

**CALIFORNIA FIRE WEATHER PROGRAM
RISK PREPAREDNESS GUIDE**

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California Fire Weather Program Risk Preparedness Guide

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INTRODUCTION

The California Fire Weather Program Risk Preparedness Guide is designed to alert and to provide early notification to the Fire Service of critical weather conditions that may lead to a large fire, significant growth on existing fires, and/or extreme fire danger/behavior. Major elements of the program may include, but are not limited to, media notifications, increased public awareness, and fire prevention/detection activities.

OBJECTIVE

The Objective is to ensure timely notification of the California Fire Service of a High Risk Day from Predictive Services, and/or a Red Flag Warning, Fire Weather Watch, or Cancellation issued by a National Weather Service Forecast Office.

ELEMENTS OF THE CALIFORNIA FIRE WEATHER PROGRAM RISK PREPAREDNESS GUIDE

The California Fire Weather Program Risk Preparedness Guide consists of a High Risk Day, Fire Weather Watch, Red Flag Warning, or Cancellation.

Definitions:

1. High Risk Day – Notice issued by the Predictive Services Units located in Redding and Riverside when there is a minimum 20% chance of either of a new large fire occurring, or significant growth on existing fires. High Risk Days are displayed in the 7-Day Significant Fire Potential Product which incorporates fuel dryness and weather triggers to display Significant Fire Potential during the next seven days across the Geographic Area by Predictive Service Areas. For North Ops, the product can be found at: http://gacc.nifc.gov/oncc/predictive/weather/Fire_Potential.html and for South Ops, click here: http://gacc.nifc.gov/oscc/predictive/outlooks/Fire_Potential.html.
2. Fire Weather Watch – Notice issued by the National Weather Service usually 24 to 72 hours in advance of a Red Flag Event (i.e., critical weather conditions that may result in extreme fire danger/behavior). Fire Weather Watches, however, can be issued for the first twelve hours of a forecast period for dry lightning.
3. Red Flag Warning – Notice issued by the National Weather Service usually 24 hours in advance of a Red Flag Event.
4. Cancellation – When the National Weather Service terminates a Fire Weather Watch or a Red Flag Warning, or it expires.

Criteria:

1. High Risk Days – The 7-Day Significant Fire Potential product has an explanation page which describes the product in more detail and lists the established criteria (see Appendix A) for the Predictive Service Areas across the state. For the North Ops version of this document, click here: <http://gacc.nifc.gov/oncc/predictive/weather/Fire%20Potential%20Documentation.htm> and for South Ops, click here: http://gacc.nifc.gov/oscc/predictive/outlooks/7-Day_Documentation.pdf.
2. Fire Weather Watch or Red Flag Warning – A complete listing of Red Flag Criteria for each National Weather Service Forecast Office in California can either be found in Appendix B or in the California Annual Operating Plan located here: http://gacc.nifc.gov/oscc/predictive/weather/California_2010_AOP.pdf.

Coordination:

The National Weather Service will coordinate all Fire Weather Watches, Red Flag Warnings, and Cancellations with Predictive Services/local fire agencies as time permits. Predictive Services will notify the National Weather Service of the issuance of any High Risk Days.

NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

Predictive Services/National Weather Service

Upon issuing a High Risk Day, Fire Weather Watch, Red Flag Warning, Red Flag Warning or Cancellation, the issuing office will notify the Geographical Area Coordination Center(s) (GACC) that is affected.

Geographical Area Coordination Centers

The affected Geographical Area Coordination Center (GACC) will use their procedures to notify regional state offices and local dispatch centers.

Local Dispatch Centers

The affected local dispatch centers will implement notifications as dictated by their current Fire Danger Rating Operating Plan.


POST-NOTIFICATION ACTIVITIES

Entities may wish to establish and implement various activities that may include but are not limited to the following:

- Fire patrols
- Road or area closures
- Arson watch
- Additional Staffing
- Reconnaissance flights
- Upgraded dispatch levels
- Pre-deployment of resources
- Equipment use restrictions

APPENDIX A – PREDICTIVE SERVICES HIGH RISK CRITERIA

North Ops

Symbol	Criteria	Description
H	Hot and Dry	High temperatures 8 degrees above seasonal normal values with minimum humidity 12% or less
W	Windy	Sustained 10 minute wind speeds of 15 mph or greater
	Lightning	Dry lightning (LAL 6) or any lightning following an extended dry period

South Ops

Lightning ():

SC01 Eastern Sierras – Two Day Dryness Level* of 2.5 or higher with 190 or more lightning strikes.

SC03 Southern Sierra – Two Day Dryness Level* of 2 or higher with 180 or more lightning strikes.

SC09 Western Mountains – Two Day Dryness Level* of 3 with 30 or more lightning strikes.

SC11 Southern Mountains – Two Day Dryness Level* of 3 with 85 or more lightning strikes.

SC14 Central Mojave – Two Day Dryness Level* of 3 with 110 or more lightning strikes.

SC16 Northern Deserts – Two Day Dryness Level* of 2.5 or higher with 315 or more lightning strikes.

*Two Day Dryness Levels are calculated by taking the Fuel Dryness Level from the first day with lightning and adding the Fuel Dryness Level of the next day and dividing by two.
 Example: SC01 is in the brown category on day 1 (Brown = 3) and drops into the yellow category (2) on day 2 so $3 + 2 = 5$ and $5 \text{ divided by } 2 = 2.5$. This takes into account of whether or not the lightning activity is becoming wetter over time.

