Sierra Front Media Fire Guide

Welcome to the **fire planet!** Fires need fuel and oxygen for combustion and Earth is the only planet that has *both*. And somewhere in the world, *right now*, a wildfire is burning.

Fire is a part of every ecosystem on every continent in the world, except Antarctica. You can bet that if it is January and snowing in the Sierra Nevada, there are wildfires burning in Australia, Argentina and South Africa (and vice versa in August).

And when huge columns of black smoke are visible to hundreds of thousands of people, and catastrophic wildfires are on the march toward them, **no news room is immune to the clamor**.

Wildfires are as natural a part of this planet as sunshine, wind and rain. Fire, after all, has evolved over hundreds of millions of years with plants to be an integral part of the environment. It acts as a natural recycler of nutrients for forests and brush communities, cleansing the environment of sick, dead, bug-infested and accumulated fuel on the ground. Wildfires in America, especially in the relatively arid landscapes of the West, periodically thin forests and consume "dead and down" materials that would rot and decay in the wetter environments of the East. Without periodic wildfires consuming this material, fuel quantity, fire intensity and even negative impacts to plants and the animal species that rely on them start to occur.

So "Mother Nature" likes to burn; is there a problem? The problem is that the imprint of our modern civilization has been laid right down over the top of ecosystems that have naturally evolved with fire. Our expectations that humans should be able to control wildfire in our adopted environment, especially "out West," have led to over 100 years of public demands that the government extinguish all fires.

Firefighters and ad campaign heroes like Smokey Bear responded; after all, people consider wildfires **"bad"** when homes and businesses burn, innocent people are killed, and scenic vistas are "destroyed."

Does it seem like there have been more and more **"bad"** fires in the past 25 years?

Wildland fuels have continued to build up while wildfire suppression has continued. Communities have marched right up the side of our mountains and into the forest. But as the old TV commercial said, *"It's not nice to fool Mother Nature."* Is it really any surprise that summer wildfires seem to burn bigger, hotter and faster than ever?

Is it also any surprise that more and more firefighters, and the journalists who cover them, are having deadly close-calls when working these fires?

Journalists, like trained firefighters, can reduce the risks to themselves and their crews while still getting their stories. Wildfire dangers are most often specific to local conditions and environments; in few places is that more true than along the eastern front of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. We have produced this Media Guide to assist you in doing your job safely, but remember, *Your Safety is Always Your Responsibility*.

After all, do you *really* want your media competitors reporting on your death or serious injury?

Getting Your Story in a Wildfire Environment & Living to Tell the Tale

The Sierra Front Wildfire Cooperators strongly recommend that journalists be properly trained on the risks and dangers when reporting a wildfire. This media guide is designed to complement such training and was prepared for media personnel planning to operate near a wildfire.

We will never presume to tell you *what* to report or *how* to report on wildfire situations. Our intent is to give you a basic understanding of:

- How our firefighting resources are organized and the tactics that they use;
- How to coordinate with us when you are assigned to report on a wildfire;
- Emphasize the wildfire behavior and dangers you may encounter;
- Suggest ways to stay safe during wildfire assignments;
- Provide you with a list of resources to assist outfitting yourselves with the proper fire clothing, equipment and knowledge.

This kind of knowledge could just save your life.

Principles discussed in this handbook also apply to other emergency or incident management situations that involve federal and state land management agencies operating under what is called the National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS).

National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS)

In 1981, wildland fire agencies adopted the National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS) to more effectively manage many types of emergencies. The system was designed to develop and coordinate standards for training and qualifications and reporting processes. Under NIIMS, an organization structure called the Incident Command System (ICS) was adopted to improve the capabilities of wildland firefighting agencies to handle any emergency situation. ICS has been copied around the world.

When an incident occurs, the agency with local jurisdiction (such as BLM, U.S. Forest Service, Reno Fire, etc.) will respond with local resources. Of course, wildfires know no boundaries, and, as the fire grows, so can the response. If the incident begins to tax the local resources because of size and/or complexity, a local dispatch center (such as the Sierra Front Interagency Dispatch Center in Minden) can order an interagency ICS team of experts to be dispatched to the incident. This team is referred to as the Incident Management Team (IMT). The Sierra Front and Great Basin IMTs are local examples in western Nevada. Once a team is in place, the responsibility for managing the incident, including the flow of information, is delegated to the Incident Commander.

