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Route To:

Subject: Assessing Physical Fitness Before Taking Work Capacity Test

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Directors

Work Capacity Testing (WCT) is important when preparing for fire management activities each year. Prior to assigning personnel to fire management duties, it is imperative to safely assess their physical fitness for their often rigorous duties.

The Work Capacity Test Implementation Guide, published in 2007, is being revised. Fire and Aviation Management (FAM), working with Human Resources Management (HRM) and Union representatives from the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE), have developed a new draft of this document prior to the expected implementation of an automated system for recordkeeping. Ultimately, we expect employees to be able to complete Health Screening Questionnaires (HSQ) and related forms in an electronic system, and access medical examinations. We are working toward the deployment of such a system with Acquisition Management (AQM), but do not yet have a target date for its activation.

Prior to implementing an electronic recordkeeping system, several modifications must be made: one for preparing for providing medical response during the WCT; the other clarifying how long a completed WCT is considered effective.

Medical Preparedness

Each year, personnel in fire management activities must complete the WCT to assess their physical fitness. The WCT can pose an injury risk to individuals completing it; cardiac arrest the most serious. Forest Service (FS) employees who administer the WCT must ensure they are prepared for medical emergencies. In 2010, both the FS and the National Park Service (NPS) saw personnel suffer cardiac arrest during the WCT.

Effective immediately, any field unit administering the WCT shall prepare a medical response plan (such as an ICS-206 form), evaluate options for immediate medical care and patient transport and identify the closest available emergency medical services. A minimum of a qualified Medical First Responder/Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) must be on site during WCT administration. Based upon a thorough evaluation of potential medical treatment and evacuation scenarios, a higher level of emergency medical qualifications and equipment on-site may be warranted like an emergency medical technician, paramedic, oxygen, and so forth.

It is recommended that an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) be on-site during all WCT. Beginning January 1, 2012, this recommendation becomes a requirement. This lead time is for field units to accomplish acquisition and training.



WCT Effective Dates

In the past, WCTs were considered effective for 12 months from the date an individual passed the test. Effective immediately, WCTs are considered effective for 13 months from the date passed. This change is to provide more flexibility to both fire program managers and employees. With this new flexibility, an employee is eligible for an assignment immediately upon return to work, with enough time to take the WCT for the rest of the season upon return to his/her duty station. For employees performing fire duties, it is essential to maintain a high level of physical fitness year-round.

An employee could be required to re-take a WCT before the 13-month period has expired if:

- A management official through personal observation or direct knowledge determines an employee's health and/or fitness level has changed.
- A medical provider presents evidence an employee can no longer perform at the appropriate fitness level for the qualified position.
- An employee discloses a significant change in their medical condition or history.

Finally, to clarify current guidance, if an employee is on an emergency assignment on the date their WCT expires, they will complete their assignment including any extensions. Upon return to their duty station, they must complete the WCT and acquire a new Incident Qualification Card prior to accepting any new assignments.

The changes and clarifications above are in partnership with Union representatives from NFFE and I want to thank all FS emergency responders for your continued efforts to provide a safe and healthful workplace. Please contact your Regional Office Fire Operations Safety and Risk Management Specialists, or Larry Sutton, WO-FAM Fire Operations Risk Management Specialist, at lsutton@fs.fed.us or (208) 387-5970 with comments or questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ **JAMES E. HUBBARD**

JAMES E. HUBBARD
Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry

cc: pdl wo spf fam regional fire directors, pdl wo spf fam ad's, Eric Plimmer