

# Texas A&M Forest Service

## Incident Information Protocols

### 2019



Prepared by the Incident Information Steering Committee:

Melanie Karns  
Erin O'Connor  
Logan Scherschel

Revised May 2019

## Overview

These procedures provide general guidance to the Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) Incident Information Organization: Forest Resource Protection (FRP) Public Information Officer (PIO), TFS PIOs, TFS Communications Office (TFSCO) staff, Agency Administrators (AA), and incoming Incident Management Team (IMT) PIO. The primary goal of this document is to outline incident information protocols.

### Background

Texas is divided into eight branches for administration and emergency response: Central, East, North, Northwest, PanhandleSouth, South-Central and West Branch. Each branch is broken into Regional Fire Coordinator (RFC) regions (Appendix C). The RFC serves as the liaison for fire departments and is responsible for the TFS fire program in their area. Due to the heavier fuel models and the limitations of local fire departments, TFS fills a major role in initial attack in the forested areas of the East Branch.

TFS support to initial attack (IA) efforts range from single, short duration events (less than one burning period) to multiple starts over several days or months. An Incident Management Team may be activated to support extended IA efforts. Long duration fires (several burning periods) are becoming more common and may be managed by an IMT(s). The location for the Incident Command Post for these IMTs are determined on a case by case basis. TFS has an active fire prevention program with well-established community relationships. Many prevention personnel are qualified PIOs and support IA and IMT information efforts.

### Overview of FRP PIO Role

The FRP PIO is stationed in College Station at TFS Headquarters. Their primary role is to run FRP social media (All Hazards Twitter, Lone Star State Incident Management Team Facebook and Wildfire Education & Prevention Facebook) and ensure incident information flow between the field and the EOC while keeping TFSCO informed. This role will serve as the incident information contact until an IMT PIO is in place.

### Overview of field PIO Role

Field PIOs should respond to local incidents as needed, coordinating with the IC and FRP PIO for dissemination of information.

## Extended Initial Attack - Prior to Activation of Incident Management Teams

The following procedures are recommended during an extended IA prior to activation of Incident Management Teams that includes a PIO:

- The EOC is not staffed to respond to media or public inquiries; they refer all calls to the on-call FRP PIO.
- Public Information Officer, [information@tfs.tamu.edu](mailto:information@tfs.tamu.edu), 979-255-0591

### Overview of FRP PIO Responsibilities during Extended Initial Attack

- Produce a daily statewide fire update.
- Produce a list of TFS-approved accurate and updated talking points.
- Participate in conference calls as needed with all PIOs to discuss key messages and concerns. Calls can be more frequent when the scope and intensity of information activities increase.

- FRP PIO will coordinate the management of information among field PIOs, TFS EOC, and TFS Prevention and Mitigation.

FRP PIO will address TFS policy issues, especially contentious or politically controversial issues and will communicate those to field PIO staff.

Field PIOs should notify FRP PIO and TFSCO of any significant interview requests from national media. Notification should include the media outlet, interview content, significant issues/concerns and the name/position of the agency person participating in the interview.

## **Long Duration Incidents – Incident Management Teams have been Activated**

The following procedures are recommended when incident management teams have been activated to manage TFS suppression and on all hazard incidents:

### **Delegation of Authority**

A Letter of Intent (see Appendix A) outlining key information concerns and incorporating by reference these procedures will be provided to incoming Incident Management Teams as part of the Delegation of Authority package. Further clarification of roles will take place during subsequent discussions between the FRP PIO, IMTPIO and Agency Administrator.

### **IMTPIO Responsibilities**

In addition to normally expected roles and responsibilities, the IMTPIO will:

#### **Media**

- Prioritize working with the local community and media
- Handle media and public information concerning the operational aspects of the team’s assignment, releasing 209-confirmed information and/or updates as approved by your Incident Commander
- Notify FRP PIO and TFSCO of inquiries from national media
- Submit media relations materials to Incident Commander (IC) for approval and dissemination
- Work with IC on social media strategy and posting
- Maintain InciWeb
- Coordinate and communicate with FRP PIO
- Coordinate with Joint Information Center if established

#### **Elected officials**

- Work directly with local TFS representative when contacting elected officials
- Notify FRP PIO at [information@tfs.tamu.edu](mailto:information@tfs.tamu.edu) and TFSCO at [newsmedia@tfs.tamu.edu](mailto:newsmedia@tfs.tamu.edu) of any contact with elected officials
- Notify Joe Cox – Assistant Vice Chancellor for External Relations, [joecox@tamu.edu](mailto:joecox@tamu.edu), 512.542.7830

#### **Local personnel**

- Maintain regular contact with local or assigned TFS personnel

- Maintain regular contact with local county and/or city Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) and provide information, maps/other materials for posting as requested
- Refer issues and concerns of a political and/or policy nature to FRP PIO, TFSCO and Assistant Vice Chancellor for External Relations

### **Overview of FRP PIO Responsibilities during Long Duration Incidents**

- During long duration incidents, the FRP PIO should coordinate and support the IMT PIO as needed.
- If media inquiries are received regarding fires an IMT is managing, they should be redirected to the IMT PIO.
- When a Texas IMT is in place, the FRP PIO will coordinate staffing and PIO operations between the EOC, Texas IMT PIO and field PIOs.