IMTs are used by federal, state and local agencies around the country hundreds of times each year.

These teams are designed to handle rapid fire growth and quickly develop a functional on-the-ground organization to meet each incident's specific needs. They can order/utilize firefighters and equipment from all over the country (starting with local available resources and working their way outward to find help) and just as quickly demobilize when resources are no longer required.

While IMTs have been used primarily for wildland fire over the past two decades, the "all-risk" function is increasing. Recent all-risk functions include Florida hurricane relief

efforts in 2004, recovery of wreckage from the Space Shuttle Columbia in 2003, and the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

As mentioned before, Incident Management Teams utilize local resources to the extent practicable until outside resources have to be brought in. In Nevada they order the firefighters, engines, dozer, aircraft and all their logistical needs by working through one of five Interagency Dispatch Centers (IDCs), including:

- **Sierra Front IDC at the Minden Airport,** Central Nevada IDC in Winnemucca, Elko IDC, Ely IDC, & Las Vegas IDC.

Sierra Front Interagency Dispatch Center at the Minden Airport in Douglas County

IDCs throughout the country work through the partnership and cooperation of state, federal and local governments. In Nevada these cooperators include the BLM, Forest Service, BIA, National Park Service, Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF), and local municipal fire departments. **Each IDC is responsible for managing wildland firefighting resources within its coverage zone, much like a chess player moves pieces on a board.** These decisions are made with the close cooperation of state, federal and local wildland firefighting cooperators.

If requested resources are not available within an IDC's coverage area, then the IDC goes to the next higher level; in Nevada this means working with the **Western Great Basin Coordination Center (WGBCC) in Reno**. WGBCC, one of 11 Geographic Area Coordination Centers located throughout the United States, is the primary logistical support center within Nevada. If WGBCC can not find requested resources within Nevada, then orders kick up to what is known as **NIFC**.

The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), located at the international airport at Boise, Idaho, is the nation's support center and main supply cache for ICS wildland firefighting. Eight federal and state agencies call NIFC home and work to coordinate and support wildland fire and disaster operations. Member agencies include the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Forest Service (FS), National Park Service (NPS), National Weather Service (NWS), National Association of State Foresters (NASF) and the Office of Aircraft Services (OAS).

The National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC), located at NIFC, is the office that coordinates national emergency response to wildland fire suppression efforts.

NICC is the center that provides logistical support, intelligence and resources coordination between the 11 Geographic Area Coordination Centers for wildland fires across the nation.

In other words, NICC facilitates the national sharing of local/regional fire suppression personnel and equipment at the time and place where they are most needed. No one region of the country has the resources needed for a catastrophic outbreak of many large fires at once – NICC *prioritizes* the movement of resources to meet the greatest needs at the time. The NICC also serves as an "all-risk" coordination center, providing support in response to national emergencies such as floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and terrorist attacks. International requests for assistance from countries like Canada, Mexico and Australia also come through NICC.

Who is Your Media Liaison for Fire Information?

Ok, back to the local level. Who should you call for information when a fire breaks out?

During the initial attack phase of a wildfire along the Sierra Front, the best place to contact is the **Sierra Front Interagency Incident Dispatch Center** in Minden. The Center maintains a website at www.sierrafront.net and a **Fire Information Hotline at (775) 352-1228, with a backup number at (775) 883-5995.** Local Public Affairs Officers/Fire Information Officers from the BLM, Forest Service and NDF are many times called in to Minden to answer media inquiries and update the website during

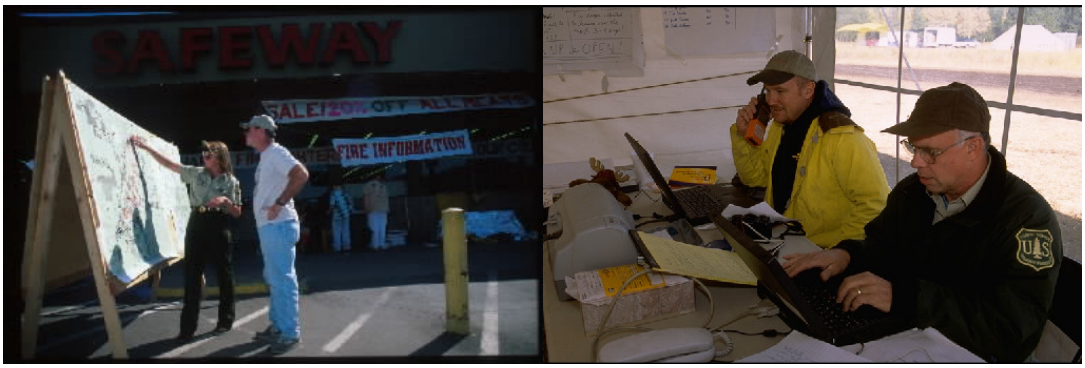
incidents (this allows the dispatchers to concentrate on moving firefighters and equipment). This is especially true when lightning storms are causing numerous new wildfire starts.

