

Comments/Suggestions on why the wildland fire dispatcher should be included in the wildland firefighter series

While the GS-2151 Series Classification does broadly describe what we do as Fire Dispatchers, it does not fully include all the duties and Fire Management knowledge required to perform the duties of a Fire Dispatcher. OPM even states in the 2151 Fire Logistics Dispatcher Evaluation Statement that “While the work of fire support logistical dispatching is not illustrated in the Dispatching Series, GS-2151, the Office of Personnel Management has advised that the underlying purpose is alike”. My take on this is that yes, they are alike but vary in many ways that should warrant Fire Dispatchers being included in the new 0456 Series. The following statement shows how we differ from the 2151 Series.

Most wildland fire dispatch centers cover multiple fuel zones, fire zones, and districts; causing them to staff longer days and hours than most wildland fire positions. Due to lack of staffing and high demands for dispatchers to be available, dispatchers are regularly pushing the NWCG 2:1 (work/rest guidelines) limits. Most wildland firefighters are required to be available as needed when off the clock due to lack of staffing or high demand of wildland fire support. The result is dispatchers are on call at a moment’s notice, expected to arrive at dispatch before wildland firefighters leave the station in response to a wildland firefighter including aircraft. Dispatchers are expected, when on call, to take detailed notes and information and transcribe it over to dispatch logs when arriving back to the dispatch center. This occurs anytime of the day or night. There is an extremely high demand for dispatchers trying to get back to the office to provide a major safety measure to the wildland fire community.

Our main dispatch duties are fire management based (we were hired as Fire Dispatchers). Dispatchers do track non-fire personnel as a collateral duty, not a main duty. Per the Position Description (PD) for Forestry Technician (Dispatch), it states that **“The center is responsible primarily for wildland fire preparedness and suppression support activities but, may support all- risk incidents as needed or directed”**. Dispatchers are categorized and regulated by IFPM for certain trainings and qualifications needed to perform our duties in Fire and Aviation Management. The PD states in multiple places that we must collaborate with Fire Management on many different non-standard technical problems requiring the use of specialized techniques. The dispatch PD consists of over a page and a half the knowledge we must possess in order to effectively perform the duties of our job.

As Fire Dispatchers we must have a wealth of knowledge that is not only confined to the Agency we work for but, we must have the knowledge of all Federal, State, Tribal and Private agencies or know how to obtain and interpret those policies. These policies include, but are not limited to, the Red Book, Incident Business Management, Mobilization Guides, MOU’s, etc. This knowledge is based in Fire Management and previous on-the-ground experience as a great asset to having a sound foundation of understanding these policies. Another portion of knowledge that is beneficial to us as dispatchers is knowing what the capabilities of all the different types of crews, equipment and aircraft we use is. This is paramount when we are the one choosing the

resources to respond or fill an order and is a skill and knowledge that can only be truly built by having hands on experience in using. We must possess this knowledge to ensure we safely and efficiently dispatch our resources, in the most cost-effective way. We must possess the knowledge of multiple computer programs and be able to multi-task the use of them simultaneously with accuracy and efficiency while answering telephones and radio communications and logging this into the WildCAD system.

We do dispatch motor vehicles and aircraft, it is not for the transportation of passengers or supplies, and there is no routineness to our routes and destinations as described in the 2151 Series. It is for the purpose of responding to a fire incident or other all-hazard incident. These are very specific actions and require a knowledge based in Fire Management in order to be safely and effectively carried out.

While our position is based in an office setting and not physically strenuous, we must be able to perform our duties under high mental stress, long hours, and noisy environments while multi-tasking between telephones, radios, employees and computers. We routinely experience workdays of more than 16 hours and have to balance our work-rest ratios while being understaffed. We have to be prepared to respond during all hours of the day and night. In essence, if a fire call comes in outside our normal working hours, we have to be able to respond to provide the services of dispatch so our field going forces have the tracking and safety assurance that we provide. When this happens it does interfere with our staffing abilities and we have to become creative in how we provide the services that we do. Dispatch is the first one in and the last one to get home on any given day. Dispatch is required to always be ready for the unexpected emergency and be able to respond quickly and appropriately. This knowledge is gained through practical experience and practice (training).

Key points to consider are requirements needed to be an Initial Attack Dispatcher (IADP), Expanded Dispatcher (EDSD), Aircraft Dispatcher (ACDP). This includes lack of adequate staffing due to low pay, high demand of availability, and required knowledge of the job.

I am currently a wildland fire dispatcher and was previously a primary wildland firefighter. I have been a qualified wildland firefighter for over 10 years from a basic firefighter to a single resource engine captain. I believe 100% without my knowledge of wildland fire and previous experience that I could not perform my job as a wildland fire dispatcher as well as I do and per the requirements by the federal government. I would not be allowed to dispatch wildland fire resources to wildfires. Below are my resources and supporting documentation.

