dangerous to firefighters and the public. Wildfires occur unexpectedly and create an emergency in which firefighters race to minimize harm to valuable resources or property. Firefighters can contain and limit the spread of wildfires only by preparing well ahead of time, thoroughly examining various possibilities of fire numbers and sizes, and developing contingency plans to cope with them. And only by having adequate, thoroughly trained, well-equipped firefighters can fire suppression be carried out safely. For the past ten years, an average of 67,043 fires have started each year on Federally protected wildlands, burning an average of 2,749,029 acres, an area slightly smaller than the State of Connecticut. When an exceptionally severe fire year occurs, the combined fire protection forces of Federal, Tribal, State, and local governments are challenged. In the past ten years, 1988, 1990, and 1994 were considered extreme in the number of acres burned.

In 1994, the Federal agencies with wildfire responsibilities estimate that 95 percent of wildfires were suppressed during initial attack action. Nevertheless, nearly $1 billion was spent on the fires that escaped initial attack, and the nation experienced an enormous loss of natural resources, private property. With the loss of 34 firefighters, it was a tragic year for wildland fire; and even more sobering is that without the commitment to safety demonstrated by firefighting personnel throughout the nation, our losses could have been even greater. Important lessons were learned, including an affirmation that agency personnel at all levels, and not just those directly involved in fire suppression, must be committed to safety.

It is estimated that presently in the 11 western states there are 20 to 30 million acres of Federal lands where conditions are ripe for extremely intense, destructive wildfires. This high risk brings with it the potential for danger to human health and safety and for enormous costs and economic loss as well as severe damage to soils, watersheds, wildlife, and flora. Federal wildland fire protection agencies must continue to provide resources and new technology for early detection and quick suppression of fires. To not do so would be to put significant public and private values, as well as human lives, at unacceptable risk.

The purpose of wildfire suppression is to minimize damage to resources, property, and the environment; to minimize expenditures of public funds for effective suppression, based on values at risk; and to provide for the safety of firefighters and the public.

Following the tragic loss of lives in the past fire season, the USDA-Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management chartered an Interagency Management Review Team (IMRT) that focused on three key areas:

- Creating a ''passion for safety'' within all wildland fire suppression organizations that goes beyond traditional implementation.
- Emphasizing the importance of agency administrator duties and responsibilities in the implementation of safe fire management policies, programs, and practices.
- Monitoring performance and accountability of all personnel involved in fire and aviation management activities. This includes ensuring appropriate skills and training are acquired by administrators, program managers and staff, and all firefighting personnel.

The IMRT report includes 35 recommendations for follow-up. Many have been completed; several are more complex and are ongoing. The IMRT will complete its work June 30, 1995, but individual work groups will continue with ongoing projects until they are completed. A significant outcome of this focus on firefighting safety was a joint statement by the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior in May of 1995:

> We are committed to ''Zero Tolerance'' of carelessness and unsafe actions. The commitment to and accountability for safety is a joint responsibility of firefighters, managers, and administrators. No resource or property values are worth endangering people. All land management plans and all suppression plans and actions must reflect this commitment. Individuals must be personally committed and responsible for their own performance and accountability.

The task of preparing for and suppressing fires has been accomplished through the excellent cooperation of all fire suppression organizations. With shrinking budgets and work forces and more challenging fire situations, this cooperation and coordination among Federal and non-Federal fire protection organizations becomes even more essential to provide the fire protection capability the public expects.

The Interagency Management Review Team's findings included the following:

> The five Federal wildland fire agencies have each adopted separate fire management planning systems. These systems fall into two basic categories: (1) Optimization models (used by FS, BLM, and BIA) and (2) allocation models (used by NPS and FWS). Each approach has strengths and weaknesses. Three major weaknesses shared by both approaches are the focus on single-agency initial attack, the inability to adequately assess the role of non-market or non-commodity values at risk, and the inability to adequately address ''non-normal'' conditions. Nevertheless, the systems currently provide the principal source of information for budget planning and for organizational configurations in each agency.
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> The single-agency focus and contrasting approaches of the various systems have precluded effective interagency planning, for both initial- and extended-attack situations and for geographic-area and national-level resources. The lack of capability to address non-market values has hampered the ability of the fire management programs to provide an organization that accounts for all resources and inhibits cross-agency comparisons.
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> While each agency has been making modifications and improvements to their own systems over the years, discussion has begun within the interagency fire community to commission a new-generation system that can be used by all agencies (including States) and that addresses the full range of fire management planning issues. In November 1993 the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) initiated an exploratory study of developing such a system.
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> A next-generation fire management planning system, usable by all agencies and States, would greatly enhance the ability to analyze the full range of planning issues and provide a more efficient and effective interagency fire protection organization. Fire management planning systems must address the role that fuels management and protection of adjacent lands and structures plan in fire protection planning. Efforts to develop such a system should move forward as a priority effort in the interagency community through the NWCG.
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> —Taken from the report of the Interagency Management Review Team, October 1994.

This action will facilitate the interchange of forces for suppression and create a totally mobile Federal fire force.

In addition to the need for standardization, there are a number of existing policies and procedures that hinder all agencies' efforts to become more effective in preparedness and suppression. Some of those are operational and some, such as budgeting and personnel practices, are administrative. In some cases, agencies are individually attempting to solve these problems or at least temporarily fix them season to season. However, it is critical that Federal wildland fire management agencies work together to arrive at common solutions.

Some minor differences in budget processes among agencies inhibit full cooperation. Perhaps the most important issue is the separate funding requests for seasonal severity funding, where coordinated planning and