If a wildfire grows and an Incident Management Team (IMT) such as the Sierra Front IMT assumes management of the incident, a **Fire Information Officer (IOF)** will directly serve as the Incident Commander's media spokesperson, source of general information, and key contact with other personnel assigned to the fire.

The dispatch center can give you the cell phone numbers of assigned IOFs (coverage is limited in some areas of the Sierra Front) and the fire information unit number once it is set up (this sometimes take hours depending on the remoteness of the incident command post).

The Information Officer's job is to develop media releases with complete and accurate information about the incident cause (if known), size, status, "values at risk," people and equipment dedicated to the fire, percent of containment, agencies involved, costs, injuries, and other incident information. They are there to assist the media in doing their job of reporting the facts of the incident to the public. They work from the Incident Command Post (ICP) – every fire has an ICP, even if it begins as the front seat of the Incident Commander's truck. Look for a clearly marked **Fire Information** sign once the ICP is set up.

Also, the IOFs know that you may have been monitoring a scanner, heard the initial report of wildfire to the dispatchers, and thus arrive on the scene right behind the first fire engines. They will be out **looking for you** to pass along incident information as it develops and interpret what you are seeing from the standpoint of fire behavior and suppression techniques.



Some large incidents may end up having as many as 12 or more assistant Information Officers to assist in handling phones/FAX, posting fire information on agency websites, conducting stand-up media interviews, briefing local elected officials and agency personnel, leading media fire line and camp tours, coordinating public meetings, distributing information updates/maps door-to-door in affected neighborhoods, posting fire information bulletin boards in communities and in fire camp, and acting as a liaison with their law enforcement and Red Cross counterparts.

Information Officers are extensively trained and pre-plan/equip themselves to assist the media to do *their* jobs. They realize the importance of making the media's job safer and easier; they understand your deadlines and will eliminate "run-around" as much as possible. They can arrange for media escort personnel to the fire line when appropriate, arrange interviews with the IC and other team personnel and firefighters, offer suggestions for stories, give you access to a phone/laptop jack if possible, find you first aid assistance, and *some* of them even make great coffee!

Daily briefings are held at the ICP (usually at 0600 and 1800 before shifts begin) to update fire personnel on the day's planned suppression activities. Media are welcome to attend these briefings, and may gain a more personal feel for similar information that is included in the media updates.

Fire Access

Fire officials are obligated to provide reasonable access to newsworthy events, but it is each reporter's duty to not put officials in a position where they must turn their attention from fighting the fire or rescuing victims to helping you. Public (including the media) and firefighter safety is the number one priority for public land managers and incident management teams. Because suppression of wildland fire is an inherently dangerous undertaking, reasonable precautions must be taken to ensure the safety of firefighters, the public and you.

Access to a wildland fire depends on a variety of factors including the location and the availability of access roads, fire behavior and fire suppression tactics. In wildland-urban interface areas the media may be able to get the photographs/video that they need shooting from public roads. In some remote locations, access by non-emergency personnel is limited. In wilderness areas, access may only take place without mechanized transportation.

The key to success in accessing the fire is contacting the Information Officer. They will try to coordinate a tour for you if the proper personnel are available to assist. The appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) may also be available if the supply unit has been set up at the incident command post. We can not guarantee that the supply unit will have sizes of fire clothing that will fit you. It is **always** best to come to a wildfire fully equipped - it is the best way to keep you safe and help meet your deadlines.

Remember that the decision to assume risk remains with the journalist. If necessary, an acknowledgement that the journalist clearly understands the dangers may be required in writing.

Ground Tours

Information Officers understand your need to "get a close-up" of the fire and will make every effort to make sure you get the access you need in a safe way. Once you have contacted an Information Officer, it is likely that a tour can be arranged. Many times a

joint media tour will be arranged when numerous media representatives wish fire line access at approximately the same time.

