

SMOKE TRAINING AND CHANGING REGULATIONS—AN UPDATE FROM THE FIRE AIR COORDINATION TEAM (FACT)

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ABSTRACT

Fire has the greatest potential to affect human health of any other source on public or private lands. Changes in air quality regulations are changing the way the fire programs operate and will affect how land management objectives are met. Tightening of air quality standards to protect public health will result in more non-attainment areas across the United States (all regions). Current approaches to smoke management and prescribed fire have resulted in local and interstate exceedances of existing public health standards. A clear understanding of these issues and changes is important to minimizing future impacts. The Fire Air Coordination Team (FACT) is developing training for line officers and fire management staff. Online training for line officers consists of a half-hour overview of regulation changes with more in-depth modules on key topics. Training to help fire managers meet potential challenges on a national scale with state-level implementation, using a proactive approach, ensuring timely decisions, and greater efficiency, all in the interest of public and ecosystem health, is critical for the success of fire programs. Training for fire staff emphasizes creating or rejuvenating state-level smoke coordination groups. By creating and participating in state-level groups, the specialized staff can represent agency policy with respect to the Clean Air Act and implementing regulations, the ecological need for fire, the tradeoffs between wildfire and prescribed fire emissions, and potential basic smoke management practices. Because federal air quality standards are implemented by state, tribal, or local regulators, fire managers must work at these local/state levels. Federal activities are subject to the Clean Air Act as implemented by state, tribal, and local authorities. FACT is likely to be absorbed as the Smoke Committee (Smoc) under National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG) restructuring now underway. The National Association of Clean Air Agencies (NACAA) has also recently engaged in FACT activities.

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