

***Presentation Paper for the Wildland Fire Leadership Council
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***From the International Association of Fire Chiefs Co-Chairs of the Wildland Fire
Control Committee***

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Overview: This presentation is being made on behalf of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). The IAFC is one of the oldest professional fire associations in the United States (established in 1873), and with more than 12,000 members, represents the majority of the nation's fire service – both urban and rural. The IAFC and its members are the primary point of contact for members of Congress seeking input on all types of fire and disaster response issues, as such the IAFC has been instrumental in shaping national fire policy.

Our organization places high priority on the growing fire problem that is occurring in the urban interface/intermix. Nationally we have made significant gains to control almost every type of fire problem. Every type, that is, except wildland fire. And contrary to the trend for other types of fire problems, wildfires continue to grow in size, intensity, and complexity every year. All fire chiefs are concerned about the need to address this deadly multi-billion dollar problem. Metropolitan and regional fire agencies protecting a sprawling suburban communities are as concerned as the small volunteer fire agencies that are “first in” to battle the 5 acre wildland fire that within minutes can spread to 50 acres and then a multi-thousand acre wildfire that wipes out the local economy.

The last 10 years of wildfire activity have created a new level of concern on the part of all of our member fire chiefs.

The IAFC understands and appreciates the need to be involved and collaborate on the solutions to America's fire problem. In 1972 President Nixon commissioned a similar process to deal with the terrible fire loss record America was experiencing (the worst fire death and property loss record of any industrialized country in the world). 12,000 Americans were dying annually in fires. The firefighter profession was by far the most dangerous job in America. The urban fire problem was out of control. Within ten years of implementing the tenants of what became known as “America Burning” the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control (now the U.S. Fire Administration) reduced fire deaths in America by one half and reduced the property loss by billions of dollars.

Now we find ourselves in a similar effort with the National Fire Plan and the ten Year Strategy. These efforts should be that mark in time when we began to rally around solutions to the wildland fire problem. Joint efforts in training, communications, command strategies, safety priorities and a focus on prevention and mitigation of fires, especially for life threatening fires, are the time tested tools for accomplishing the goals of the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy, just as they were for the success of the efforts that stemmed from America Burning.

Integrated Strategy: The IAFC is pleased to see that the Congressional Direction for the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy includes the need for federally assigned agencies to work closely with states, and local officials. The IAFC appreciates and supports the Congressional statement that: “Key decisions should be made at local levels.” Our federal partners need to cooperate, collaborate and communicate with us in the development of a long-term strategy. The new era of fire prevention and control in the interface will include emphasis on the methods and measures that prove successful for local, state, and federal agencies working together to implement coordinated action plans.

The IAFC is in the process of developing a National Policy Statement that will include the following goals:

- Develop effective, responsive and sustained state and federal support to local fire services as a critical component to the wildland fire control policy.
- Improve interagency collaboration and coordination between local, state and federal agencies at all levels for the prevention, preparedness and control of wildland fire.
- Develop and promote seamless integration of local, state and federal fire suppression efforts on the fireground.
- Expand cross-training opportunities for firefighters and promote a high regard for safety, effective initial attack, transition of command and overall fireground communications.

Immediate Action: The IAFC Board of Directors is finalizing the 2002/2003 Strategic Plan. They are developing the policy and setting direction for the seven regional Divisions in the United States and one Division in Canada. The Wildland Fire Control Committee is recommending the following goals:

- Attain a seat (advisory and non-voting is acceptable) on the Wildland Fire Leadership Council.
- Seek Wildland Fire Leadership Council support for the IAFC to be considered a “key collaborator” for all of Goal #1 in the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan.
- Develop funding and a working group consisting of representatives from the U.S.D.A. and U.S.D.I., the National Fire Academy and the IAFC to improve the wildland training program for structural firefighters; and assess wildland resource needs for structural firefighters.
- Develop a system of identifying local wildland firefighting apparatus, equipment, certificated wildland firefighter response personnel, and related local fire resources necessary to control major wildland fires and develop guidelines for a controlled response of those resources.
- Develop a “SWAP” training program to certify local fire officers to work on wildland incident management teams, and for wildland fire incident management officers to work in a structural fire incident community setting.
- Conduct an annual training conference (similar to the one IAFC is presenting on December 4-6 of 2002 in Kansas City) and develop an on-going newsletter and

annual summit meeting of the major stakeholders to critique and learn from (for future year action) the previous years wildland fire experiences.

Ten Year Implementation Plan Action Tracking: The IAFC will be an active player in the Ten Year Implementation Plan and is seeking strong involvement with the first goal – To Improve Fire Prevention and Suppression. We have systems in place for the structural firefighting problem as well as for disaster response and overall fire management issues that can be modeled for the wildland fire problem solutions. Much of this effort is directly related to the advancement of our profession after the “America Burning” report. We have a National Fire Academy, proven safety and training systems and have become world leaders in promoting the Incident Command System.

The IAFC and its members are the experts in protecting communities during all types of disaster, from hazardous materials release to tornado, earthquake, terrorism or wildland fire.

The IAFC is also an excellent resource and valued partner when creating interface policy on reducing fire hazards and promoting community awareness. We have experience that relates to fire prevention, implementation of fire mitigations, emergency response preparedness (disasters, fire, political connections, etc.) and community education. Local fire service has the experience in adopting regulations and ordinances relating to fire safety within their counties and understands how to use local planning processes. Local fire chiefs are also aware of the political, legal and regulatory problems and concerns within the local community. The fire chief is considered a recognized and respected leader when dealing with local governance issues.

The IAFC will accept a collaborative leadership role or liaison status for any of the tasks listed under Goal #1. Currently IAFC is identified as one of the members of a collaborative group (Task G.1.c) that will assess and report to Congress on the status of rural/volunteer fire departments in WUI. IAFC also sees a need to consider the affect of WUI on structural firefighters that are being counted on to respond to major wildland incidents and assume more leadership roles in managing major wildland fires. The IAFC will look favorably on our involvement with any of the tasks associated with our strengths and general interest in attaining the success envisioned with the rest (beyond our desire for direct involvement with Goal #1) of the Ten Year Strategy Plan.

The events of September 11, 2001 made it plainly clear that the fire service must be prepared to respond and “hold the line” for any emergency. This is true for terrorism and it is true for wildland fire. We will always be the first line of defense for interface fires in our communities. Clearly then, we need to be effectively used by our federal partners to ensure smooth and effective integration of efforts. The IAFC is ready to do its part to participate in the process so that these common goals are met.