

PART 4

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT AND DRAW-D



USDA Forest Service National Wildland Fire Operations Safety Decision Support Briefing Paper

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Topic: Levels of Engagement and DRAW-D

Background: In response to the Thirtymile tragedy the term “disengagement” was added to the wildland firefighting lexicon. As with many well-intended actions in response to identified needs, application and meaning of the term were all over the map. In the most severe of misinterpretations “disengagement” resulted in abandonment of suppression objectives by on-scene firefighters, rather than a shift in the level, breadth, or focus of their efforts. In order to clarify and emphasize the original intent, i.e. thoughtful and mindful decision-making and action in response to changes the environment and the associated risk and exposure, an alternative descriptor is necessary.

Key Points:

- As with military field actions, there are only five things we can do in firefighting. We'll call them *LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT*... defend (holding actions, priority protection areas), reinforce (bringing more or different resources to bear on the issue), advance (anchor and flank, direct or indirect attack), withdraw (move to a safety zone or otherwise cease current activities until conditions allow a different level of engagement), or delay (waiting until the situation has modified sufficiently to allow a different level of engagement). The Marine Corps calls this *DRAW-D*.
- *DRAW-D* concurrently applies to actions on segments of line, Divisions, or the incident in its entirety.
- *DRAW-D* applies to the levels of fires we fight, i.e. initial attack, extended attack, large fires, and “mega” fires.
- *DRAW-D* presupposes every action on or in response to an incident represents a level of engagement. Safe and effective firefighting requires a bias for action, realizing every tactical maneuver is predicated on thoughtful, mindful decision-making. In this model, accurate situational awareness, rapid and pinpoint risk identification and mitigation, and effective decision-making are essential.

Decision to Be Made:

Whether or not to introduce *LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT* and *DRAW-D* in the firefighter lexicon, and pursue incorporation of the concept into firefighter training in general.

Recommendation:

Firefighting requires a bias for action. The environment is dynamic, risk-filled, and consequence severe. Every tactical action should be predicated on prompt hazard recognition and rapid decision-making. In this model “can-do” is incorporated in every level of engagement, and every level of engagement is equal in value to the overall effort as the other. Understanding this premise serves to channel firefighter cultural “can-do” bias toward effective, safe actions. It also serves to highlight the fact that any level of engagement or action requires a conscious decision based on the situation at hand or eminent. Withdrawal is not a stigma, but a decision. Delay is not a lack of effort, but a wise choice to maximize long-term effectiveness. Reinforcement is not a sign of weakness, but an indicator of savvy risk management. Adoption of *LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT* and *DRAW-D* will help get our firefighters to the point of making the right decision, at the right time, with plenty of time to act.

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Levels of Engagement

- Defend** Hold and improve the line.
- Reinforce** Add resources necessary to *advance* or *defend*.
- Advance** Direct or indirect attack or active burnout operations.
- Withdraw** Abandon constructed line or established position in response to fire behavior or other influences adversely affecting the ability to *advance* or *defend*. This may or may not include travel along safety routes to safety zones.
- Delay** Wait for conditions to meet pre-identified triggers necessary to *advance* or *defend*.