

## **S-445 Incident Training Specialist Pre-Course Work**

### **Historical Overview and Orientation to the Wildland Fire Qualification System**



#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The material in this pre-course work is designed to be used as a self study orientation guide to the Incident Training Specialist course S-445. The student equipped with the Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide, PMS 310-1 and a Position Task Book (PTB) can work through the material in this pre-course work to increase their understanding of the subject.

The pre-course work provides a historical overview and orientation to the Wildland Fire Qualification System. This pre-course work is not intended to replace the established guidelines and direction. It is designed to increase user understanding and application of the Wildland Fire Qualification System.

#### **II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The following historical overview of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) and the Wildland Fire Qualification System is provided so the user can have a better understanding of where we have been in the evolution of the current qualification system and how we got to where we are today.

Prior to 1973, common standards did not exist among agencies for wildland fire qualification and training. Each agency established independent standards and limited national courses existed. This resulted in an inability to exchange resources above the crew level.

In 1972, the BLM conducted a study that showed an extensive duplication of effort and lack of standardization even within a single agency.

Every year partner agencies faced common problems:

- Widely dispersed field areas
- Limited staff
- Wildland fire activity

An umbrella organization was needed to facilitate the development of practices, standards, and training to bond the wildland fire community. In 1976 the first of three major efforts would occur to help unite the wildland fire community in their effort to respond to increasing fire activity nationwide.

A. Establishment of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group

On March 18, 1976, an Interagency Memorandum of Understanding between the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture officially formed the NWCG.

The NWCG fills the interagency need by contributing towards the cost-effective execution of each partner agency's programs to benefit agency mandates, resources, and the taxpayer.

The NWCG includes representatives from the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Fire Administration and representatives from the National Association of State Foresters. In June of 1994, the original agreement was modified to include the Federal Emergency Management Agency's U.S. Fire Administration.

Detailed products are produced by Working Teams and Advisory Groups working under the direct coordination of the NWCG. The products are approved by a consensus of the NWCG. Agreed policies, standards, and procedures are then implemented by each agency through regular channels. The NWCG Working Teams are grouped to reflect the concerns of the interagency wildland fire community.

Currently, the NWCG Working Teams are:

- **TWT**—Training Working Team
- **IOSWT**—Incident Operations Standards Working Team
- **WFEWT**—Wildland Fire Education Working Team
- **FUWT**—Fire Use Working Team
- **FEWT**—Fire Equipment Working Team
- **SHWT**—Safety and Health Working Team
- **IBPWT**—Incident Business Practices Working Team
- **IRMWT**—Information Resource Management Working Team  
National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Protection Advisory  
Group

The IOSWT and the TWT are key to the development and maintenance of the Wildland Fire Qualification System and appropriate training curriculum. The IOSWT is responsible for all qualification and standards while the TWT is responsible for training issues and curriculum.

The Fire Use Working Team and the former Prescribed Fire and Fire Effects Working Team (PFFEWT) have provided subject matter expertise and oversight in the development of the prescribed fire system's qualification and training curriculum. Their work has been coordinated with that of the IOSWT and the TWT, and incorporated into the Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide, PMS 310-1.

B. National Interagency Fire Qualification System (NIFQS) and the Incident Command System (ICS)

Between 1973 and 1982, two additional major efforts were conducted that would allow agencies to cooperate and share personnel and resources.

1. The National Interagency Fire Qualification System (NIFQS) was developed between 1974 and 1977 and implemented in 1978.

NIFQS established minimum standards based on:

- Experience
- Training
- Physical fitness

NIFQS later became known as a training based system due to its reliance on completion of required courses to enable an individual to qualify for a position.

NIFQS training courses were developed between 1974 and 1982. These courses were developed through an interagency effort led by the former BLM Division of Training at the former Boise Interagency Fire Center (BIFC). BIFC used:

- New instructional system development technology,
- Interactive instructional methods, and
- A concept of centralized development and decentralized instruction.

The resulting suppression courses (S-courses):

- Provided a common training standard acceptable to all NWCG agencies.
- Were developed by wildfire agencies for wildfire.
- Were based on the large fire organization (LFO).
- Were performance based and contained wildfire suppression skills.
- Were certified by the NWCG and published through the National Audiovisual Center.

2. During this same period of time the Incident Command System (ICS) was being developed in Southern California through FIRESCOPE (Firefighting Resources of California Organized for Potential Emergencies).

ICS was developed for much the same reasons as NIFQS however its focus was on:

- Cooperation of wildland fire
- Structural fire
- Law enforcement
- Other emergency response agencies in an all-hazard environment

While ICS provided many common elements acceptable to both wildland fire and emergency response agencies, it did not include training and qualification components.

C. National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS)

In 1982, the NWCG adopted ICS for national implementation and combined the best of both the ICS and NIFQS. The result was the NIIMS which includes the ICS plus the training and qualification of NIFQS and a publications management component.

The adoption of ICS meant that most of the NIFQS S-Courses could no longer be used, since they were based on the Large Fire Organization (LFO) and procedures.

The FIRESCOPE agencies, led by the California Department of Forestry (CDF), were tasked with developing the ICS training curriculum using the S-courses as a model and adapting to the new courses as much as possible. Unfortunately the resulting courses (I-courses) did not meet all user needs.

In August 1987, the TWT, assisted by the former BIFC Division of Training, conducted an analysis to determine why the I-courses were not working. This analysis revealed differences between FIRESCOPE agencies and NWCG agencies that were contributing to the problems with the I-courses.

As a result of the analysis, the TWT and the current IOSWT submitted a joint proposal to the NWCG calling for major modifications to the training and qualification system. NWCG approved this proposal in January 1988 and tasked the former BIFC Division of Training to develop a specific proposal for a new suppression qualification and training system.