Wind/Humidity (W):

SC08 South Coast – Sustained winds of 20 mph combined with humidity of less than 15%.

SC09-SC16 – Sustained winds 30 mph combined with humidity of 15% or less.

APPENDIX B – NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE RED FLAG CRITERIA

Dry Lightning – A lightning event that is not accompanied by enough precipitation to significantly wet fuels that have been identified as critically dry. Significant precipitation is defined as ranging from .05 inches for grass or brush fuels to .15 inches for closed-canopy timber/heave fuels. Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings will be issued for high impact lightning events in receptive fuels isolated events or events of short duration (i.e., events which start dry but become wet within an hour or two) do not need warnings but will be headlined in the forecast.

Wind and Humidity – Wind and humidity criteria are geared toward those situations which may result in rapid spread of wildfires. Because topography and vegetation play a big role in this, several sets of criteria are used across California. Where possible, issuance criteria have been meshed with those used in adjacent states to meet the needs of agencies whose jurisdictions cross state lines. Criteria are listed in the Wind/Humidity Table below:

Area Description	NWS Fire Weather Zones	Criteria
Southern California desert area excluding the Lower Colorado River Valley	226-228, 230, 232, 260-262	Relative Humidity <15% and wind gusts >35 mph for 6 hours or more, assuming fuel conditions are critical
Lower Colorado River Valley	229, 231	Relative Humidity <15% with sustained winds >20 mph or wind gusts >35 mph for 3 hours or more
Antelope Valley and SE Kern County Deserts	298, 299, 259	Relative humidity <15% and sustained (20-foot) winds >25 mph for a duration of 8 hours or more
Southern California (WFO Los Angeles)	234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 244, 245, 246 251, 252, 253, 254, 259, 288, 547, 548	RH<10% with sustained wind and gust 15G25 mph for 6 hours or more. RH<15% with sustained wind and gust 25G35 mph for 6 hours or more
Extreme Southern California (WFO San Diego)	242, 243, 248, 250, 255, 256 257 258, 260, 261, 262	RH<15% with sustained wind and gust 25G35 mph for 6 hours or more
Northern California West of the Cascade/Sierra Crest	006, 201-204, 211-213, 215-221, 263, 264, 266-269, 276, 277, 280-282, 505-513, 516-518, 528-530	Refer to “Wind/RH RFW Decision Matrix for Northern California West of the Cascade/Sierra Crest”

Wind/RH RFW Decision Matrix for Northern California West of the Cascade/Sierra Crest

- Matrix assumes daytime 10-hour fuel moisture (NFDRS obs time) is <6%, annual grasses have cured, and no wetting rain (greater than 0.10 inch) has fallen in the past 24 hours.
- The sustained wind refers to the standard 20-foot, 10 minute average fire weather wind speed.
- The wind event should be expected to last for at least 8 hours to qualify for a Red Flag warning. [This guidance was developed for foehn wind events, which normally exceed 12 hours duration, and may last as much as 3-5 days]. A 'W' in the matrix indicates that the forecaster should consider a warning.

Relative Humidity	Sustained Wind 6-11 mph	Sustained Wind 12-20 mph	Sustained Wind 21-29 mph	Sustained Wind 30+ mph
Daytime Minimum RH 29-42% and/or Nighttime Maximum RH 60-80%				W
Daytime Minimum RH 19-28% and/or Nighttime Maximum RH 46-60%			W	W
Daytime Minimum RH 9-18% and/or Nighttime Maximum RH 31-45%		W	W	W
Daytime Minimum RH <9% and/or Nighttime Maximum RH <31%	W	W	W	W

Additional Southern California Qualifying Fuels Information

- In order to determine whether fuel conditions warrant Red Flag considerations for a given day, the Predictive Services Unit in Riverside will produce a written discussion on the fuel status across Southern California on a bi-monthly basis. This discussion, updated on Thursdays, will be based on input from the fire community and will include a brief description of the current status of the live and dead fuel moistures, including green-up/curing information, as well as expected fuel conditions over the next seven days.
- The National Weather Service should refer to this online document as the primary source of fuels information along with the National Fuel Moisture Database located at <http://72.32.186.224/nfmd/public/index.php>, but may look at other sources for fuel information.

National Weather Service Weather Forecast Offices whose areas of responsibility include portions of Southern California should also refer to the matrix portion of the “*Southern California 7-Day Significant Fire Potential*” product which is produced by the Southern California GACC Predictive Services Unit.

When a fuel condition of “Very Dry” (brown) is displayed on the product’s matrix for any Predictive Service Area (PSA), the “fuels switch” will be considered “on” for that day. A Red Flag Warning is NOT recommended for any PSA designated as “Moist” (green) or “Dry” (yellow).

During dry winters and the spring curing season, fuel moistures over the deserts may be quite low without initiating serious concerns about the potential for large fire growth. Reasons include light fuel loading and/or discontinuous fuel or the existence of dry fine fuels when larger live fuels remain relatively green. The Southern California GACC Predictive Services Unit will coordinate with affected Weather Forecast Offices to clearly communicate fuel conditions, and provide updates regarding spatial trends and changes in large fire potential, despite a “Very Dry” (brown) display on the associated matrix of the Southern California 7-Day Significant Fire Potential product.