### **TFS Joint Information Center (JIC)**

A facility established as the central point of contact for news media and interested parties to coordinate incident information activities at the scene of the incident. Public information officials from all participating federal, state, and local agencies should collocate at the JIC.

### **Incident Updates, News Releases and Media Advisories**

IMTPIO is responsible for preparing incident updates, news releases, incident alerts and media advisories pertaining to the incident. All final versions should be sent to [newsmedia@tfs.tamu.edu](mailto:newsmedia@tfs.tamu.edu) and [information@tfs.tamu.edu](mailto:information@tfs.tamu.edu).

IMTPIOs may disseminate media materials to local contacts and respond directly to inquiries from local contacts. TFSCO may provide a media contact list to the IMTPIO for the operational area.

All incident updates, news releases, incident alerts and media advisories are to be issued with the TFS logo (use <http://texasforests.tamu.edu/LogoUseGuidelinesAndDownloads/>). If Unified Command is in place, cooperating agency logos should be included. Team logos may also be included. All communications materials should provide the Information phone number, TFS web site address (<http://texasforests.tamu.edu/>) and InciWeb address as points of contact.

### **Social Media**

IMTPIO will post items to officially established TFS social media venues:

- All Hazards Twitter @AllHazardsTFS
- Lone Star State Incident Management Team Facebook
- Texas A&M Forest Service main Facebook page – Send suggested posts to TFSCO

FRP PIO will continue to maintain Wildfire Education & Prevention Facebook page and may assist IMTPIO with other social media pages as requested.

Social media passwords are not to be shared. Social media accounts cannot compete with TFS as the primary information source. Communications resources and social media guidelines can be found at the below links.

- TFS - <http://texasforests.tamu.edu/communicationresources/>
- Texas A&M University System - <https://www.tamus.edu/marcomm/socialmedia/employee-guidelines>

### **Elected Officials**

IMTPIO may contact local elected officials to establish open communication, to clarify IMTPIO role in regards to working with the community and determine information support needs. Notify affected RFC and/or Mitigation & Prevention personnel prior to contact and conduct joint visits whenever possible.

If contact with state and nationally elected officials (and their staffs) is made, Assistant Vice Chancellor for External Relations, TFSCO, IC, FRP PIO and the Agency Administrator. Should the IMTPIO receive any negative comments regarding TFS from any elected or appointed officials, notify the above contacts. TFS may request the assistance of IMTPIOs and incident command staff at briefings for local, state and nationally elected officials and/or their staff.

### **Coordination with Law Enforcement**

In the event a fire cause is suspicious and/or under investigation, the Incident Commander will work in consultation with the lead TFS law enforcement investigator to determine the release of information regarding fire cause. In the case of a non-fire incident, TFS law enforcement will coordinate with the Agency Administrator to determine what information is to be released internally and externally, and when.

By statute, TFS is the lead agency on wildfire investigations. These are conducted by the TFS Forest Resource Protection Law Enforcement. In accordance with the Public Information Open Records Act, to obtain a copy of an investigation a written request must be submitted to TFS. Directions for submitting an Open Records Request can be found at <http://txforestservicetamu.edu/main/article.aspx?id=85> .

### **Internal Reporting Requirements**

The Texas Interagency Coordination Center (TICC) (936) 875-4786, EOC (979) 458-7306 and FRP PIO should be notified immediately by telephone of any incident involving the following: structures destroyed or evacuated; fatality (employee, contractor, or member of public); aircraft incident; shelter deployment; or serious injury to firefighter requiring hospitalization.

In the event of a fatality, consult the guidelines provided in the Agency Administrator's Guide to Critical Incident Management (<http://www.nwccg.gov/pms/pubs/pubs.htm> PMS 926). Notify TFSCO, IC, FRP PIO and the Agency Administrator.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Letter of Intent, Delegation of Authority

Appendix B: Texas Government Facts

Appendix C: Regional Contacts

## Appendix A: Letter of Intent, Delegation of Authority



**To:** Incident Management Team Public Information Officer  
**From:** Texas A&M Forest Service Agency Administrator  
**Date:**  
**Subject:** Letter of Intent

In addition to all pertinent items contained in my agency's delegation of authority to your team, I ask that you do the following:

- Priority should be placed on working with the local community and media
- Handle media and public information concerning the operational aspects of your team's assignment, releasing 209-confirmed information and/or updates as approved by your Incident Commander and WIRES
- Maintain social media as necessary
- Adhere to the response framework for incident information established by the agency administrator
- Coordinate with any Joint Information Centers, if established
- Provide copies of news releases, fact sheets, and other public and media outreach documents to Forest Resource Protection Public Information Officer ([information@tfs.tamu.edu](mailto:information@tfs.tamu.edu)) and Texas A&M Forest Service Communications Office ([newsmedia@tfs.tamu.edu](mailto:newsmedia@tfs.tamu.edu))
- Refer issues and concerns of a political nature to Texas A&M Forest Service Communications Office, Incident Commander, Forest Resource Protection Public Information Officer and the Agency Administrator
- Notify Assistant Vice Chancellor for External Relations, Texas A&M Forest Service Communications Office, Incident Commander, Forest Resource Protection Public Information Officer and the Agency Administrator of inquiries from national media and contacts and inquiries from elected state legislative and federal congressional officials

A copy of the Texas A&M Forest Service Incident Information Procedures document and Public Information Officer handout shall be provided.

