



WESTLAKE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Travis County Emergency Service District #9
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TO: All Firefighters and EMS Personnel

FROM: Gary Warren, Chief, Westlake Fire Department

DATE: April 14, 2006

SUBJECT: Wildland Firefighting Plan

Over the years, our Department has developed a well-deserved reputation for our aggressive and professional firefighting. We have trained to prepare ourselves for emergencies that include everything from the proverbial cat-in-the-tree to structural firefighting, emergency medical services, swiftwater rescue, high-angle rescue, hazardous materials spills, vehicle extrication, killer bee swarms, and wildland firefighting. In the face of these varied emergencies, we have become accustomed to success.

Each of the above emergencies presents an unknown that demands our immediate intervention with minimal prior knowledge of the situation. Utilizing aggressive tactics and applying maximum resources, we have persevered.

With small wildland and brush fires, we have been equally aggressive and successful with our offensive attacks; however, luck has been with us and we have not had the type of major wildland fire that our area is capable of sustaining. When (not IF) a major wildland fire occurs in our area, it will severely overload our paid and volunteer personnel and exceed the capacity of all our equipment.

Since we know a major wildland fire is coming, we must now prepare for that time when we are no longer the victors, but we may be on the defensive until enough resources from throughout Travis County and Texas can be brought to our aid.

When the major wildland fire occurs, we will lose property, we will lose the precious vegetation that covers the hills in the area, we will lose a great deal of wildlife, and we may lose the lives of those people and pets who are unable to evacuate in time. To put this type of major disaster in perspective, it must be remembered that the wildland fire that raged through our area in 1961 burned out of control for three days and burned from St. Stephens School Road to Mount Larson.

It is the purpose of the Wildland Plan enclosed in these pages to anticipate the types and locations of wildland fires we can expect, prepare a Pre-Fire Plan for each of those scenarios, and lay out preliminary attack plans. By the use of these pre-fire plans, we can anticipate our needs, evaluate our vulnerabilities, and lay out our fire action steps without the heat of fire.

Just as it is possible to predict the kinds of wildland fires we will sustain and their locations, it is possible to anticipate the news media reactions to a major wildland fire and thus be prepared for them. We can expect to see and hear such terms as “overwhelmed”, “devastated”, and possibly “unprepared” to describe our efforts – comments we would never expect or deserve in our normal emergency operations. A major wildland fire in our area could easily require the services of well over a hundred firefighters, ten to fifteen Class A apparatus, and several brush trucks. Would such a requirement “overwhelm” our Department? Yes, it would. So we must be prepared to be patient and to reach out for the assistance that other departments, the Texas Forest Service, and the National Guard can bring to us. The “quick attack” will not be appropriate by itself. Our Incident Commander will need to develop a long-range strategy, execute a detailed attack plan, and utilize limited resources efficiently in order to prevail.

It is the purpose of this Wildland Plan to accomplish three goals:

- Provide a Wildland Fire Plan Incident Command Document that will assist the Incident Commander in the assignment and delegation of critical duties during an incident;
- Conduct a risk analysis of the potential ignition sources within our area and analyze those risks for probability of occurrence and potential severity of fire;
- Provide a brief background on wildland firefighting to familiarize our firefighters with the characteristics of wildland fires; and
- Develop pre-fire planning scenarios for certain high-hazard or high-frequency locations where it can be expected we will be called to fight wildland fires.

Members who are interested in increasing their knowledge of wildland firefighting are encouraged to become “Red Card” certified by the Texas Forest Service. In addition, the Department has purchased several reading copies of “Wildland Firefighting – Fire Behavior, Tactics, & Command” that have been placed in convenient locations at both stations. The book is fascinating and extremely informative. It will convince you that you didn’t know there was so much to know about the subject.