

**Work Capacity Testing
Talking Points
January 2004**

- The Work Capacity Test criteria and the course layout requirements have NOT changed. The criteria for the “PACK” test, “FIELD” and “WALK” tests have not been changed. They remain:
 - Pack 45 minutes 45 pounds 3 miles (arduous)
 - Field 30 minutes 25 pounds 2 miles (moderate)
 - Walk 16 minutes 0 pounds 1 mile (light)
- However, all employees involved with or wanting to be involved with wildland fire use activities must work with their fire program manager(s) to determine their appropriate duties and the level of work capacity testing they will need to meet.
- Employee and crew safety is the basis for the WCT. Each employee’s fire related duties must be consistent with safe practices, and take into consideration the medical condition, physical condition, and the employees desire to achieve and maintain appropriate fitness levels.
- Each individual is responsible for their physical condition and their health.
- All employees who will be engaged in wildland firefighting activities will receive, fill out, and return a self health screening form called the Health Form Questionnaire or “HSQ”.
- Criteria in the HSQ have been validated by the American Heart Association for both health risk, and cardiovascular risk assessments.
- The HSQ is an approved Office of Management and Budget (OMB) form. This means it can be distributed and then recollected by the agency for official use. In this case all HSQ’s will be sent out in the pre-employment package and it is expected to be returned to the local Servicing Human Resources Office (SHRO.) An envelope will be provided in the pre-employment package for use in returning the HSQ.
- 2002 was the first year the agency had been able to collect and examine the form.
- Because the HSQ asks for private medically related information, it is considered a confidential form. When you receive your HSQ, take the time to answer it truthfully, then return it to your local SHRO. The SHRO will review the HSQ’s to determine if the employee meets the standards established. All HSQ’s will be

placed and maintained in the individuals “stand-alone” medical folder. It will not be kept in an employee’s Official Personnel Folder (OPF).

- The SHRO will not be making medical decisions when they review the HSQ, however, if further medical evaluation is indicated, the SHRO will contact the local WCT test administrator (or supervisor) and an appropriate action will be initiated. In most cases this will involve obtaining a physical examination by a qualified medical provider (Physician, Physician Asst, Nurse Practitioner.)
- The local Human Services Resource Officer (SHRO) will review the employee’s HSQ responses with the local work capacity test administrator.
- Seasoned and Veteran wildland firefighters should show up for work reasonably fit. Once they are employed they will have no less than four weeks to prepare for the WCT.
- Employees should not begin training for the WCT before the HSQ has been completed and reviewed by an SHRO. Testing or fitness training on official time will not be started until the employee meets the HSQ or medical physical examination if required.
- If you know, or expect to take the arduous, moderate or light level of the test – you should begin working out no sooner than 4 weeks before you intend to take the test. If you have been inactive or sedentary you may want to start even sooner and work up to building work capacity.
- Every employee should check with their supervisor or human services representative if there are questions on what level of test they need to take. All of the ICS positions and their associated fitness level can be found in the “Wildland Fire Qualification Subsystem Guide” 310-1, and the FS Handbook 5109.17. Fitness standards for all positions can be found there.
- The purpose for including the fitness element in the “WFGSG” 310-1 is to ensure persons assigned to fire activities do not become injured or ill because they do not have the fitness level that is required to perform the duties and responsibilities of their ICS position or job.
- Passing the WCT for temporary employees remains a condition of hire.
- All Work Capacity Test administrators must be certified, and each WCT test that is given must be documented. WCT test results are to be documented on the WCT Test Administrator’s Report. Certification requirements are included in the publication “Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters; Test Administrator’s Guide,” (FSM 5108).

- You cannot be fired for not passing an HSQ. However, as the WCT is a condition of hire, if after training, you cannot pass the WCT for the level you are assigned, you may be terminated.
- Opportunities for retesting apply to all employees:
 - Temporary employees required to pass the WCT as a condition of employment will be provided one opportunity to pass the required test. A Second chance may be provided at the discretion of management.
 - Permanent employees required to pass a WCT for duties associated with their positions will be provided three chances to pass the required test before action is initiated to address their fitness limitations
 - Permanent and temporary employees who do not perform fire assignments as a recurring part of their position but are authorized to perform such duties, may be retested as many times as management deems appropriate.

History & Background of Work Capacity Testing

- Firefighters wanted a test that more accurately reflected ability to perform firefighting work, as documented in TriData Corporation's October 1996 report, "Wildland Firefighter Safety Awareness Study, Phase I," pages 170-172.
- Forest Service exercise physiologist Dr. Brian J. Sharkey of the Missoula Technology Development Center designed Work Capacity Testing (WCT) to better measure strength and endurance levels required in doing arduous, moderate, and light wildland firefighting work.
- Because the Forest Service developed WCT, the agency wanted an independent expert to review the test development. Exercise physiologist Dr. Paul O. Davis of Applied Research Associates was selected. Dr. Davis is a court-qualified, internationally known authority on firefighter fitness standards. His May 1998 report concluded that the Work Capacity Tests were developed consistent with guidelines for employment test development. His report, "Validation of the Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Fire Qualifications (The Pack, Field, and Walk Tests) May, 1998." Was prepared for the USDA Forest Service under BLM Contract # 1422-N-651-C5-3070, May 1998. (Page ii and iii of Davis' report)
- Meanwhile, to ensure fairness to all employees, the Forest Service Partnership Council (FSPC) and Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to pilot test WCT during the calendar year 1998. A Civil Rights Impact Analysis (CRIA) was conducted during the pilot test year to identify and mitigate any adverse affects on individuals or groups protected by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of

1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, or the Civil Rights Act of 1991.

