

MEMORANDUM
Department of Natural Resources
Chief of Fire and Aviation

STATE OF ALASKA
Division of Forestry
(907) 761-6225

TO: DOF

DATE: July 10, 2020

FROM: Norm McDonald

PHONE: (907) 761-6225

SUBJECT: Lower 48 Resource Orders and COVID Mitigations

As the relatively cool summer moderates Alaska's fire season, the Division of Forestry has developed a drawdown plan to ensure that Alaska is protected, while supporting the national wildland fire response effort. Before our resources are deployed, we have a shared responsibility to inform our staff and ourselves about the hazards, risks, and mitigations we will encounter in the COVID environment. The Division will provide guidance and expectations for deploying and returning employees, although it is the individual's responsibility to use the tools and information available to make an informed decision whether to leave Alaska.

To align Alaskan wildland fire agencies' efforts, we have coordinated with AWFCG to identify, resolve, and disseminate information about COVID processes and guidance in the Lower 48. It is the Division of Forestry Fire Program's expectation that Area offices and SLC will assist the deploying resources by ensuring that COVID mitigations are identified and safety processes are in place at the receiving unit. Ensuring that mitigations are in place and providing current information will allow our employees to make personal travel decisions that will potentially impact them and their families. Our process and considerations pertain to three aspects of Lower 48 assignments.

Sending office and employee responsibility: Pre assignment

- a. We ask that dispatchers ensure all resource orders sent to Alaska include the Interagency Checklist for Mobilization of Resources by the ordering unit. COVID-specific information should be included as an attachment or in the Special Needs section of the resource order.
- b. State-specific testing or quarantine requirements should be identified before taking an assignment. If isolation or quarantine is required, determine if the receiving unit considers isolation as travel time and will compensate for room and board.
- c. Identify what kind of testing capability the state or county has. A test prior to return travel will expedite the employee's quarantine time in Alaska. A second test in Alaska may still be required.
- d. Determine what kinds of COVID precautions and PPE our firefighters and support staff should take on assignment. Determine if you have the required PPE to comply with the mandates. IMTs are requiring masks at briefings.
- e. Research the current COVID count in the state or county where you may be assigned. Consider hospital and medical support capabilities. Are you comfortable with the availability?
 1. Some L48 states have posted information about COVID mitigations on the [Geographic Area Coordination Centers \(GACC\) website](#).
 2. Harvard Global Health Institute has published a [map of COVID risk](#), by county, of the entire United States, so employees can compare the COVID risks by location in the assignments they are considering. National Public Radio published [an article](#) about the new map.

Area and Central Office support and considerations: During assignment

If a State of Alaska employee, including Emergency Firefighters, have symptoms or confirmed Covid-19 while on assignment, employees need to be aware of agency-specific plans and medical support responsibility.

- a. Determine the evacuation or transport process should a medical evaluation or test be required.
- b. Identify fiscal responsibility of hospital visit costs and testing. Not all workers' compensation claims will cover "signs and symptoms" or testing.
- c. If treatment is required, work with the incident compensation claims and notify your home office immediately to establish claims procedures. The home office or assigned admin will act as the patient advocate for Division of Forestry employees.
- d. In most cases, isolation or quarantine time will be required while awaiting testing results for symptoms or recovery. The Fire Management Board provided guidance to fire agencies in their [latest memo](#), which recommends incidents provide for this service. Do not rely on this guidance alone; employees should ensure they have the means to support themselves for up to 14 days of quarantine. If the employee is unable to provide this, the sending area should establish a plan to accommodate a traveling firefighter. Do not assume the plan provides for long term care. r before a fire deployment.

Returning to Alaska: Post assignment.

The Division of Forestry, in conjunction with DHSS, has identified the process for DOF employees returning to Alaska. Although we have access to an expedited testing program for emergency responders, not all returning firefighters are guaranteed this service.

- a. If a team member, crew, or single resource is returning from assignment and is needed to provide first responder capabilities for life and property safety, expedited testing will be approved on a case by case basis. Coordination of this testing will be established through SLC after approval of DHSS. The process will follow the established L48 resource mobilization plan found on DOF COVID site
- b. In most cases, isolation or quarantine time will be required while awaiting testing results for symptoms or recovery. The Fire Management Board provided guidance to fire agencies in their [latest memo](#), which recommends incidents provide for this service. The accompanying memos are available on the [DOF Covid site](#) Do not rely on this guidance alone; employees should ensure they have the means to support themselves for up to 14 days of quarantine. If the employee is unable to provide this, the sending area should establish a plan to accommodate a traveling firefighter before a fire deployment.

I appreciate everyone's assistance as we work through these issues. There will be questions that we may have to answer, "there is no protocol for this." In these instances, the direction is to provide for our responders' safety, provide as much information as we can, and provide support during potentially difficult administrative and firefighter health situations. It is most important that we provide and seek accurate and up-to-date information before making the decision to travel. This is both the employee's and agency's responsibility.

Updated information will be provided on the Division's COVID site as it is made available. Questions should be addressed to the COVID response team for clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. It is the Division's intent to provide our staff with the best information available to make decisions on their ability and comfort with an assignment to the L48. In this environment there are risks and unknowns. The

decision to accept those risks is shared by the employee and the Division. As we track the national situation, we will provide updated guidance and, in some cases, restrictions that are intended to protect our employees and our agency.

I would like to thank you all for your attention to this national safety and health issue. We are dealing with an unknown future and difficult times, but we can be proud of the work we have accomplished to ensure a safe wildland fire response. Thanks for your service to the State of Alaska and the country during these challenging times.