

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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To: All Employees
From: Director
Subject: New Fire Shelter Design

The Federal Fire and Aviation Leadership Council (FFALC) selected a new design for the next generation of fire shelters. The FFALC is comprised of the fire directors for BLM, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Forest Service, plus a representative of the National Association of State Foresters.

The fire shelter currently in use has been in service for almost 30 years, with only a few minor modifications. Experts at the Forest Service's Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC) designed the new shelter after extensive research into flame-resistant materials.

The MTDC began its research and development in 1996, when new flame-resistant material became available. Testing protocols were finalized and peer reviewed so that the shelter material testing would be repeatable, reliable, measurable and impartial. Testing of materials began in 1999. Additional funding was appropriated for development of shelters in 2000, and the design was narrowed earlier this year to four models. The final selection was made on June 7th.

The new design will be superior to the shelters currently in use. The new shelter is .6 pounds heavier and 64 cubic inches larger, but it folds up to almost the same size. *The* new shelter showed a 22 percent reduction in temperature rise in radiant heat compared to the current shelter, and an 81 percent reduction in temperature rise in convective heat testing. It is also more resistant to punctures and tearing than its predecessor.

The first 50,000 shelters will be distributed through the normal equipment ordering system beginning in June 2003. The General Services Administration will oversee contracting and production of the redesigned shelters. Fire shelters currently in use still meet all of the National Fire Protection Association requirements, and they are considered to have a useful life of 3 to 5 more years.

It is important to remember that fire shelters are used only as a last resort. We hope that your training and experience helps you to avoid situations in which the fire shelter may be needed. Keep in mind the Ten Standard Firefighting Orders, the 18 Watch Out Situations, and the principles of establishing lookouts, communications, escape routes, and safety zones. The best way to avoid a problem is still to avoid situations that can lead to entrapments.

We acknowledge the excellent efforts of those who developed the new fire shelter. We offer our thanks for the extra protection the new shelter will provide. We are also sure that those at the MTDC agree that we all hope their product will never be put to the test.

We still have the longest part of the fire season ahead of us. Let's do all we can to ensure that the season is a safe one for every BLM firefighter.

Signed by:
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Acting Director
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