1. GOVERNING REGULATIONS

These procedures are governed by Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide (PMS 310-1) published by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG).

2. GENERAL

Fitness and health of Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) firefighters is of utmost importance to ensure the safety of all personnel working on the fire line. The Work Capacity Test (WCT) is the primary means to assess the fitness level of firefighters.

2.1 The following positions are authorized WCT administrators:

a. Regional Fire Coordinator.
b. Task Force Coordinator.
c. Individuals designated in writing by the Incident Response Department Head.

2.2 The WCT will be administered twice per year. The required test will be administered October 1 through December 15, and an optional WCT at the arduous level will be administered April 1 through June 30. The optional spring test establishes eligibility for out-of-state assignments that require a physical fitness level of arduous, as referenced in PMS 310-1.

2.3 An employee could be required to retake the WCT during the year if:

a. Through personal observation or direct knowledge, a member of an employee’s chain of command determines the employee’s health/fitness level has changed such that they are not able to perform their duties.
b. The employee discloses a significant change in medical condition that raises questions about their ability to perform their duties.

The decision to require a retake will be made in coordination with the Environmental Health and Safety Officer (EHS Officer) and the AgriLife Human Resources Manager. The WCT procedures for the required annual test will be followed for the retake.

2.4 The WCT will be administered and recorded in accordance with the Work Capacity Test Administrator’s Guide and this procedure. Employees should be notified at least six weeks prior to testing so that they may prepare as necessary (conditioning and medical screening). The notification letter will direct employees to fill out the Health Screening Questionnaire (HSQ) immediately.
Prior to the test date, the WCT administrator will provide a list of employees scheduled for the test to the chain of command.

3. **APPLICABILITY**

All firefighters and some support personnel are required to maintain a current WCT fitness level to perform their duties. Firefighters are defined as budgeted and seasonal employees whose position description identifies fire suppression as an essential duty. Support personnel are defined as budgeted and seasonal employees who fill non-suppression roles on fire assignments.

4. **WORK CAPACITY TESTING AND CRITERIA**

4.1 There are three fitness levels assigned by work capacity testing:

   a. **Arduous** – for positions involving fieldwork that calls for above-average endurance and superior conditioning.
   
   b. **Moderate** – for positions involving fieldwork requiring complete control of physical faculties and may include considerable walking, standing and lifting 25-50 pounds.
   
   c. **Light** – for positions involving occasional field duty.

4.2 Criteria for each fitness level are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fitness Level / Work Category</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Distance (miles)</th>
<th>Pack (pounds)</th>
<th>Time (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arduous</td>
<td>Pack</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Field</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 The WCT administrator is responsible for submitting, by email, the completed [WCT and Firefighter Certification Data Sheet](#) to the Texas Interagency Coordination Center (TICC) and to the EHS Officer in Employee Development within 48 hours of completion of the test. The EHS Officer will identify the employees eligible for an incentive payment (see Section 6) and forward a listing to the payroll office for processing.

5. **REQUIREMENTS**

5.1 All firefighters must maintain at least a moderate fitness level.

5.2 For fire assignments outside of Texas, employees must meet the applicable fitness level listed by position in PMS 310-1.

5.3 Employees filling positions on South Central Interstate Forest Fire Protection Compact orders must meet the same fitness level required for assignments within Texas.
5.4 Employees who must maintain the light fitness level for a non-suppression role are likewise required to comply with the provisions of this procedure.

6. PHYSICAL FITNESS AND INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

6.1 The provisions of the physical fitness and incentive programs do not apply to seasonal and part-time employees.

6.2 As an incentive to firefighters, monetary payments will be awarded to those who achieve and maintain an arduous fitness level. The firefighter must be employed by TFS and take a TFS administered WCT to be eligible. The incentive payment will be paid at the rate of $250 per test period (fall and spring) in which the arduous fitness level is met. New hires that take and pass their initial WCT outside of the fall or spring testing periods are eligible to receive the incentive payment. To be eligible to receive two incentives during a test year, at least four months must elapse between tests. There is no monetary incentive for passing the WCT at the light or moderate fitness level.

6.3 To assist firefighters in achieving and maintaining a higher fitness level, TFS provides an opportunity to conduct physical training at the rate of one hour per day, three days per week, unless in a travel status or during emergency response. For employees who fail the WCT, supervisors may allow them one hour per day, five days per week, in preparation to retake the test. The physical fitness program will be managed by the chain of command; districts and offices are encouraged to train together. Employees will review and utilize the USDA Forest Service WCT Brochure as a guide in developing their training regimen.

7. GUIDELINES

7.1 Detailed guidance for conducting the WCT is found in the Work Capacity Test Administrator’s Guide.

7.2 At least one emergency medical technician (EMT) should be on site from start to finish. It is recommended to have at least one EMT for every 20 participants. A person may not take the test while serving as an on-site EMT. It is also recommended that an ambulance be on site throughout the test.

7.3 WCT administrators will record the two-mile time for arduous testers in case an employee attempts and fails the arduous test but passes the required moderate time and distance standards. These employees will be classified as having passed the moderate field test at the “modified moderate” fitness level.

7.4 Participants for the pack or field test are responsible for bringing a pack or weight vest with the appropriate weight for the test. Each pack or vest will be weighed by the WCT administrator prior to the test.
8. **MEDICAL SCREENING**

8.1 Prior to testing, each applicable employee must fill out an HSQ. This must be done prior to conditioning for or taking the WCT. All HSQs will be submitted to the EHS Officer for review.

