

BRIEFING PAPER



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Southern Region

Date: September 4, 2008

Topic: U.S. Forest Service (USFS) responsibilities under the National Response Framework

Issue: The Southern Region is prepared to respond to a number of tropical storms currently developing in the Atlantic. The Southern Region is continuing to work with partners throughout the Southern Area to ensure readiness and coordinated emergency response as these storm systems develop and impact the area. Region 8 was heavily impacted and greatly involved in Federal emergency response efforts during the 2005 hurricane season. Experience gained and lessons learned during that record-breaking-season are guiding current preparations.

Background: On January 22, 2008, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) released the National Response Framework (NRF). The NRF is a guide that details how the Nation conducts all-hazards response. This document, which replaces the National Response Plan (NRP), establishes a comprehensive, national, all-hazards approach to domestic incident response.

Key Points: Under the NRF, USFS is the Coordinator and Primary Agency for Emergency Support Function (ESF) 4, Firefighting. The mission of ESF4 includes:

- Coordination of Federal firefighting activities
- Resource support to rural and urban firefighting operations

USFS also provides support to 11 of the remaining 14 ESFs. This support is coordinated through ESF4 or USFS Disaster and Emergency Operations Branch, and is predicated on the availability of resources. Resources are assigned commensurate with each unit's level of training and the adequacy and availability of equipment. USFS All-hazard doctrine states that missions/tasks will be accepted using the following priorities:

1. Agency mission
2. ESF4 Missions under the NRF
3. Support to other ESFs as specified in the NRF
4. Non-specified support to other ESFs and departments/agencies

The Incident Command System (ICS) utilized by all wildland fire agencies easily fits within the NSF framework and ESF4. ICS is a flexible organization that has been used to respond to local, regional and national emergencies such as wildfires, hurricanes and other disasters, including the World Trade Center, the Oklahoma City Bombing, and the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster.

The ICS is comprised of the different sections with roles and responsibilities, allowing for rapid deployment of self-sufficient personnel and resources to remote areas. The Interagency Incident Management Teams (IMTs) of supervisory overhead can be on site within 24 hours and operational in 36 hours. These teams can order 20-person crews and individual resources from across the country to respond to emergency situations. IMTs have contracting and buying authority and therefore can begin disaster response activities quickly.