



September 2, 2014

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We received a response to our Safety Matters Forum Briefing from the US Forest Service Director of Fire and Aviation Tom Harbour as directed by your office.

We must respectfully but strongly disagree with Mr. Harbour's stated efforts to prevent wildland firefighter deaths. The record *does* indicate that more can be done to prevent fatalities. It is not meant to be a disservice to the professionals in the agencies to point this out. The real disservice results from agency leadership that fails to acknowledge that a problem exists.

Let's not wait until the next fatality occurs to take significant steps. It is important that improvements to firefighter safety are implemented *now*. Prevention of the next entrapment and fatality is always preferable to waiting to take action after an entrapment occurs. All of the efforts described by Mr. Harbour indicate improvements related to entrapment and following entrapment. Preventative measures are not addressed.

Safety Matters believes there is plenty of evidence currently available with our data and the data of other researchers to indicate that there are numerous reasonable preventative improvements that can be applied in order to significantly reduce the number of future entrapments.

We have also contacted and received a reply from Secretary Jewell, since the problem affects a number of Interior agencies as well.

We are fully aware that the 2014 fire season is in full swing. Since it is often during periods of heightened fire activity that firefighters are killed or injured, we feel that time is of the essence.

Please take another hard look at our 5 action items. You are urged to consider our plea: Your strong leadership is needed at this point in time.

Sincerely yours,

The Safety Matters Team

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