A firefighter-guide who is knowledgeable about fire behavior and is able to keep in constant contact with suppression and safety personnel will lead any fire line tour.

Please keep in mind appropriate attire when you are covering fire operations. If you are requesting fire access, please be sure you have eight-inch high lace-up leather boots with non-slip soles and heels, and cotton undergarments. The rest of the personal protective equipment (PPE) can be loaned to you *when available*.

Should you be able to access the fire without a guide, please be sure to have proper personal protective equipment and radio contact with incident personnel. **Rushing to a wildfire without communicating with incident personnel and receiving permission can be deadly.** Firefighters know where the escape routes and safety zones are, plus they might initiate a back-firing operation or call in air tanker drops not knowing that you are in harm's way. Remember, do you really want your media competitors reporting on your death or serious injury?

Safety

As a common sense rule, nothing will be allowed to jeopardize the safety of the news media or those involved in suppression activities. The Information Officer will explain to you the rationale for any specific access restrictions. If you want to go out to the fire line, you will be advised of the danger. You will be discouraged from leaving public roads and/or going off by yourself. There are usually some areas where you can safely go and see the action.

Although no test of physical condition is required, the Incident Commander may deny access to any individual who appears to be at risk if exposed to hazardous conditions on the fire line, or who may be a risk to others involved in management of the incident. Agencies apply the same fitness rules to their own personnel. Denial of access is the exception, however, not the rule.

The Information Officer can coordinate the loaning of personal protective equipment (PPE) – it is required of all persons, including media, on the fire line. *When available,*

you can be loaned: hardhat with goggles, Nomex fire resistance pants and shirt, gloves, and an emergency fire shelter (including instructions).

The media must provide their own all leather eight inch high lace-up boots with non slip soles and heels (**no** tennis shoes or hiking boots with synthetic exterior) and cotton undergarments with no plastic decals ironed on (synthetics are combustible and will melt when exposed to high temperature, thus ruining your whole day*)*.

It is always best to assemble a complete personal set of PPE stored in a single bag before the start of fire season. Keep this gear bag it in your vehicle whenever you go on assignment during fire season – it won't do any good sitting under your desk back at the office!

Limitations

No media personnel can be permitted aboard operational missions of air tankers, smokejumper aircraft or helicopters. Never, ever. Tours may be available when the aircraft are not conducting operations (pilots and crews are very proud of their "ships") – ask the Information Officer.

Don't walk, park or stop anywhere near, or downslope from, a bulldozer, water tender, fire engine or any aircraft. The noise and limited visibility make this very dangerous.

Assume every time that the equipment operators can't see or hear you.

Please don't wander off. Wandering off into an unfamiliar area without a communication link is a "Watch Out!" situation that all firefighters are trained to avoid – it can and has been fatal. If we know where you are, we will do our best to keep you safe and reporting!

Aircraft Operations, Safety & Media Overflights

Aircraft operations provide some of the most spectacular photographs and film footage in and around wildland fires. They also present several safety hazards to individuals on the ground.

There is typically a wide variety of aircraft over a large fire with each performing its own specific role.

The air attack platform is usually a small fixed-wing aircraft such as an Aero-Commander 500 flying high above the fire. There is a pilot and Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) on board. The role of this platform is to provide "eyes-in-the-sky" over a fire and overall coordination of all the aircraft assigned to the fire. The ATGS is in communication with ground personnel, all aircraft and dispatch.

A lead plane can usually be seen over large fires or fires with multiple airtankers. There is just a pilot on board these aircraft. The role of the lead plane is to fly into a potential drop zone ahead of the airtankers to determine if a retardant drop will be effective and the location of ground personnel and other apparatus. The lead plane flies ahead of the airtankers to show them where the drop is to be made and is in communication with ground personnel, air attack and the airtankers. These aircraft can be flying at extremely low altitudes over a fire.

At times there may be an Aerial Supervision Module (ASM) over a fire. This is usually a small fixed wing such as a King Air. This aircraft has a pilot qualified to fly lead plane and an Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) on board. This module can alternate between air attack and lead plane roles over a fire.

A large airtanker making a retardant drop is one of the most desired shots for the media in wildland fire. These aircraft have 2-3 crew members they hold between 2000-3000 gallons and can drop retardant in multiple small loads or all at once. At 3000 gallons a single load of retardant weighs approximately 24,000 lbs. When a load of retardant of this size hits the ground it can literally "trench" the ground. Tearing loose vegetation, rocks and other debris with can seriously injure people and damage equipment.

