

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **FOREST SERVICE RELEASES INVESTIGATION REPORT AND PREVENTION PLAN ON CRAMER FIRE**

Ogden, Utah, January 12, 2004 – U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service today released its investigation report and accident prevention action plan on the Cramer Fire, which killed two firefighters, Jeff Allen and Shane Heath, in central Idaho on July 22, 2003.

The investigation report contains 44 findings, nine causal factors and three contributing factors; the accident prevention action plan, which has agency-wide ramifications, contains five steps to implement. Forest Service Associate Chief Sally Collins accepted the report and action plan on behalf of Chief Dale Bosworth. Intermountain Regional Forester Jack Troyer is briefing the families on the findings of the Cramer accident.

"I want to extend my heartfelt condolences to the families of Jeff Allen and Shane Heath," said Troyer. I am committed to leading the region in doing our best to provide for firefighter safety. The Intermountain Region, along with the rest of the Forest Service, will initiate the changes identified in the accident prevention plan."

The 10-member investigation was led by Linda Donoghue, Station Director of the USDA Forest Service North Central Research Station (St. Paul, Minn.) with the assistance of five technical consultants. The team established the facts of the fire by conducting interviews with 41 people and by examining physical evidence, weather data, equipment, records and the fatality site.

Among the conclusions drawn by the investigation team, the report cites inadequate management oversight, failure to comply with policy, failure to recognize and adjust fire suppression and tactics, and a shortage and misallocation of resources as situations leading to the fatalities.

A separate four-member accident review board, which was chaired by Thomas Mills, Deputy Chief, Business Operations for the agency's headquarters in Washington, D.C., reviewed the findings and developed recommendations to prevent similar accidents. The accident prevention action plan is based on the Cramer Fire accident investigation team's report and the management evaluation report developed by the Cramer Fire Board of Review.

The key actions that, when implemented, would best prevent similar mishaps in the future, include strengthening command and control performance of agency administrators and fire managers and periodically re-certifying fire management leadership positions nationally. Other changes could come after separate reports by USDA's Office of Inspector and the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration reviews are completed.

A misconduct investigation is currently underway. "The Forest Service will complete the investigation and issue any appropriate disciplinary actions before the next fire season," said Troyer.

The Cramer Fire, located on the North Fork ranger district of the Salmon-Challis National Forest, started on July 19, 2003 from a lightning strike.

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