

Common Denominators of Fire Behavior on Tragedy Fires

There are five major common denominators of fire behavior on fatal and near-fatal fires. Such fires often occur:

1. On relatively small fires or deceptively quiet areas of large fires.
2. In relatively light fuels, such as grass, herbaceous fuels, and light brush.
3. When there is an unexpected shift in wind direction or in wind speed.
4. When fire responds to topographic conditions and runs uphill.
5. During critical burn period between 1400 and 1700.

Alignment of topography and wind during the critical burning period should be considered a trigger point to reevaluate tactics. Blowup to burnover conditions generally occur in less than 60 minutes and can be as little as 5 minutes. A tactical pause may be prudent around 1400 for reevaluating your situation awareness of topography, weather, and fuel.