Les Rogers  
Agency Administrator  
Texas A&M Forest Service

## Appendix B: Texas Government Facts

- 254 counties, County Judge is the Chief Elected Official; Sheriff is the Chief Law Enforcement Officer (elected).
- County Judge by statute (Section 418.1015, Chapter 418, Texas Government Code) is designated the County Emergency Management Director (EMD) and can appoint a County Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC).
- City Mayor by statute (Section 418.1015, Chapter 418, Texas Government Code) is designated as the City EMD and can appoint a City EMC.
- Counties and cities, in some cases, have opted to operate jointly under a County's emergency operations plan.
- Texas counties have the authority to issue burn bans (Chapter 352, Subchapter D, Local Government Code)
- Municipalities can issue outdoor burning ordinances within the city limits only.
- Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Disaster District Chair (DDC) has authority to activate state resources within the district and serve as the conduit to State Operations Center (SOC) for additional state resources. All DDCs have assigned PIOs known as Safety Education Officers/Troopers (see attachment).
- Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) coordinates the state emergency management program, which is intended to ensure the state and its local governments respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters, and implement plans and programs to help prevent or lessen the impact of emergencies and disasters. During disaster situations, TFS works in tandem with TDEM – including the execution of TDEM assigned tasks.
- The TFS is a state agency within the Texas A&M University System.
- The TFSCO staff work for, represent and report to the Texas A&M Forest Service Director's Office. They are not part of the incident management team or in the chain of command of the incident. They are responsible for maintaining agency media relations, legislative relations, agency communications, branding, marketing and messaging.

## Appendix C: Regional Contacts

**Regional Fire Coordinators (RFC)** are supervisory employees that respond to wildfires as well as interact regularly with the community and local government. RFCs also help train and equip area fire departments and work with local communities to reduce potential wildfire risks.



**TEXAS A&M  
FOREST SERVICE**

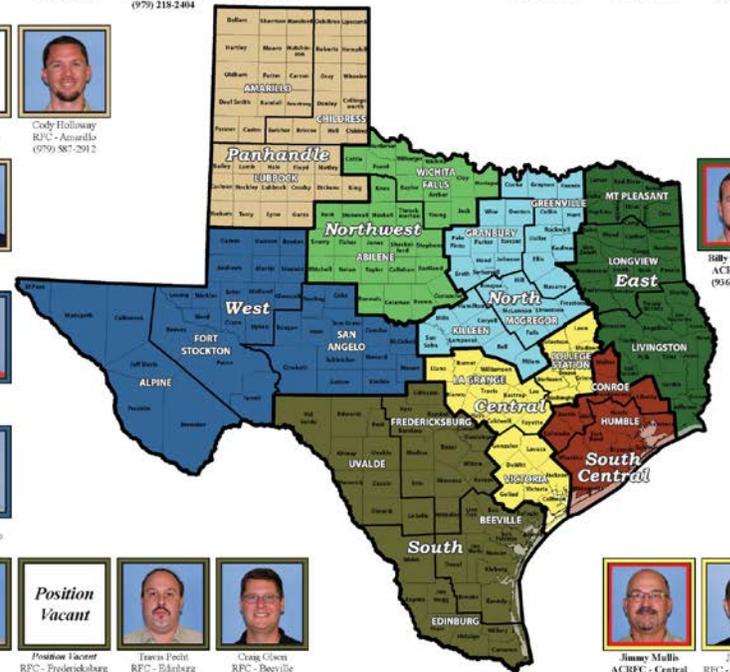
# REGIONAL FIRE COORDINATORS

The role of the Incident Response Department is to ensure the rapid and effective response of appropriate resources, as needed, to suppress and extinguish wildfires in Texas. Rapid initial response to wildland fire is essential to suppress wildfires during high fire danger conditions, limit losses and provide for the safety of emergency responders and citizens. In addition, TFS is often requested to respond to all hazardous incidents that affect the state.

Position Vacant

Position Vacant

Position Vacant



Position Vacant

**Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Specialists** are professional employees who work with public, community leaders with cities, counties and other agencies to educate on programs that reduce the risk of wildfire in communities. The WUI is where developed areas intermingle with undeveloped areas. It is the area adjacent to property where actions can be taken to prevent damage or loss from wildfire. There are over 14,500 communities at risk of wildfire in Texas. WUI Specialists train community leaders to work with local residents to develop and implement local wildfire preparedness programs for reaching as many people as possible.

