



"SAFETY ZONE"

"A High Performing Firefighter is by Definition a Safe Firefighter"

Issue 7
September 2005

Levels of Engagement

Somewhere along the line, "disengagement" was added to the wildland firefighting lexicon. As with many well-intended actions in response to identified needs, the application and meaning of the term "disengagement" are inconsistent. In the most severe of misinterpretations "disengagement" resulted in abandonment of suppression objectives by on-scene firefighters, rather than a shift in the level, breadth, or focus of their efforts.

There are only five things we do in firefighting:



Defend (holding actions, priority protection areas),
Reinforce (bringing more or different resources to bear on the issue),
Advance (anchor and flank, direct or indirect attack),
Withdraw (move to a safety zone or otherwise cease current activities until conditions allow a different level of engagement), or
Delay (waiting until the situation has modified sufficiently to allow a different level of engagement)... **DRAW-D...**

DRAW-D

- applies to actions on segments of line, Divisions, or the incident in its entirety
- applies to the levels of fires we fight, i.e. initial attack, extended attack, large fires, and "mega" fires
- presupposes every action on or in response to an incident represents a level of engagement

Safe and effective firefighting requires a bias for action, realizing that every tactical maneuver is predicated on thoughtful, mindful decision-making. In the *DRAW-D* model "can-do" is incorporated in every level of engagement, and **every level of engagement is equal in value to the overall effort as the other**. Understanding this premise serves to channel firefighter cultural "can-do" bias toward effective, safe actions. It also serves to highlight the fact that any level of engagement or action requires a conscious decision based on the situation at hand or imminent. Withdrawal is not a stigma, but a decision. Delay is not a lack of effort, but a wise choice to maximize long-term effectiveness. Reinforcement is not a sign of weakness, but an indicator of savvy risk management. Adoption of *LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT* and *DRAW-D* will help firefighters make the right decision, at the right time, with plenty of time to act.

"Newsletter of the Forest Service Fire Operations Safety Council"

<http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/council/>

