

**WESTERN STATES SEISMIC POLICY COUNCIL  
POLICY RECOMMENDATION 14-5**

**Earthquake Emergency Handbook for  
First Responders and Incident Commanders**

**Policy Recommendation 14-5**

The Western States Seismic Policy Council (WSSPC) recommends that an Earthquake Emergency Handbook for first responders and incident commanders be developed, preferably by an interagency task force.

**Executive Summary**

Most emergency first responders and incident commanders have not experienced a damaging earthquake, and therefore are unfamiliar with the nature of earthquake hazards and how to properly respond to an earthquake emergency and its aftermath. An earthquake emergency guide, similar to the Fireline Handbook for wildfires, is needed to address response issues specific to earthquakes.

## **Background**

The Fireline Handbook is a valuable tool for first responders and incident commanders dealing with wildfires. The Fireline Handbook was developed by the Incident Operations Standards Working Team, which was sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture, the United States Department of Interior, the National Association of State Foresters, the United States Fire Administration, and the Intertribal Timber Council. This handy document is used at essentially all major wildfires, and the importance and utility of the handbook is underscored by the variety of organizations that joined together to produce and subsequently adopt it. Among other things, following the handbook can avoid putting fire responders at undue risk and avoid potential injuries because the handbook incorporates the hard won lessons learned and accumulated wisdom from fighting many fires, and compiles that information into an easy and quick to use format.

Most emergency first responders and incident commanders have not experienced an earthquake, and therefore are unfamiliar with the nature of earthquake hazards and how to properly respond to an earthquake emergency and its aftermath. This is because the repeat time between large, damaging earthquakes is relatively long compared to many other natural hazards such as wildfires. Unfortunately, the consequences of an earthquake and related hazards in its aftermath can be catastrophic. The incident commander for the 2008 Wells, Nevada earthquake was unfamiliar with earthquake hazards and had to learn the basics of earthquake emergency response while responding to the event. He expressed the need for an earthquake emergency guide similar to the Fireline Handbook. Developing an Earthquake Emergency Handbook was also the number one “lesson learned” in the emergency response section of the Wells earthquake disaster review (dePolo and LaPointe, 2011).

## **References**

dePolo, C.M. and LaPointe, D.D., editors, 2011, *The 21 February 2008 Mw 6.0 Wells, Nevada earthquake - A compendium of earthquake-related investigations prepared by the University of Nevada, Reno*: Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology Special Publication 36, variously paginated. (<http://www.nbmgs.unr.edu/Pubs/sp/sp36>)

Incident Operations Standards Working Team, 2004, *NWCG Fireline Handbook*: National Wildfire Coordinating Group Handbook 3, variously paginated.