



Secretary Gale Norton's All-Employee Message on Firefighting Duties and the Safety of our Firefighters and the Public

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August 11, 2004

Memorandum

To: All Employees

From: The Secretary /s/Gale A. Norton

Subject: 2004 Wildland Fire Season

Although this year's wildland fire season was pushed back a few weeks in many parts of the west due to spring rain, it's clear that the 2004 fire season is well underway, especially in Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, and Nevada. With extended drought conditions and thousands of acres of diseased forests plaguing much of the west and elsewhere in the country, all the factors are in place for yet another severe fire season.

In the past, the severity of a fire season was mostly measured by the number of fires and acres burned. Today, we gauge a season's severity by the resulting damages: the number of homes burned, families displaced, and natural resources damaged. For years we have said that wildland fire knows no boundaries. Wildfire behavior forces us to adapt our strategies and tactics, and requires us to be especially diligent, ensuring the safety of our firefighters and the public.

The Department's policy and my intent when it comes to fireline safety are clear and non-negotiable: firefighter and public safety come first every time. Each one of us is responsible for ensuring that decisions, actions, and behaviors are consistent with this policy.

As we move forward toward the most active period of the 2004 wildland fire season, as needs arise all employees should support wildland fire emergencies within your training, qualifications, and physical abilities. Those who are not qualified or cannot support assignments away from home should support local fire suppression efforts and provide backup for those who are able to go off-unit assignments.

I want to thank each and every one of you for your dedication and commitment to an important part of our mission to preserve our natural and cultural resources. Please be very careful this fire season and remember that firefighter and public safety come first.