DEVELOPING STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES IN WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

Drogue-in-Tow
Check my canopy
Check with vigor
Throw away drogue release handle
Left hand on hip
Look at main release handle
Reach for main release handle
Pull main release handle
Look at reserve handle
Reach for reserve handle
Pull reserve handle
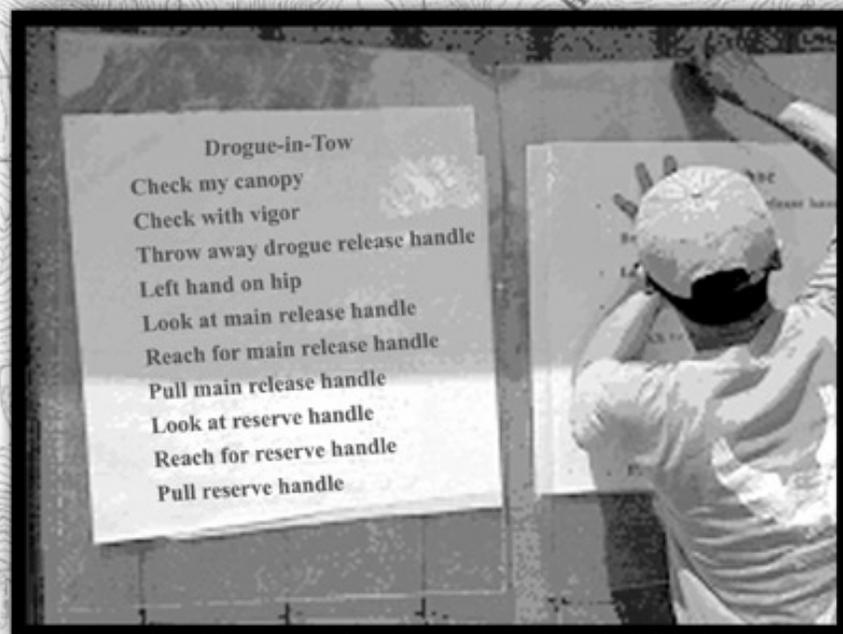
LEADERSHIP TOOLBOX REFERENCE
SOP Workbook
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Preface

This workbook is intended to assist in the development and use of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for critical tasks, primarily in an operational environment. An SOP is a guideline that clearly spells out what is expected and required of personnel during fire assignments or other day-to-day activities. In short, SOPs set the standards that your unit or crew will perform under. SOPs can be developed for most any situation including administrative procedures.

The Leadership Committee of the NWCG Training Working team sponsored this project. Project team members were:

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This workbook was adapted using information found in <u>Developing Effective Standard Operating Procedures for Fire & EMS Departments (1999)</u>, published by the United States Fire Administration and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

The use of Standard Operating Procedures by you as a leader will provide several benefits. First, the your intent will be communicated to all individuals on the crew or within the unit. Second, SOPs provide consistency in the way you provide guidance as a leader. Third, SOPs provide subordinate employees with the desired end state and allow them to use their discretion if decisions need to be made. SOPs provide leaders the framework to conduct business safely by allowing them to focus on critical decisions instead of routine ones thus enhancing their decision making ability in stressful situations. Finally, SOPs provide a mechanism to identify needed changes, implement agency policy, enhance training, describe desired performance, and evaluate operational performance. The result is improved operational efficiency, greater accountability, and increased safety.

SOPs aren't meant to limit the ability of on-scene personnel to make decisions. In fact, if developed and implemented properly SOPs will provide the desired end state and allow decision makers a great deal of flexibility in their decision making processes.

SOPs also set the standards for basic crew operations. A variety of tasks such as wearing of crew uniform, rules of engagement, use of the Risk Management Process, and communication procedures can be addressed through the development and implementation of Standard Operating Procedures.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this document is to serve as a planning guide and reference for fire management programs, including individual crews and overhead teams, for developing, implementing, and maintaining SOPs in one of two formats.

The first is a stand-alone document. You may wish to develop specific standard operating procedures for very specific situations. If multiple stand alone SOPs are developed an SOP manual should be considered.

