

USDA FOREST SERVICE
Fire and Aviation Management

WORK CAPACITY TESTS FOR WILDLAND FIRE QUALIFICATIONS –
IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

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WORK CAPACITY TESTS FOR WILDLAND FIRE QUALIFICATIONS

FITNESS STANDARDS FOR WILDLAND FIRE POSITIONS

The fitness standards are described in the National Wildfire Coordinating Group "[Wildland Fire Qualification Subsystem Guide" 310-1](#) and FSH 5109.17. The Guide and handbook describe four fitness categories; Arduous, Moderate, Light and None and assign one category as the standard for positions identified in the guide.

TESTING FOR FITNESS STANDARDS FOR WILDLAND FIRE POSITIONS

The Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters (WCT) described in the "Work Capacity Test Administrator's Guide," April 2003, NWCG Publication Management System PMS 307, NFES 1109, are the exclusive tests used by the Forest Service to determine whether a person meets the required fitness standard. The publication describes the PACK Test for Arduous positions, FIELD Test for Moderate positions and the WALK Test for Light positions, and it also contains the instructions for conducting the tests. NONE means the position does not require a fitness standard, and does not require a Work Capacity Test.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORK CAPACITY TESTS

The purpose for including the fitness element in Wildland Fire Qualification Subsystem Guide (310-1) is to ensure persons assigned to fire activities do not become injured or ill because they do not have the fitness level required to perform the duties and responsibilities of the job. The degree of fitness required ranges significantly between the ARDUOUS and LIGHT levels. The program to become physically fit before taking a WCT varies in intensity of work and the amount of time needed. The following describes a process beginning well before WCT's are conducted and carries through the actual testing. The steps are intended to make sure employees are not only fit enough to safely perform their fire duties but also to reduce the risk of injury or illness during fitness training or while taking a WCT. The elements of the implementation guide include:

1. Determination of Employees' Roles in Fire Program.
2. Informing Employees and Prospective Employees of Fitness Expectations.
3. Health Assessment.
4. Medical Examinations.
5. Conducting Work Capacity Tests.
6. Work Capacity Test Oversight.

The "Associated Forms, Documents and Publications" section of this report includes materials needed to implement WCT. *Section 1 is located on page 8 and are located at:*
http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct_index.html

1. DETERMINATION OF EMPLOYEES' ROLES IN FIRE PROGRAM

Any employee involved with or wanting to be involved with fire suppression and fire use activities will work with Fire Program Managers to determine appropriate duties considering factors such as medical condition, physical condition and desire to achieve and maintain fitness levels. Targeted duties must be consistent with these considerations. The targeted duties should be discussed annually prior to scheduling training and prior to beginning fitness training in preparation for work capacity tests. Work Capacity tests are effective for one year (12 months) from the time passed. An employee could be required to re- take a Work Capacity Test before the 12 Months has expired when 1). A management official through personal observation or direct knowledge determines that an employee' health and/or fitness level has changed or 2). A medical provider presents evidence that an employee can no longer perform at the appropriate fitness level for the qualified position.

2. INFORMING EMPLOYEES AND PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES OF FITNESS EXPECTATIONS

All persons expected to perform fire duties that require a WCT must be informed of the requirement in a timely manner. Those required to pass the WCT should be informed at least four (4) weeks prior to the scheduled test date, to allow time for fitness training. A HEALTH SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE (HSQ) will be provided at that time to each current and prospective employee to perform a personal assessment with instructions for its use and directions on where to return the form. Individuals required to obtain further medical evaluation will be provided the needed information (The SF 78 discussed below).

Employees in Fire Positions

Expectations and requirements for fire duties should be explained during pre-fire season meetings with the Fire Program Manager. The applicable WCT will be identified and the employee should be informed of the test date to allow time for fitness training prior to the test. Information related to fitness training, training for the WCT, and the type of WCT to be taken shall be made available to the employee.

An HSQ will be given to the employee with instructions to complete it and return it in the envelope pre-addressed to the Servicing Human Resource Office. The HSQ will be reviewed by the local servicing human resources office. The designated human resource specialist will determine whether the person meets the criteria (identified by the American Heart Association) to begin training or is to be referred to a qualified medical provider (physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner) for further evaluation.

Each individual is responsible for their physical condition and their health. No amount of health screening or medical examination can ensure an individual's safety on a work capacity test or during fire suppression and fire use activities. If employees are uncertain about the condition of their health, have been inactive, or are seriously under or overweight, they should consult their personal physician before beginning physical conditioning, taking a WCT, or engaging in fire use activities.

Prospective Employees (new hires and rehire eligibles) Hired in Fire Positions

Expectations of fitness requirements will be explained in the recruitment notice. The recruitment notice will include information about the work to be performed, the WCT to be taken, and how to prepare for the WCT.