Wildland fire dispatchers are funded majority by fire management. As a dispatcher, our pay is based on WFSE (Fire Funded Personnel) previous charge code descriptions for dispatchers were wildland fire management preparedness (WFPR), Suppression (WFSU), and Hazardous fuels management (WFHF) and all of those are under fire management.

My PD states I am a "Fire Dispatcher" and includes "located in a fire management organization". "Prior wildland firefighting experience on the fireline is a mandatory requirement." "Ninety (90) days of experience as a primary/rigorous wildland firefighter or equivalent experience outside federal employment is a basic qualification requirement for this

position. This position was approved for Secondary Firefighter Retirement Coverage under CSRS and FERS by USDA 8/29/07, B4, AFM11C.” The phrase “knowledge of...” is listed in my PD and 9 of these are in reference to wildland fire activity and aircraft dispatch on wildland fires.

Requirements by the Forest Service, local, GACC, national mob guides, and the interagency standards for fire and fire aviation operations require dispatchers to be adequately staffed for wildland fire preparedness and suppression.

As a wildland fire dispatcher, we are expected to handle emergency situations including be prepared to react, document, and perform at the highest levels. As dispatchers we are exposed to some of the most traumatic radio situations you can imagine like listening to firefighters being injured, entrapped, missing, unresponsive, in accidents, and so much more. Firefighters and public screaming on the radios or the telephones during an emergency. As a wildland fire dispatcher, and working the hours we do, with the little staffing dispatch has we form very close relationships with our wildland fire crews. When someone is injured, it is like our family member is injured. Some incidents have only a handful if any injuries through the entirety of incident. Dispatchers cover such a large area and many incidents at the same time they are exposed to many medical incidents ranging from low to extreme during a season, then several counting what occurs during their career. During the Summer of 2022, I was in a dispatch center that had over 10 different medical incidents (3 red medical incidents) in a single 14-day assignment spanning over 5 plus incidents. One of the four dispatchers in the office was the primary dispatcher on most of these medicals.

Supporting documentation

Below are some supporting documentation of dispatcher’s. This document could be a book just in supporting documentation, but I am only focusing on a few key points and the ACDP qualification.

1. My position description is listed under GS-0462-06 Forestry Technician (Dispatcher) NWCG Position Qualification requirements PMS 310-1

2. Aircraft Dispatcher – ACDP <https://www.nwcg.gov/positions/acdp>

Quote from the NWCG ACDP website. If a dispatcher is expected to do these duties below, they are required to have wildland fire knowledge.

- “Identify, analyze, and use relevant situational information to make **informed decisions and take appropriate actions.**”
- Review and follow local dispatch standard operating procedures and **use** standard terminology, symbols, designators, and acronyms.
- **Recognize** and **identify** resource shortages
- **Know** tactical aircraft types and capabilities.

Review the ACDP taskbook to be qualified as an ACDP.

- Per the ACDP taskbook, dispatchers are required to complete these tasks under an incident (14 tasks) and required to complete tasks under a wildfire incident (4 tasks) to be qualified as an ACDP.
- A minimum of ten IAT aviation courses to be qualified as an ACDP.
- Other Training Which Supports Development of Knowledge and Skills
 - D-312, Aircraft Dispatcher
 - S-270, Basic Air Operations
 - D-310, Expanded Dispatch Support Dispatcher
 - S-260, Interagency Incident Business Management

ACDP requires knowledge of 23 different standards and reference materials listed on their site.

3. Per Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 5709.16 32.21
 - a. All flights (other than scheduled commercial air carrier flights and UAS flights operating under Part 107 or USFS/DOI blanket COA authority) will be arranged by a **qualified aircraft/aviation dispatcher**, appropriate aviation manager, and/or an aircraft/aviation dispatch trainee under the direct supervision of a qualified aircraft/aviation dispatcher and approved at the appropriate management level.
 - b. Due to the lack of qualified ACDP staffing NWCG Memorandum 22-05 was sent out on 6/15 that recommends the policy gets pushed back to 01/01/2025.
4. Local Draw Down levels (Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations)
 - a. “Drawdown is the predetermined number and type of suppression resources that are required to maintain viable initial attack (IA) capability at either the local or geographic area. Drawdown resources are considered unavailable outside the local or geographic area for which they have been identified. Drawdown is intended to:
 - Ensure adequate fire suppression capability for local and/or geographic area managers; and
 - Enable sound planning and preparedness at all management levels.”
 - b. During our highest staffing levels at this center, we are required to have four initial attack dispatchers, one aircraft dispatcher, and one expanded support dispatcher at a minimum.

This document was written collectively by the Center Manager, Assistant Center Manager and Initial Attack Dispatcher.