Single Engine Air Tankers (SEAT's) can be used on large fires to plug holes in the line or reinforce the line. They are most effective on small fires or spot fires.
These aircraft can also drop retardant in multiple small loads or all at once. While this aircraft holds 800 gallons which may seem small compared to a large airtanker this is still over 6000 lbs of retardant. A SEAT can come in much lower over a fire than a large airtanker and can still cause serious injury to anyone directly below it.

Safety guidelines for personnel on the ground during airtanker operations include the following:

1. Watch and listen for lead planes and/or airtankers in the area.

2. If there are fire crews in the area listen to them or watch for them moving off the line. This may mean there is an airtanker coming in for a drop.

3. If possible, move out of the drop zone.

4. If caught in the open, lie face down with your head towards the oncoming aircraft. Cover your head with one arm. Hold your camera or other equipment out to the side with the other arm and hang on tightly as it may be jarred loose from the force of the drop.

5. DO NOT STAND UP IN FRONT OF APPROCHING AIRCRAFT!

6. After the drop, avoid walking in heavy concentrations of retardant as it is a VERY slippery substance and can cause falls that result in injury.

7. Retardant on clothing can be washed in washing machines (do not wash with other items). Vehicles and equipment should be washed off as soon as possible, a high pressure nozzle on a garden hose will work.

8. If you are at an airtanker base keep clear of all airplane propellers, get approval of base personnel before approaching any aircraft, wear eye protection and hang on to any loose objects that may be blown away by prop wash.

Helicopters also fill many different roles on a fire. Everyone likes to see a helicopter making water drops on the fire. This can be accomplished with either a bucket hanging below the ship or with a tank fixed to the belly of the ship.

Helicopters can be used for hauling cargo such as fire equipment, food or drinking water to remote heli-spots to support ground personnel. This can be accomplished by flying the load inside the ship or in a cargo net hanging below it.

Some ships may be used to transport fire crews to remote drop points on a fire.

Smaller helicopters may be used for mapping the fire, as another means for aerial supervision or may be on stand by for medi-vac purposes.

Helicopter operations pose additional risks to ground personnel. Helicopter arrivals and departures can result in injuries from flying rocks and debris caused by rotor wash. It is extremely dangerous to be below helicopters during bucket/water drop operations. The largest bucket carries 3000 gallons of water, the same amount as a large airtanker, but even the smallest amount can cause serious injury due to the low levels of the drops. Safety guidelines for ground personnel in and around helicopter operations include the following:

1. Keep clear of helicopter rotors.

2. Avoid standing near helicopters during take-off and landing as the rotors will pick up loose rocks and debris, hang on to any loose objects in your possession and wear eye protection.

3. NEVER approach or depart a helicopter except at the command of the pilot or crewman.

4. NEVER approach or depart a helicopter from the uphill side or rear. Always approach from the front, maintain solid footing and WALK in a crouched position, never run.

5. Avoid being under helicopters carrying anything below them such as a cargo net or bucket. Objects may fall out of cargo nets and water drops may cause injury. In rare circumstances a pilot may have to jettison the entire load including the bucket or net and cable.

Firefighting Aircraft of the Sierra Nevada

BEECH KING AIR

The King Air is a low-wing twin-engine aircraft with a rounded appearance. It has five round side windows. It is turbine powered and pressurized. This aircraft is used as an Aerial Supervision Module (ASM) which is a combination Lead Plane and Air Attack Platform.

National Contract
Home Base – Stead Air Attack Base

Length (feet):	36
Wing Span (feet):	50
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	260/226
Payload (pounds):	1100
Number of Pax Seats:	6

AERO COMMANDER 500B

The Aero Commander series are high-wing twin-engine aircraft. Because of the high-wing design these aircraft provide excellent visibility. Locally this aircraft is used as an Air Attack Platform.

BLM Contract
Home Base – Minden Air Attack Base

Length (feet):	35
Wing Span (feet):	45
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	195/169
Payload (pounds):	900
Number of Pax Seats:	5

Twin Otter

The Twin Otter DHC-6 is a turbine powered aircraft with excellent short field take-off and landing capabilities. It is used for the transportation of passengers and cargo. Locally it is primarily used to transport smoke jumpers and paracargo. It is unpressurized and slow, but very stable, maneuverable, and has good endurance for longer flights.