The pre-employment package will include the HSQ, the approximate date of the WCT and an explanation of the consequences of not passing the WCT. The local servicing human resources office will review the HSQ. An HSQ will be given to the employee with instructions to complete it and return it in the envelope pre-addressed to the Servicing Human Resource Office. The designated human resource specialist will determine whether the person meets the criteria to begin training or is to be referred to a qualified medical provider (physician, physicians assistant, or nurse practitioner) for further evaluation. Employment is contingent upon the return of the completed HSQ, review of the form and a medical providers approval, if required, to begin physical training or to take the WCT.

Employees Hired in Non-Fire Positions

If the employee is interested and will be available for fire assignments but fire duties are not included in their position description they will follow the same guidelines as those for employees in fire positions as outlined above.

Casual Hire (AD) Employees

The announcement of intent to hire casual employees should include information about the type of work to be performed. A HSQ form will be given to casual hire employees prior to taking any level of the WCT. If the individual marks any item in section A or any two items in section B of the HSQ, they will not be allowed to take the WCT without a release from a medical provider. If the position is of a critical nature and the Forest Service determines the need to proceed with the hiring, the government may pay for medical screening or a medical exam. Payment for their medical exam from WFSU funds by the Forest Service is consistent with direction. However, the casual should not be in a hired status during the exam. The examination cost should be charged to the P-code for AD training assigned to your Region by the National Fire Finance Office in Boise.

Retesting if the WCT is not passed

The goal is to provide appropriate information to people within a time frame that allows them to become physically fit enough to pass the required test on the first try. Any employee who sustains an injury during the test, and is subsequently seen and certified as injured by a qualified medical provider (physician, physician assistant, nurse practitioner), will not have that WCT counted as one of their attempts. Once released for full duty, the employee will be given sufficient time, based on the recommendation of the medical provider, to prepare for testing. However, the employee will only be allowed up to four (4) weeks for test preparation. Subsequent retesting of employees who fail the WCT will take place a minimum of forty-eight (48) hours from the time the failed WCT was administered. If employees fail to pass the WCT, the following is applicable:

Temporary employees required to pass a WCT as a condition of employment will be provided one opportunity to pass the required test. A second chance may be provided at the discretion of management.

Permanent employees required to pass a WCT for duties associated with their positions will be provided three chances to pass the required test before action is initiated to address their fitness limitations.

Permanent and temporary employees who do not perform fire assignments as a recurring part of their position but who are authorized to perform such duties, may be retested as many times as management deems appropriate.

There are several sources of information about fitness and WCT available to provide to personnel required to pass one of the WCTs. All individuals required to take a WCT will receive a copy of the "Work Capacity Test" brochure (April 2003) from the Servicing Human Resources Office (SHRO). This brochure is posted on the WEB at http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/2002/brochure_2002.pdf.

The publication, Fitness and Work Capacity, 2nd edition, (NFES - 1596) is for optional use. It is 78 pages with a great deal of information about fitness and work capacity, health, safety and performance and fit-to-work topics.

3. HEALTH ASSESSMENT

A HEALTH SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE (HSQ) is used for self-screening of current and prospective employees involved with fire use activities. It is based on a questionnaire developed by the American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine for use by Health/Fitness facilities for cardiovascular screening of people who would be participating in "...high-intensity recreational physical activity (e.g., basketball, tennis, racquetball and swim clubs)". The physical requirements of many of the activities are similar to those required by firefighting tasks - others are more demanding than firefighting. The questionnaire is a single page document to be completed by the individual. Both the HSQ and the SF 78 forms are considered confidential medical records that must be safeguarded from unauthorized access or release. As with any medical record, these documents are to be seen only by the employee and those with a job-related "need-to-know." Within the Forest Service, for purposes relative to conditioning for or taking the WCT, authorized persons are limited to designated individuals on the staff of the Servicing Human Resource Office (SHRO). Ultimately, these medical forms are to be filed in an official Employee Medical Folder.

To preserve confidentiality, the expectation is that the employee will complete the HSQ and submit it directly to the SHRO. Similarly, we expect the SF 78 to be sent directly to the SHRO by the medical provider. Directions should be provided to the medical provider for returning the examination information.

Employees

All current employees required to pass a WCT will receive a copy of the HSQ from the unit Fire Program Manager. It must be completed and returned to the SHRO. A determination whether the HSQ meets the criteria for further medical evaluation, will be made and the individual will be notified prior to beginning training for the WCT but not less than four weeks prior to the WCT date.

When review by the SHRO indicates that further medical evaluation is necessary, the individual will not be allowed to participate in training for the WCT on official time until the medical evaluation is obtained and clearance from the medical provider is received.

Permanent and temporary employees who do not perform fire duties as a recurring part of their position, but are authorized to perform such duties, will follow the same guidelines as that of employees stated above.

Prospective Employees

All prospective employees **required** to pass a WCT, as a condition of employment, will receive a copy of the HSQ in their job offer package with direction on where to return the form. The form will be reviewed by the SHRO to determine if further medical evaluation is necessary. The Forest Service will be responsible for any costs necessary for medical evaluation. The individual is expected to report for work with their medical clearance completed and prepared to pass the WCT.

4. MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

The Forest Service will pay for medical evaluations and examinations when required. Payment for additional medical tests is limited to chest x-ray, a resting EKG, and a urinalysis. For employees with wildland firefighting duties in their position descriptions, a 12-lead EKG stress test will be paid for if indicated by a doctor in consultation with the unit HR office prior to conducting the test.

When medical examinations are ordered, the Forest Service will provide instructions to the examining physician. Copies of the SF - 78, Certificate of Medical Examination (with Section A and B completed) for each WCT level are posted on the web at: http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct_index.html, along with all the required “Forms, Documents and Publications” as listed in section 1. The instructions must include the name of the person to be examined, a description of the WCT, what medical factors are to be evaluated, and directions for returning the examination information.

Pre-employment medical examinations that evaluate the same functional requirements and environmental factors as those evaluated by a medical examination for a WCT may be substituted.

5. CONDUCTING WORK CAPACITY TESTS

The publication, “Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters, Test Administrator’s Guide,” April 2002, PMS 307, NFES 1109, is the Forest Service standard for conducting the WCT. The required standard of testing is once every 12 months. However, in the event the employees’ health changes, management may require the employee to retest within the 12-month period, using the WCT test criteria.

The appropriate forms and publications related to Work Capacity Test administration are listed in Section 1 of this document. All documents are listed on the web at:

http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct_index.html

Each WCT must be conducted by a Certified WCT Administrator. Roles and responsibilities for that position can be found in the “Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters: Test Administrator’s Guide”. Guidelines for certification can be found in appendix A.

Work Capacity Test Documentation-

Each WCT session will be documented using the following:

“Job Hazard Analysis”

A Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) was done for the general activity of Work Capacity Testing and mitigations identified have been incorporated into the instructions. A copy is included in the Forms, Documents and Publications section of this package. A unique JHA will be developed to address local conditions. The JHA will be discussed with the participants prior to taking the work capacity tests.

"Work Capacity Administration Report"

The form will be completed each time a WCT is conducted to document the session, location, test administrator, personnel tested, the test results and pertinent comments. Any injuries will be documented in the pass column and described in the comment section of this form. Only those individuals cleared by the designated human resource specialist will be allowed to take a test.

At the end of the Calendar Year, each Region will summarize comments from the "Work Capacity Administration Report" forms for the year and maintained at the Region. This report must identify the number of people taking the test, any systemic administration issues and a summary of injuries that occurred during testing.

"Work Capacity Test: Informed Consent" form

Each person participating in a WCT must sign a "Work Capacity Test: Informed Consent form provided by the test administrator prior to taking the test. The completed form will be filed in the Employees' Medical Folder.

"Work Capacity Test Record"

The form will be completed for each test participant. A completed copy will be provided to each employee's unit Fire Program Manager for fire qualifications records and for the employee's official personnel record and a copy retained for the test administrator's record.

"Work Capacity Test Participant Comment"

At the time of testing, participants will be given a copy of the form "Work Capacity Test Participant Comments" and be told they may send comments to the address at the bottom of the form.

6. WORK CAPACITY TEST OVERSIGHT

The Regional Fire Director is responsible for oversight of WCT within the Region to ensure compliance with this implementation guide.

SECTION 1: “ASSOCIATED FORMS, DOCUMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS”

(Associated Forms, Documents and Publications Pertinent to Implementing Work Capacity Tests)

Forms: http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct_index.html

- * Health Screening Questionnaire (HSQ) - (FS-5100-31 / OMB 0596-0164)
- * Work Capacity Test: Informed Consent
- * Work Capacity Test Administration Report
- * Work Capacity Test Record
- * Work Capacity Test Participant Comments
- * SF-78 (Arduous, Moderate, Light)
- * Job Hazard Analysis for Work Capacity Tests

Publications:

- * “Fitness and Work Capacity 2nd Edition” (NFES 1596)
- * “Work Capacity Test” brochure (January 2002)
- * “Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters” (9851-2810)
- * “Wildland Firefighting Health and Safety Report # 4:
http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/h_s_rpts/spring_2002/

APPENDIX A: TEST ADMINISTRATOR CERTIFICATION PROCESS

1. Pre-work-

*Administrator candidates are required to study:

"Work Capacity Test" brochure

"Fitness and Work Capacity" (NFES 1596)

"Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters, Test Administrator's Guide"
(9851-2810-MTDC)

"Work Capacity Test Implementation Guide, January 2004" (this package)

"Work Capacity Test Questions and Answers, January 2004"

2. Classroom Interaction-

The candidates will be required to have a thorough discussion to ensure understanding of the pre-work materials and additional information specific to the local area led by the unit Fire Program Manager.

3. Certification of Test Administrators-

Following completion of the classroom interaction the Fire Program Manager will certify the individuals chosen to administer WCT.

4. Documentation-

The names of persons certified to administer WCT will be filed in the Red Card system file and a notice of certification will be filed in each WCT Administrator's personnel folder.

5. Re-certification-

Administrators will be re-certified every 3 years or when significant changes are made in the WCT or procedures related to the tests.