8.2 Only one HSQ must be completed annually unless there is a change in the employee’s health or the employee’s physician directs the employee to return prior to taking the spring WCT. Employees who have had a change in medical condition since the previous WCT must have medical clearance forms clearing them for the WCT completed by their physician. The medical clearance forms must be faxed to the EHS Officer at 979/458-6699 prior to the WCT.

8.3 The EHS Officer will review each HSQ and determine whether an employee is cleared to start conditioning and take the WCT or requires further medical evaluation. If further medical evaluation is required, the EHS Officer will notify the employee by e-mail and copy their supervisor. TFS will reimburse full-time employees for any out of pocket costs incurred (i.e., co-payments). Seasonal employees will be reimbursed for any costs incurred, up to the highest co-payment amount under a current A&M System health care plan in the same geographical area.

8.4 Employees requiring medical evaluation must have their personal health care professionals complete the [Wildland Firefighter Medical Clearance Form](#) prior to taking the WCT. This form, when completed, will be forwarded to the EHS Officer for review at least a week prior to the test date. If this is not possible, the individual’s test date should be adjusted.

8.5 Each WCT participant will also sign a [Work Capacity Test: Informed Consent](#) form. This form will be collected by the WCT administrator on test day.

9. **FAILURE TO MEET FITNESS LEVEL REQUIREMENT – CURRENT EMPLOYEE**

9.1 Employee not medically cleared to take the WCT: The EHS Officer will notify the employee, their supervisor and the next level supervisor by e-mail of what must be done. The employee will be evaluated to determine if he/she can perform all requirements of the job until medically cleared. Upon clearance:

   a. If it is within the fall testing period, the employee has until the end of the period to take the test.
   b. If it is not within the fall testing period, the employee must take the test within two weeks of the medical clearance date.

9.2 Employee fails the first WCT: The EHS Officer will notify the employee and their chain command up to the department head by e-mail of what must be done. A minimum of 48 hours must pass before attempting to retake the WCT. The employee will be given up to 60 days to retake the test. If employee fails to take
the test within the fall testing period and does not have a medical excuse, it is considered a failure as of the end date of the fall testing period.

9.3 Employee fails the second WCT: The EHS Officer will notify the employee, their chain of command up to the associate director, and the AgriLife HR Manager by e-mail of what must be done. A minimum of 48 hours must pass before attempting to retake the WCT. The employee will be given up to 60 days to retake the test. If employee fails to retake the test within 60 days of the first failure, it is considered a second failure as of the end of the 60 days.

9.4 Employee fails the third WCT: The EHS Officer will notify the employee, their chain of command up to the associate director, and the AgriLife HR Manager by e-mail. The employee will be evaluated and placed in another job not requiring a WCT fitness level or have his/her job status reviewed by the chain of command and AgriLife Human Resources. If employee fails to retake the test within 60 days of the second failure, it is considered a third failure.

9.5 An employee who is being considered for transfer or promotion to a position that requires passing the WCT should demonstrate the ability to pass the WCT at the appropriate fitness level before being awarded the position.

9.6 An employee who fails the WCT at the moderate level may not work on the fire line until the WCT is passed.

10. FAILURE TO MEET FITNESS LEVEL REQUIREMENT – NEW EMPLOYEE

10.1 Employee not medically cleared to take the WCT: The employee will be evaluated to determine the job duties that he/she can perform until medically cleared. Any employee not medically cleared within the standard WCT requirements and timelines will have their job status reviewed by their chain of command and the AgriLife HR Manager for appropriate administrative action. Upon medical clearance, the employee must take the WCT by the end of the prescribed timeline in this procedure or within two weeks, whichever is later. After taking the test, the standard WCT requirements and timelines apply.

10.2 Initial Test: A new employee will take the initial WCT within the first 60 days on the job.

10.3 Employee fails the initial test: The EHS Officer will notify the employee and their chain command up to the department head by e-mail of what must be done. A minimum of 48 hours must pass before attempting to retake the WCT. The employee will be given up to 30 days to retake the WCT.

10.4 Employee fails the second test: The EHS Officer will notify the employee, their chain command up to the associate director, and the AgriLife HR Manager by e-mail. The employee may be placed in another job not requiring the WCT or will be terminated.
10.5 Competitive Selection Employment: For purposes of fairness in the competitive selection process, a current employee transferring from a position not requiring the WCT will be treated the same as a new employee when selected for a position posted on Workday. The employee is not required to demonstrate the ability to pass the WCT before selection but must comply with 10.1 through 10.3 of this procedure. However, current employees are strongly encouraged to pass the WCT prior to accepting the transfer.

10.6 New employees must pass the WCT before filling a fire suppression role. If a new employee has previously passed the WCT administered by a recognized state or federal agency within the same TFS test periods (fall or spring), those results will be accepted by TFS but do not qualify for the incentive payment (see Section 6.2).

11. **WCT RETAKE**

11.1 The supervisor of an employee is responsible for coordinating with a WCT administrator to take the WCT.

11.2 The supervisor of an employee failing a WCT will coordinate with a WCT administrator to schedule the employee to retake the WCT.

11.3 The WCT retake will be supervised by an authorized WCT administrator (see Section 2).

11.4 The WCT retake has the same administrative requirements, but can be conducted individually if the proposed location, date, time or administrative requirements for a consolidated retake make it unfeasible.

CONTACT: Environmental Health and Safety Officer, 979/458-6697