National Resource
Smokejumper Base: Carson City

Length (feet):	52
Wing Span (feet):	65
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	170/148
Payload (pounds):	3000
Number of Pax Seats:	15

Lockheed P3-A Orion

This is a four-engine turbo-prop. It was designed as a military aircraft, best known for surveillance with the U.S. Navy. The turbine engines add reliability plus extra power which gives the P-3 a short takeoff roll and a 3,000 gallon retardant load.

National Resource
No home base

Length (feet):	99
Wing Span (feet):	133
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	275/239
Retardant Load (gallons):	3000
Number of Gates:	Continuous Flow System

Lockheed C-130 Hercules MAFFS

The MAFFS (Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System) C-130 is a four engine turboprop. It was originally a military transport. It is designed to temporarily convert Air National Guard C-130s to airtankers. These airtankers are only activated at high preparedness levels and can only be reloaded at specialized bases.

Length (feet):	99
Wing Span (feet):	133
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	275/239
Retardant Load (gallons):	3000
Number of Gates:	1

Douglas DC-4

A popular airtanker, the DC-4 has been acquired from both military surplus and airlines. It is a little slower than most other airtankers, but can operate from sorter and less weight restricted airports. The DC-4 has round cabin windows.

Did not have contracts for the 2004 season.

Length (feet):	93
Wing Span (feet):	118
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	220/191
Retardant Load (gallons):	2000
Number of Gates:	4-8

Lockheed P2V

Built for the U.S. Navy, the P2V was designed for long range patrol and anti submarine warfare. It is superbly suited for airtanker operations with its two jet engines adding power during takeoffs and retardant drops. Wing tip tanks are optional on P2Vs.

There were two P2V's on a limited contract for the 2004 fire season pending structural fatigue testing. Minden Air owns 2 of these aircraft.

Length (feet):	86
Wing Span (feet):	98
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	240/208
Retardant Load (gallons):	2000
Number of Gates:	6

Grumman S-2F Tracker

S-2Fs are used by the California Department of Forestry, and frequently assist along the Sierra Front during the Initial Attack stages of a fire. They can reload out of either Stead or Minden Tanker Bases.

Length (feet):	44
Wing Span (feet):	73
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	160/139
Retardant Load (gallons):	800
Number of Gates:	4

Air Tractor 802F

These Single Engine Airtanker' s (SEAT's)aircraft are very maneuverable and are useful for hitting spot fires, plugging holes in line, reinforcing line, and making short line extensions. They can reload out of Minden, Stead or a portable retardant base can be set up at any small airport with a paved runway or along any stretch of paved road meeting their runway length requirements.

BLM Contract
Home Bases: Minden and Stead

Length (feet):	30
Wing Span (feet):	48
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	115/100
Retardant Load (gallons):	800
Number of Gates:	1

Sikorsky S-64 Skycrane

The S-64 is a high performance; heavy lift helicopter originally designed for the military and is powered by twin turbine engines. It has been modified to carry a 2000 gallon tank that can be filled thru a draft hose/snorkel with a pump on the end in less than a minute while hovering over a water source or portable retardant tank. No passengers are transported in these aircraft.

Forest Service Contract
Home Base: Minden

Length (feet):	70
Rotor Diameter (feet):	75
Cruise Speed (mph/kts)	92/80
Payload (lbs):	16,400
Gallons:	2000

Sikorsky UH-60 Blackhawk

The UH-60 is a military helicopter operated by the Nevada Air Guard and may be used thru an agreement with the Nevada Division of Forestry. Some of these aircraft are equipped as "Firehawks" with an external tank versus a bucket. No passengers are transported in these aircraft.

Nevada Air Guard / NDF
Home Base: Stead

Length (feet):	65
Rotor Diameter (feet):	54
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	167/145
Payload (lbs):	4,000
Gallons:	600

Bell 205

The Bell 205 was originally designed for military use as the UH-1H and nicknamed the Huey. They have been called the pick-up truck of helicopters as they can haul up to 14 passengers or cargo. Locally they are used by the Nevada Division of Forestry Helitack Crew.