The second format is a Crew or Unit Operations Guide. By creating this document the crew leader, fire management officer, Incident Management Team leader or unit leader, can outline what is expected of each employee in the performance of his or her duties. The operations guide will provide the framework for each member to know what is expected of them and how they are to carry those tasks out.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

In the following pages the seven key items in the development, implementation, and evaluation of SOPs are presented. This process is useful in the development of single Standard Operating Procedures or for the development of a Crew or Unit Operations Guide.

Task Analysis

A task analysis can be summarized as asking yourself basic questions about your unit or crew and making a list of factors that will influence your SOPs.

- What areas of my operation need SOPs?

- What situation am I trying to clarify?

- What process do I want my crew to use for a given situation?

- Is the development of an SOP the answer to these questions or should I resolve these issues in another manner?

Developing the SOP

There are eight basic steps in the formal SOP development process. You may only need to conduct steps four through eight though.

1. Build the Development Team

2. Provide Organizational Support

3. Establish Team Procedures

4. Gather Information and Identify Alternatives

5. Analyze and Select Alternatives

6. Write the SOP

7. Review and Test the SOP

8. Ratify and Approve the SOP

In many circumstances the SOP development team will be a single person or maybe two members of the overhead structure from a unit or crew. It is important to take a few minutes and identify alternatives and then analyze each and select the best method. Just because your unit has always done something in a specific manner doesn't mean that it is the way it should be done in perpetuity! Take the time to select the best alternative since the SOP should be one that stays with your organization for some time. Remember, you don't always have to reinvent the wheel! Most situations are faced by your peers as well. Ask them how they handle specific situations and share your SOPs with them. Some questions to ask yourself during SOP development are:

1. Is the proposed procedure realistic? Can it work on the fireline, in the office, etc?

2. Can the procedure be readily implemented given the current resources of the unit?

3. Will training be required?

4. Must equipment be procured?

5. Does the procedure comply with agency policy and guidelines?

6. How will this procedure impact individual crewmembers?

7. Will the procedure survive outside scrutiny?

Writing the SOP

A standardized format for SOPs helps streamline the writing process. Additional benefits include ease of revision or updating and enhanced usability. Regardless of the format, several items are usually included in any single SOP. A sample single SOP format can be seen on page five. Single SOPs should be incorporated into a comprehensive SOP Manual or as an appendix to a Crew Operations Plan.

- Numbering system- Important for reference, usability, and integrating SOPs into an overall manual.

- Effective date- Date the SOP is officially adopted for use in the field. This may be different from the date of issue.

- Expiration/review date- Important for ensuring the currency of SOPs by establishing a date for periodic review and revision, if needed.

- Title

- Description of purpose or rationale statement- Describes the purpose of the SOP, why it is needed, and what it intends to accomplish.

- Authority signature(s)- Indicates that the SOP was properly created, reviewed, and approved by the crew leader, FMO, or line officer.

- Scope- Describes situations for which the SOP was created and the intended audience.

- General procedures- The body of the SOP; sets forth broad procedural guidelines for operations.

- Specific procedures- Specific actions necessary under the SOP to safely mitigate a situation.

- References- Source material used to create the SOP or useful in future evaluations.

Implementing the SOP

Implementation includes all the steps that a unit takes to introduce the SOP to users and make it an integral part of normal operations. The implementation process should be designed to ensure that:

- Everyone is informed about the new or modified SOP and understands the significance of the change.

- Copies of the SOP are distributed as needed and readily accessible to all potential users.

- Personnel know their roles and have the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the SOP safely and effectively (including a understanding of consequences for failing to comply).

- A mechanism exists to monitor performance, identify potential problems, and provide support in the implementation process.

	Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore **Fire Management** Standard Operating Procedures	**Section:** Fire Management	**Revised:** 1/14/02	**Number:** 21
Subject: **Wildland Fire Initial Attack Size Up Report**				**Page:** 1 of 1

Scope: This Standard Operating Procedure applies to all INDU personnel conducting initial attack operations on wildland fires within Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

Purpose: The purpose of this SOP is to standardize the reporting of initial attack size up of a wildland fire by INDU fire management personnel and law enforcement rangers to the communications center.

