

**PHOENIX REGIONAL  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

**Mulch/Compost Fires**

**M.P. 202.18B**

**04/18**

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**Purpose**

The purpose of this procedure is to establish guidelines for companies operating on incidents involving mulch/compost fires. Mulch/compost fires pose a unique challenge for fire companies due to the many different tactics needed to resolve these incidents.

**Policy**

The best practice to extinguish mulch/compost fires is to isolate the burning material by removing the surrounding uninvolved material, spread out the burning material and then apply water to only that material. Initial companies need to understand that these types of fires are going to be Defensive. Incident Commanders should take their time in developing a plan and realize that our standard quick, aggressive, offensive tactics will not work. Often application of water is actually the worst thing we can do and only makes the incident more difficult to control.

**Procedure**

The first arriving company will assume command and make access to the site (if necessary, relay best access to AHQ). All other companies should stage appropriately. The Incident Commander shall evaluate the Critical Fireground Factors, with an emphasis on determining if this is an isolated mulch/compost fire or are there structural exposures to protect. The following questions need to be asked during size up and when developing an Incident Action Plan:

- What type of fire and how large is it (i.e. small surface fire vs. deep seated fire)?
- Are there exposures in immediate danger?
- How far has the fire progressed?
- What direction is the fire going, and what is the wind direction?
- Is there heavy equipment and qualified operators on site (e.g. loaders, dozers, etc.)?
- What are the water supply options (e.g. hydrants, daisy-chains, drafting, tankers, etc.)?
- What is the availability of additional resources and special equipment?

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**With Structural Exposure**

For any fire larger than a small surface fire that the initial arriving unit cannot resolve, the Incident Action Plan should be primarily determined by the presence of any immediate exposures. If exposures exist, the Incident Commander should develop an Incident Action Plan with a priority on exposure protection that accomplishes the following:

1. Location of a site manager or responsible party
2. Secure an uninterrupted water supply as needed
3. Assign companies to key positions to protect exposures (assigned companies need to be aware of ground conditions and position apparatus appropriately)
4. Identification of an appropriate incident organization and sectors as needed
5. Only apply water as needed to protect exposures
6. Develop a plan to extinguish the burning mulch/compost
7. Request appropriate resources (e.g. Foam-Truck, Hose-Truck, Car99, ADEQ, RM50, PIO, etc.)

**Without Structural Exposure**

If no exposures exist, the Incident Commander should develop an Incident Action Plan that accomplishes the following:

1. Locate a site manager or responsible party
2. Secure an uninterrupted water supply as needed
3. Do not apply water to main pile of burning material, wait until pile is isolated
4. Develop a plan to isolate burning material using on-site equipment, Car 99, etc.
5. Assign companies to key positions that allow for application of water to isolated material (be aware of ground conditions when assigning units)
6. Identification of an appropriate incident organization and sectors as needed
7. Request appropriate resources (e.g. Foam-Truck, Hose-Truck, Car99, ADEQ, RM50, PIO, etc.)

**Operational Information**

Fires in composting facilities are relatively common; fortunately, most facilities are able to resolve small surface fires. Fires are started in one of two ways, internal combustion caused by the breakdown of the organic materials or external ignition (lighting, sparks, smoking materials and arson). Deep seated smoldering fires can actually burn for days before being detected. These are the types of fires our fire companies typically will encounter.