Nevada Division of Forestry
Home base: Minden

Also used by the California Department of Forestry

Length (feet):	57
Rotor Diameter (feet):	48
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	104/90
Payload (lbs):	1,400
Gallons:	325

Bell 407

The Bell 407 is a multi-use helicopter capable of transporting 6 passengers. This helicopter is used locally by the Bridgeport Heli-Rappel Crew. This is a specially trained crew that uses 250 foot ropes to rappel into fires that are in otherwise inaccessible terrain.

USFS Contract
Home Base: Bridgeport Helibase

Length (feet):	34
Rotor Diameter (feet):	35
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	150/130
Payload (lbs):	1,040
Gallons:	130

Bell 206 L-III

The Bell 206 L-III is a multi-use helicopter capable of transporting 6 passengers or cargo. It is an excellent ship for accessing small areas. Locally it is used by the BLM's Palomino Helitack Crew.

BLM Contract
Home Base: Palomino Helibase

Length (feet):	43
Rotor Diameter (feet):	37
Cruise Speed (mph/kts):	127/110
Payload (lbs):	950
Gallons:	100

"Can we fly our news helicopter over the fire?"

Overhead views of a wildfire can be quite spectacular. However, unless certain procedures are followed, media over flights can be difficult to arrange because of temporary flying restrictions for all aircraft other than those actively involved in fire suppression. To coordinate an over flight, please contact the Information Officer.

Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR) are outlined in the Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR) Section 91.137. Aircraft associated with the media should first review the Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) to see if there is a TFR designation over the incident. If TFR are in place, the NOTAM for that incident should list an assigned VHF-AM frequency with which the media aircraft can contact the assigned aerial supervisor over the incident. Prior to entering the TFR area, media aircraft should contact the assigned aerial supervisor via the assigned VHF-AM frequency.

The following is a list of possible aerial supervisors that may be encountered over an incident:

-- Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS). Usually designated as either "(incident name) Air Attack" or as "Air Attack (assigned number)." Coordinates aerial resources and tactics with resources that are on the ground at the incident.
-- Lead Plane. Usually a fixed wing aircraft identified as "Lead (assigned number)." The lead plane conducts low-level flights over an intended retardant drop zone ahead of air tankers to identify problem areas in the drop zones.
-- Aerial Supervision Module. This fixed wing platform combines the roles of Air Tactical Group Supervisor and a lead plane platform for large air tankers. Modules are usually designated as either "Bravo (assigned number)" or "Alpha (assigned number)." Coordinates aerial resources and tactics with resources that are on the ground. Helicopter Coordinator. Usually a rotor wing aircraft that coordinates rotor wing aircraft in conjunction with the ATGS (or ASM) over large, complex incidents.
-- Air Tanker Coordinator. Usually a fixed wing platform will coordinate air tanker activities in conjunction with the ATGS over large, complex incidents.
-- Helicopter Coordinator (HLCO). Coordinates all helicopters on larger incidents (can be on the ground coordinating operations and not flying).

Fire Traffic Area - Key components of a standard Fire Traffic Area (FTA) include**:**

1. Initial Contact Ring – A ring 12 nautical miles from the center point of the incident. At this point, inbound aircraft contact the ATGS or appropriate aerial supervision resource for permission to proceed to the incident. Briefing information is provided to the inbound aircraft by the aerial supervision resource over the incident.
2. No Communication (NOCOM) Ring – a ring 7 nautical miles from the center point of the incident that should not be crossed by inbound aircraft without first establishing communications with the appropriate aerial supervision resource.
3. Three (3) C's of initial contact – Communication requirements and related actions to be undertaken by the pilot of the inbound aircraft:
   a) Communication – Establish communications with the

controlling aerial supervision resource over the incident.

b) Clearance – Receive clearance from aerial supervision resource to proceed to the incident past the NOCOM ring until the clearance is received and understood.

c) Comply – Inbound aircraft will comply with clearance from aerial supervision resource. If compliance cannot be accomplished, the inbound aircraft will remain outside the NOCOM ring until an amended clearance is received and understood.

Wildfire Feature Story Possibilities

Besides the "hot" news aspects of a wildfire, there are many other story opportunities (especially after several days of coverage when you are looking for a fresh angle):

Fire Prevention: Most of the serious wildland fires in the West are caused by the careless acts of people. News media help is essential in making the public aware of the seriousness of a fire situation, the conditions which contribute to wildland fires, and what can be done to help prevent wildfires.

