

Safety Note #88

FIELDWORK SAFETY: FIRE PREVENTATIVE AND DEFENSIVE MEASURES



Data available from the California State Fire Marshall indicates between 1992 and 2002 an average of about 14,000 grass, brush, and tree fires occurred annually. During this same time span, an average of 177 firefighters were injured and a total of five firefighters died while combating grass, brush, and tree fires. In addition, an average of 42 civilian injuries occurred annually and a total of 77 civilians died from these types of fires. It is estimated that between 1992 and 2002, property losses were approximately 1.4 billion dollars due to grass, brush, and tree fires

ANR employees that perform fieldwork in forested, brush-covered, grassland, and wetland areas are at risk for encountering a wildfire situation or inadvertently causing a wildfire. Accordingly, ANR fieldworkers shall be prepared to take fire preventive and defensive measures. Moreover, employees should also be aware that they can be held criminally and civilly

responsible if it is found that their negligence caused a wildfire (Public Resources Code Sections 4422 and 4435).

Fire Preventative Measures encompass recognizing the flammable nature of the fieldwork area, particularly during periods of increased fire danger, and employing prudent fieldwork practices as given below:

- Prior to initiating fieldwork, compile a list for use in the field of telephone numbers for contacting local emergency responders and the property owner.
- As part of fieldwork preparation, develop an emergency evacuation plan that incorporates methods for notifying co-workers or colleagues of an emergency and descriptions of emergency escape routes and assembly areas.
- Always be aware of the fire hazard level in the fieldwork or surrounding area.
- Never use open flames or create sparks as part of field tasks when the fire hazard level is “high” or “extreme” in the fieldwork or surrounding area.
- Keep vehicles on roads or other non-vegetated areas to prevent ignition of wildfires by catalytic converters.
- Utilize equipment and tools with internal combustion engines and motors that have spark arresters and vehicles equipped with mufflers (Public Resources Code, Section 4442 a and d).
- When using tools or equipment that produce flames or sparks, assure that a 10 foot diameter cleared area surrounds the work area and an appropriate shovel and water-type pump extinguisher are available at the work site (Public Resources Code, Section 4427).

Fire Defensive Measures encompass being alert to the existence or occurrence of a wildfire within the fieldwork or surrounding area and reacting to the situation as follows:

- When the outbreak of a wildfire is observed, immediately notify the emergency response authority (i.e., dial 911) and property owner and alert all co-workers or colleagues working within the field and surrounding area.
- When a wildfire exists or occurs within the fieldwork or surrounding area, always assure that a safe secondary-escape route is present from the area where fieldwork is being performed.
- Should a wildfire encroach upon the fieldwork area, implement the emergency evacuation plan.
- Never attempt to suppress an uncontrolled wildfire.