



**FIRE SCENARIO DECISION
EXERCISE 4**

Air support

You are the protection supervisor making decisions about sending air support. This exercise has three scenarios.

What first?

1. Scenario 1
2. Scenario 2
3. Scenario 3

Scenario 1

Recon plane reports this fire. Estimates it to be 50 acres with spotting, torching and running crown fire.

- Bring in a retardant drop
- Do not drop retardant





Your DC-7 drops 3,000 gallons of retardant across the head of the fire. This slows the fire enough for the crews on the ground to stop the forward progress. There is still work to do, but it looks like we're going to win this one.

New scenario?



The bad news is: Your fire blew up and burned 30,000 acres of national monument, costing the taxpayers millions of dollars, and you have been temporarily relieved of your duties as a protection supervisor. The good news is: This is a pretty awesome photo and you get to try again.

[How could this have gone better?](#)

Scenario 2

Structure fire with minimal spread to the forest fuels. Potential to spread to the adjacent barn. Landowner is frantic because his farm equipment is in there and he is not insured.

- Bring in a retardant drop
- Do not drop retardant



You ordered retardant to suppress a structure fire. The district forester (your boss's boss) would like to remind you of the mission of ODF, which is to suppress forest fires. The governor's wildfire council heard about this, as well as the Federal Aviation Administration. Enjoy your time in court.

[Let's figure out how to avoid this outcome.](#)



Meanwhile, the fire you diverted air support from grew to 12,000 acres, causing the city of Ashland to be evacuated.

[Try again?](#)



The local fire district is called and structural firefighters take over the job. The landowner has some losses, but this wasn't a job for wildland firefighters.

Good call.



Scenario 3

You have 5 engines and a bulldozer on this fire, as well as 3 helicopters. There is some group torching occurring, but the fire is laying down in the areas where the timber has been harvested. There is a town a couple miles north of your fire, but the winds are currently out of the east.

[Bring in a retardant drop](#)

[Do not drop retardant](#)





A successful drop helps to secure the lines that had been built with the dozer, but the fire could have been extinguished without spending the extra \$20,000 on the airtanker. Now the finance folks are working overtime to get that bill paid and your supervisor is grumbling.

[Was there a better way?](#)

Study shows correlation between rapid dispatch of air tankers and duration of wildfire

Bill Gabbert February 28, 2020 Fixed wing AFUE, research, study

Data suggests duration of fires is shorter when air tankers are deployed early



A C-130 makes a retardant drop on the Canyon Fire in Napa County, California July 22, 2019. Photo by Kent Porter used with permission.

While you were able to suppress this fire without the air tanker, citizens complained about a perceived lack of effort in putting the fire out. Many people think that air tankers are the sole reason large fires go out. There is also political pressure regarding the use of aviation resources.

As long as you keep making decisions based on your situational awareness and focus on using the right tool at the right time, you will be successful.

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Sometimes you just can't win. ...