- As part of the Memorandum of Understanding an assessment team was formed in January 1998 to review the pilot year data and recommend mitigating measures if there were adverse affects on civil rights. The team consisted of Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management personnel and specialists in civil rights and human resources management. The team was also to determine whether the WCT should be the sole fitness test used by the Forest Service for arduous level fire positions. (Yes, just “Arduous,” as stated in the first paragraph of attachment 1 to December 1998 FSPC minutes.)
- With the groundwork laid, Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management distributed educational material to Forest Service units in the spring of 1998.
- More than 4300 firefighters took the test in 1998. The assessment team found that no employee group or protected class was adversely impacted under EEO statistical guidelines. WCT was to be implemented Forest Service-wide in 1999.
- Tragically, on January 11, 1999, a Forest Service employee died from an apparent heart attack suffered while taking the Work Capacity Test. The Forest Service suspended using WCT and investigated the incident. A Board of Review (BOR) convened to review the investigation report and recommendations. The Forest Service accepted the BOR’s recommendation and adopted WCT on January 1, 2000.
- Dave Aldrich and Mike Apicello distributed the initial WCT information to each of the nine Forest Service Regional Fire and Aviation Management Directors on January 20, 2000.

Forest Service units continue to request additional copies of “Work Capacity Test Administrator’s Guide” (publication 9851-2810-MTDC, Revised April, 2003), and “The Pack Test” (publication FS 617). Requests for hardcopy are forwarded to MTDC, or they can be pulled from the internet at

http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/wct/wct_index.html

Wildland Fire Qualifications System Positions

“Wildland Fire Qualifications System,” (PMS 310-1) Positions requiring fitness
NOTE: Check with your Fire Management Office, some positions have been dropped while others may have had their fitness level changed with the update of the PMS 310-1. This information can also be found on the NWCG home page on the Internet: www.nwcg.org.

- Arduous
 - Incident Commander Type III (ICT3)
 - Incident Commander Type IV (ICT4)
 - Division/Group Supervisor (DIVS)
 - Task Force Leader (TFLD)
 - Strike Team Leader Tractor/Plow (STPL)
 - Strike Team Leader Dozer (STDZ)
 - Strike Team Leader Engine (STEN)
 - Strike Team Leader Crew (STCR)
 - Crew Representative (CREP)
 - Firing Boss, single resource (FIRB)
 - Tractor/Plow Boss, single resource, (TRPB)
 - Dozer Boss, single resource, (DOZB)
 - Engine Boss, single resource (ENGB)
 - Felling Boss, single resource, (FELB)
 - Crew Boss, single resource (CRWB)
 - Advanced Firefighter (FFT1)
 - Firefighter (FFT2)
 - Helicopter Manager (HEMG)
 - Helicopter Crew Member (HECM)
 - Field Observer (FOBS)

- Moderate
 - Safety Officer Type 2 (SAF2)
 - Operations Branch Director (ORBD)
 - Operations Section Chief, Type 2 (OSC2)
 - Situation Unit Leader (SITL)
 - Fire Behavior Analyst (FBAN)

- Light
 - Operations Section Chief Type 1 (OSC1)
 - Staging Area Manager (STAM)
 - Helicopter Base Manager (with more than four helicopters) (HEB1)
 - Helicopter Base Manager (with 1-3 helicopters) (HEB2)

Work Capacity Testing is the test the Forest Service will use to measure physical fitness for fire fighting related positions.

- WCT is superior to the step test and mile-and-a-half run for testing an individual's fitness for wildland firefighting positions because it measures both strength and endurance.
- The Wildland Fire Qualifications System lists 86 firefighting jobs, with experience and training requirements for each. In addition, 29 of those jobs require meeting a physical fitness level of arduous, moderate or light.
- Twenty of the 86 firefighting related positions require meeting a physical fitness level of arduous.
- A Civil Rights Impact Analysis was completed, and implementing WCT does not adversely affect those protected by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act;
- The Civil Rights Act of 1964, or the Americans with Disabilities Act, or the Civil Rights Act of 1991.

Questions and Answers

Why adopt the Work Capacity Test?

The work capacity test measures strength and endurance better than the step test and mile-and-a-half run.

Why did the Forest Service delay adopting the WCT?

The Forest Service pilot tested WCT to assure fairness to those protected by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Civil Rights Act of 1991.

How many firefighters successfully pass the tests?

Service-wide, since 2002 the Forest Service has a 90%+ national pass rate.

How many positions in the Wildland Fire Qualifications System require completing the Work Capacity Tests?

The Wildland Fire Qualifications System identifies 86 positions, 29 have arduous, moderate or light physical requirements. In addition, those individuals on the fireline for any reason need to attain the light physical level.