Fireworks on Public Land: No fireworks are allowed on any public lands, no matter the time of the year. This includes "Safe & Sane" fireworks. Violations of this prohibition range from a $100 ticket to a $100,000 court mandated fine. If a fire is caused due to the use of fireworks on public land, the individual will also be held responsible for suppression costs of the fire.

Detection of Fires: Many tools are used to discover and monitor forest and range fires. Although lookout towers and aerial surveillance are important, a single phone call (cell phones are really helping out here) from a local citizen is often the first report of a new incident. A national electronic "lightning detection" system now enables public land managers in the West to know within 4 seconds exactly when and where lightning strikes. This is an important tool, since 75 percent of wildfires in the West are lightning-caused.

Logistics: Quickly mobilizing crews, equipment, and supplies to distant and remote parts of the country is a huge job and a specialty of the Incident Command System. Fire personnel from other countries come to the U.S. to see how we do it. Dispatchers on local units like the Sierra Front Interagency Incident Dispatch Center and at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise work together in a nationally coordinated effort to provide rapid mobilization of resources. Getting crews and equipment home (demobilization) when the incident ends, and accounting, repairing and replacing supplies to be ready to go again, is an equally challenging task.

Aircraft: As described in previous sections, there are many different kinds of aircraft assigned to incidents. Many are helicopters. Some are military surplus. Some are modified passenger or transport aircraft. They are used to haul water, retardant, cargo and personnel.

Retardant: Fire retardant is a chemical mixture added to water and used to slow a fire's progress until ground forces can contain it. The chemical composition is usually a fertilizer and water solution designed to hold water in place and reduce evaporation. The net effect is to cool the flames and reduce the rate of fire spread. The fertilizer helps plant growth once the fire is out. Fire retardant foam has even stronger wetting capability and is used in severe situations to protect structures.

Incident Base Camp Life: Welcome to Tent City! Firefighters come from all parts of the country. They are men and women representing all nationalities and range in age from 18 to over 60. They generally work 12 hour operational periods, with most of their rest time spent in a main Incident Base Camp or "spiked-out" at more remote camps.

Camps may contain 500 or more firefighters, support personnel and contractors who turn the site into a small, temporary city with services to meet information, medical, dining, supply, shower, sleeping, transportation and vehicle servicing needs.

Rehabilitation of Burned Areas: Rehabilitation of a burned area or soil disturbance is done to prevent runoff damage that leads to reduced water quality, sedimentation and impacts to fishery resources. Watershed rehabilitation can include construction of water bars, seeding of burned areas and fire lines, and protection of stream channel and soil. A team of resource specialists assigned to the incident develops a specific rehabilitation plan, many times while firefighters are still suppressing the fire. Implementation of the plan begins immediately and can continue for months after the incident ends.

Helpful Web Sites

- Sierra Front Interagency Incident Dispatch Center – www.sierrafront.net
- Inciweb National Wildland Fire Incidents – www.inciweb.org
- Western Great Basin Coordination Center – www.nv.blm.gov/wgbcc
- National Interagency Fire Center - www.nifc.gov
- Wildfire threat reduction recommendations for homeowners developed by Nevada's fire fighting experts - www.livingwithfire.info

Note: identification of commercial sites offering firefighter PPE & related supplies are for information purposes only – listing them here does not constitute a complete list of vendors or is in any way an endorsement by the Sierra Front Wildfire Cooperators or any of its member agencies.

www.hazardousmedia.com (The Reporter's Hazardous Assignment Handbook)

www.nationalfirefighter.com
www.haz-matdepot.com
www.thefirestore.com
www.fireoutfitters.com
www.buyemp.com
www.forestry-suppliers.com
www.firedex.com
www.thomasnet.com
www.monstersafety.com
www.allseasonsuniforms.com

The Sierra Front Media Fire Guide has been written by the Sierra Front Wildfire Cooperators. Special thanks:

- Mark Struble, Public Affairs Officer for the BLM-Carson City Field Office & Fire Information Officer for the Sierra Front Incident Management Team.
- Ronna Hubbard, Coordinator for the Sierra Front Wildfire Cooperators.
- Linda Nail, Aviation Dispatcher, Sierra Front Interagency Dispatch Center.
- The majority of the photographs used in this Media Guide are "public-domain" photographs from the National Interagency Fire Center's Photo Gallery, located on the web at: http://firepix.blm.gov. Thanks to NASA for the 1972 photograph of the western U.S. taken from Apollo 16 on the way to the Moon.

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