

WILDLAND FIRE RESPONSE, THE CALIFORNIA MODEL

Insights from California: Comparing Wildland Fire Response in California with Federal Guidelines

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Airport Fire September 2024
Lake Elsinore, Riverside County CA



INTRODUCTION

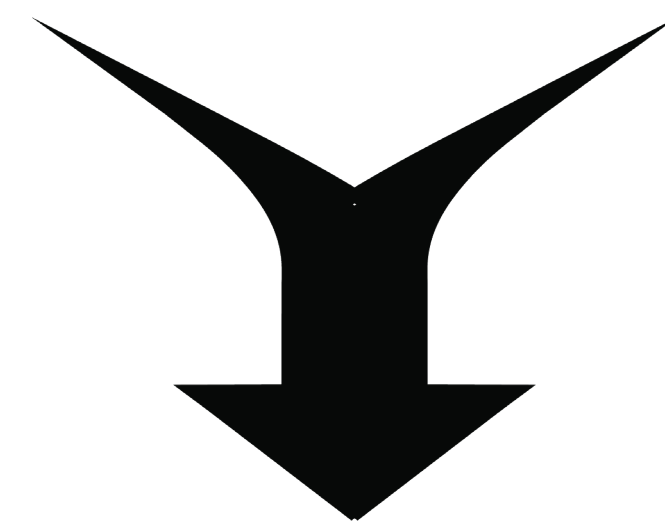
The federal government developed wildland fire response guidelines aligned with the national framework; however, the national guidelines do not incorporate local response frameworks. The document analysis compared California's wildland fire response system with federal guidelines, using the ML Framework as the research anchor and analytical roadmap. Through this analysis, researchers identified areas of alignment, inconsistencies, and gaps.

FEDERAL DOCUMENT SET

FEDERAL GUIDELINES (NIMS, NWCG)

CALIFORNIA DOCUMENT SET

8 SIGNIFICANT WILDLAND FIRE AARS (2003 - 2024) & STATE-LEVEL WILDLAND FIRE GUIDELINES (SEMS, FIRESCOPE)



RESEARCH ANCHOR

ML FRAMEWORK (MARANGHIDES & LINK, 2025) Wildland fire generalized response, notification, evacuation timing

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS OVER TIME



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Wildland fire response depends on rapid, multidisciplinary coordination under compressed timelines.

- The fire service has primary tactical authority while law enforcement and emergency management act in supporting roles and maintain authority over their distinct obligations.

Existing doctrine overlooks the uncertainty, speed, and mental demands of extreme wildland fires.

- State and Federal guidelines do not fully capture the realities of extreme wildland fire conditions.

Interviews with first responders are necessary to capture lived experience and cognitive decision-making

- First responder interviews reveal how personnel perceive risk, adapt decisions, and coordinate during extreme conditions.

Qualitative research matters.

- Existing doctrine and after-action reports detail what occurred during wildland fires but do not fully explain how first responders perceive risk, adapt decisions, manage uncertainty, or coordinate actions in extreme conditions. Qualitative interviews capture these operational realities.

Future research and operational guideline update considerations:

- Explore common guidelines across international borders.

JOIN THE DISCUSSION AT THE RESEARCHER'S MEETING

Wednesday, June 17, 4:15 to 5:45 p.m., Interlocken C

This research is part of an ongoing study examining how first responders perceive risk, decide on evacuations, and coordinate protective actions during extreme wildland fires.

PROTOCOLS COMPARED WITH ML FRAMEWORK

PROTOCOLS CONSISTENT WITH THE LOCAL AND FEDERAL GUIDELINES

Federal and State Organizations Response

- Federal and State Fire Service organizations respond to reports of a wildland fire, conduct a situation assessment, leading to evacuations and fire suppression efforts.

Fire Behavior Assessment Consistency

- Federal and State Fire Service organizations follow NWCG guidelines while assessing fire behavior.

ICS Structure Consistency

- Federal and State Fire Service organizations follow ICS structure for an organized incident management.

PROTOCOLS INCONSISTENT WITH THE LOCAL AND FEDERAL GUIDELINES

FIRESCOPE and Pre-positioned Resources

- California's FIRESCOPE and SEMS systems support decentralized operational decision-making, prepositioned resources, and rapid mutual aid coordination during extreme wildland fire incidents.

CA first responders do not rely on elected officials or the EOC for direction.

- SEMS authorizes field-level personnel to make tactical decisions without political input to save lives and protect property.

PROTOCOLS MISSING FROM THE ML FRAMEWORK

First responders collaboration processes while responding to a wildland fire.

- Pre-existing systems (mutual aid, formal networks, learned processes) allow fire service, law enforcement, and emergency management personnel to collaborate in the response phase of a wildland fire.

First Responder's Cognitive Processes

- First responders across the three disciplines all face unique cognitive challenges based on the changing conditions. Extreme conditions create unique cognitive challenges.

DOCUMENT SETS & REFERENCES

Scan for a PDF with Acronyms, and references.



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