Procedure: Personnel should write observations down prior to contacting the communications center. When delivering a fire size up report to the communications center the following format should be used (reference the Incident Response Pocket Guide 2002 while in the field):

1. Incident Name
2. Incident Commander
3. Incident Type (Wildland fire)
4. Incident Status
5. Location
6. Jurisdiction
7. Radio Frequencies
8. Incident size
9. Fuel Type
10. Wind Speed and Direction
11. Slope and Aspect
12. Best Access
13. Special Hazards or Concerns (Structures threatened, smoke on highways, fire impacting train track, etc.)
14. Additional Resource Needs

Upon completion of the size up report ensure that the communications center received your information.

Approved by:	**Effective Date:**

Training Needs Assessment

To determine training needed for implementation of a new SOP ask the following questions:

1. Who needs to be trained in the new or revised SOP?

2. What instructional content should be covered? What training methods will be most effective? Will a simple crew meeting with distribution and discussion of the new SOP be adequate?

3. How will understanding and competence be evaluated?

4. How long will the training sessions take? How will training be scheduled and administered?

Training Scheduling and Administration

Keep in mind that training is perhaps the most critical component of the SOP implementation process. Training is the means by which the SOP becomes a useful and intuitive operational tool. Some procedures will not require extensive orientation and are self defining; others will require more explanations and definition. The best SOP will be ineffective or even dangerous if crew members are not capable of carrying it out. It is up to you to ensure that each crewmember understands the SOP and is capable of carrying it out.

Some questions to ask yourself when preparing for training are:

1. What training materials are needed? Who will prepare them?

2. Who can teach this material effectively?

3. What facilities, special equipment, and supplies are needed?

4. What timeframe is appropriate for initial training and refresher training?

5. Can training be integrated with other training or unit activities?

6. What records should be maintained? What reporting requirements are applicable?

Evaluation

Every SOP should undergo a periodic review. Evaluations may be needed more often initially. The goal of an evaluation is to assess the results of the SOP, a task that requires asking the following questions:

- What were employee behaviors and actions before the SOP was implemented?

- What administrative or operational problem was the SOP designed to address?

- Was the new SOP fully implemented, or were there unexpected barriers to full implementation?

- How did employee behaviors and actions change after introduction of the SOP?

- Were the changes in behaviors and actions what were intended? Was the purpose of the SOP accomplished?

- Is the need for the SOP still current? Is the current SOP the best solution?

CREW / UNIT OPERATIONS GUIDE

You will find that following the process outlined for the development, implementation, and evaluation of SOPs is helpful in the development of a Crew or Unit Operations Guide as well.

Start at the beginning by conducting a task analysis and walk through the process, bypassing those steps which do not apply to your situation. It is important to note that an Operations Guide, like a stand-alone SOP, is only as effective as your ability to communicate its purpose, use, and individual accountability in its application.

The following pages contain a suggested format for an Operations Guide along with topical material contained therein. You may find that your crew or unit has specific needs that are not addressed here and should adapt this format as necessary.

- Cover page with document title, unit/crew name and logo, and date.

- Table of Contents

- Vision Statement and Expectations
  Ideally the development of a Vision Statement would involve all affected employees.

- Ground Rules for the crew or unit:

    Uniform Policy

    Call Back/Availability Protocol

    Scheduling of Leave

    Alcohol And Drug Policy

    Vehicle Use

    Physical Training

    Facilities Maintenance

    Administration

    Injury Reporting

    Fire Assignment Responsibilities

- Organizational Structure:

    Chain of Command

    Administrative Configuration

    Operational Configuration

    Collateral Duties of all personnel

- Safety and Training

    Safety Plan

    Training Curriculum

    Training Nomination and Prioritization Process

- Operational Procedures
  These SOPs will obviously vary with the specific job functions performed by the crew/unit. Review the task analysis information found above in the SOP development section to help determine areas in need of Standard Operating Procedures.

- Appendices as necessary

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