



Today's discussion is from the  
Miscellaneous Category.

### Issues Associated with Fighting Fire on the US/Mexico Border

Employees (including interns and volunteers) who work along the United States-Mexico border have a potentially dangerous work setting and should maintain a higher level of situation awareness and vigilance. . It is not uncommon to encounter drug smugglers; undocumented immigrants and those who transport them in large groups; high speed law enforcement pursuits; or large amounts of trash that included biological hazards. Such encounters can be characterized as “low frequency” and with good situation awareness, can also be characterized as “low consequence.” It is when information is not shared and a heightened level of awareness is not occurring that these low frequency events become “high consequence.”

Firefighters and other land agency employees can better prepare and protect themselves by adhering to simple protocols and ensuring a higher sense of awareness in all activities. This applies not only to local personnel, but especially to those who visit the area to work. They are faced not only with a new environment—remote southwestern deserts—but unexpected situations.

If you find yourself working in proximity to the international border between the United States and the Republic of Mexico, ensure you receive a thorough briefing on the safety concerns. Just as you've been taught for years to seek advice on fire behavior in the area from the “locals,” you should also seek local advice on current issues associated with the border and the local protocols to ensure your safety. Prepare yourself and your crew before hand with the following information and resources.

- If coming to the SW region on assignment, review and print the [International Border Watchout pocket card](#) for all members of the crew/team. This and other information is available at:

[http://gacc.nifc.gov/swcc/administrative/safety/us\\_mexico\\_border/us\\_mexico\\_border.htm](http://gacc.nifc.gov/swcc/administrative/safety/us_mexico_border/us_mexico_border.htm)

#### **International Border Watchouts!**

1. Expect high speed driving and law enforcement pursuits
2. Expect drivers to be distracted
3. All aircraft operations have increased collision risk
4. Radio frequency interference from Mexico likely
5. Radio/cell phone dead spots increase employee risks
6. Cell phone connections to Mexico likely
7. Language barriers increase risk
8. Threats to employees are present 24/7/365
9. You are not clearly identified as government employee
10. Every visitor contact has potential risk
11. Higher occurrence of unexpected visitor encounters
12. Traditional responses may not be appropriate, check your gut
13. Responding to situations inconsistent with assigned authority and training
14. Night operations require special considerations
15. Unattended vehicles will be damaged or stolen
16. Illegal uses in remote areas likely
17. Heightened risk of biological contamination
18. Always know your location and be able to describe it
19. Let others know your expected route and destination (check-in/check-out)

- Familiarize yourself and your crew with the [USFS JHA](#) and [BLM Risk Assessment](#) on Border Safety Issues. The information is relevant to all firefighters coming to the SW region regardless of agency.

● In addition to the hazards associated with wildland fire and aviation, firefighters must maintain their situational awareness for border-related hazards. A few mitigations can be to:

- Consider posting an additional security lookout on scene, in addition to any needed fire lookout.
- Work in pairs whenever possible, including travel to and from border fires and on-scene tasks.
- Make any/all reasonable attempts to scout the area for any persons who might be unaware of the fire or might be in harm's way.
- Have alternative communications tools available on scene such as cellular and satellite phones.

Firefighters are encouraged to review the [Coronado Nat'l Forests' protocol for border fires](#) to become familiar with the measures taken to increase the safety of all personnel working along the border.

● Use the following video at a safety briefing. The video and discussion should take about 2 hours. The video captures the knowledge and skills of employees who have years of experience working near the border. It is designed to raise your awareness and stimulate discussion about the border situation)

**Video: Working Along the US/Mexico Border**

[Part 1](#)

[Part 2](#)

[Part 3](#)

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**Have an idea? Have feedback? Share it.**

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