This proposal was developed with extensive input and review and recommended a performance-based qualification system and a new curriculum composed of:

- All Hazard courses (I-courses)
- Suppression skill courses (S-courses)
- Job aids

The NWCG approved this proposal in September 1991, and funded it for implementation over a ten-year period. The former BIFC Division of Training was assigned the lead in development of the training courses, Position Task Books, and other components which make up the system in use today. Funding and resources for development of the training curriculum and job aids was established through an interagency agreement.

D. National Incident Management System (NIMS)

On February 28, 2003, the President issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-5, which directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and administer a National Incident Management System (NIMS). According to HSPD-5:

This system will provide a consistent nationwide approach for Federal, State, and local governments to work effectively and efficiently together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity. To provide for interoperability and compatibility among Federal, State, and local capabilities, the NIMS will include a core set of concepts, principles, terminology, and technologies covering the incident command system; multi-agency coordination systems; unified command; training; identification and management of resources (including systems for classifying types of resources); qualifications and certification; and the collection, tracking, and reporting of incident information and incident resources.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE PERFORMANCE BASED SYSTEM

The Wildland Fire Qualification System is a “performance based” qualification system. In this system, the primary criteria for qualification are individual performance as observed by an Evaluator using approved standards.

This system differs from previous wildland fire qualification systems which have been “training based.” Training based systems use the completion of training courses or a passing score on an examination as the primary criteria for qualification.

A performance based system has two advantages over a training based system:

- Qualification is based upon real performance, as measured on the job, versus perceived performance, as measured by an examination or classroom activities.
- Personnel who have learned skills from sources outside wildland fire suppression and prescribed fires, such as agency specific training programs or training and work in structural fire, law enforcement, search and rescue, etc., may not be required to complete specific courses in order to qualify in a NWCG position.

A. The components of the Wildland Fire Qualification System are as follows:

1. Position Task Books contain all critical tasks which are required to perform the job. PTB's have been designed in a format which will allow documentation of a Trainee's ability to perform each task. Successful completion of all tasks required of the position, as determined by an Evaluator(s), will be the basis for recommending certification.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Training requirements include completion of all required training courses and prerequisite experience prior to obtaining a PTB. Use of other courses or job aids providing additional training which supports development of knowledge and skills is recommended to prepare the employee to perform in the position.

2. Training courses and job aids provide the specific skills and knowledge required to perform tasks as prescribed in the PTB.
3. Agency certification is issued in the form of an incident qualification card certifying that the individual is qualified to perform in a specified position.

## B. Responsibilities

The local office is responsible for selecting Trainees, proper use of task books, and certification of Trainees (see Position Task Book Design and Use in the PMS 310-1).

## IV. PRESCRIBED FIRE TRAINING AND QUALIFICATION

### A. Approval of the Prescribed Fire Training and Qualification System

In 1993, at the request of the currently named Fire Use Working Team (FUWT), the NIFC National Fire and Aviation Training Support Group (NFATSG) were tasked with development of the prescribed fire training and qualification system. A proposal was completed and approved by the NWCG in 1995.

In March 1999, prescribed fire and fire use training and qualifications were added to the Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide, PMS 310-1. The 1999 guide was revised and published as a NWCG certified version in 2000.

In April 2006, the Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide was revised and updated. To maintain definition consistency and clarity among NWCG documents, the term Wildland Fire is used when Wildfire, Wildland Fire Use, and Prescribed Fire are referred to collectively. The title of the Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide, PMS 310-1 has changed to reflect this usage.

When referring separately to Wildfire, Wildland Fire Use, or Prescribed Fire, use that specific term. Specific terms will be used in Position Task Book Qualification Record Code Columns.

### B. Conversion to a Competency-Based System

In February 2005, the NIMS Integration Center hosted a meeting in Emmitsburg for all emergency management organizations to begin collaboration on the implementation of the NIMS (National Incident Management System). From that meeting it became obvious that the development of core competencies for ICS positions was necessary.

In 2005, the TWT, IOSWT and USFA began working together to develop these competencies for all ICS positions (does not include wildland fire, support or associated positions). In the fall of 2005, the wildland fire, support and associated positions were added to the development to maintain consistency throughout all positions utilized in wildland fire. The competencies for the ICS positions were given to DHS and have become the national standard for all emergency responders.

Competencies and behaviors for all positions in the Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide, PMS 310-1 were finalized in early 2006. In February 2006, the NWCG approved the next step of revising all PTBs to support the recently developed competencies and behaviors.

The revision of the PTBs triggered a necessary update to the PMS 310-1 to update the language. New PTBs and a 2008 version of the PMS 310-1 were published via the web in May 2008.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WILDLAND FIRE QUALIFICATION SYSTEM**

1976	National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) established.
1974-1978	National Interagency Fire Qualification System (NIFQS) developed and implemented.
1974-1982	NIFQS training courses (S-courses) developed.
1974-1982	Incident Command System (ICS) developed through FIRESCOPE.
1982	National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS) developed and adopted by the NWCG. Combined ICS and NIFQS.
1991	NWCG approved a proposal for a performance based qualification system, and a new curriculum composed of; all risk courses (I-courses), suppression skill courses (S-Courses), and job aids and funded it for implementation over a ten-year period.
1993	Proposal for the Prescribed Fire training and qualification system approved for implementation by the NWCG.
2000	Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide published.
2001	Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System National Training Curriculum completed.
2006	Wildland Fire Qualification System National Training Curriculum revised.
2008	National Competency Project was completed moving NWCG to a competency based system that is in line with national standards for emergency responders.