

INFORMATION/BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 23, 2018

FROM: Kent Slaughter, Manager, BLM Alaska Fire Service, 907-356-5505

SUBJECT: Fort Wainwright Security Screening

The BLM Alaska Fire Service (AFS) facilities are located on Fort Wainwright in Fairbanks, Alaska and utilize the air base services and facilities on the Garrison for mobilization and deployment of firefighters. This briefing paper provides information regarding AFS compliance with Department of Defense (DoD) security screening required for access to the Garrison and the waiver process for Emergency Firefighter (EFF)/Administrative Determined (AD) firefighters with certain criminal convictions.

KEY FACTS

- **Jobs:** Fort Wainwright Army Garrison security screening policy granting access on the military installation where BLM AFS facilities are located will result in the restriction of access for some firefighters with certain criminal convictions. While these convictions would not necessarily disqualify these individuals from federal employment as firefighters, the lack of access to base creates a situation where they are unable to complete training or utilize AFS facilities and equipment. This may also reduce the number of EFF/AD firefighters who are hired on an as-needed basis due to access denial or the lengthy waiver process to obtain access. If a candidate for an EFF/AD position chooses not to apply for a waiver or does not obtain a waiver, BLM AFS will not employ the individual due to mobilizations and medical evacuations that come through BLM AFS facilities.
- **Stakeholder Positions:** BLM AFS is a tenant of the Fort Wainwright Garrison and is subject to DoD guidelines required for personnel to gain access to the military installation. Individuals conducting business at BLM AFS facilities, including the Alaska Division of Forestry (ADOF), EFF/AD personnel and anyone attending training at BLM AFS, must undergo background screening by Garrison security prior to gaining access on post. Non-BLM AFS personnel, including crews mobilizing from the Lower 48 to help on fires, will also need to go through this screening.

BACKGROUND

The BLM Alaska Fire Service facilities are located on the Fort Wainwright Army Garrison, an Army installation with specific screening guidelines to grant personnel access at various staffed control gates. There is a 100 percent identification check at all gates for anyone 16 years of age or older. BLM AFS employees and individuals needing to get to AFS facilities go through the

Fort Wainwright Security screening process before obtaining a temporary pass. Once cleared, individuals can gain access through the control gates by presenting a driver's license and their Department of Interior (DOI) ID or other identification that meets the REAL ID guidelines such as tribal identification cards. BLM AFS was not fully compliant with Garrison screening policies for EFF/AD personnel.

DISCUSSION

BLM AFS has not been in compliance with the background screening for training and mobilizations of EFF/AD crews or crews traveling from the Lower 48 to help during the Alaska fire season. In the past, EFF/AD firefighters and crews were transported via aircraft and landed at the air field on the garrison without this screening. In other instances EFF/AD firefighters were bused onto Fort Wainwright and went through an ID check at the front gate. They were not subjected to the security screening in either case. BLM AFS was recently advised by Fort Wainwright security that these practices do not comply with DoD controlled access rules.

In order to comply with the security screening, BLM AFS initiated the screening process for EFF/AD crew bosses invited to the Crew Boss Summit February 19-23. Out of 53 crew boss names submitted to Fort Wainwright security for background checks, 18 did not pass initial screening due to having a criminal history of assault or sexual misconduct convictions. Of the 18, three were denied access outright and 15 were deemed eligible to pursue a waiver process for entry to Fort Wainwright. The Post Access Denial Waiver Application requires supporting court documentation and can take up to 30 days to process. Fort Wainwright security review each waiver and grant access on a case-by-case basis. Persons granted a waiver will be able to access Fort Wainwright for the fire season unless another disqualifying conviction occurs. Fort Wainwright security may also outright deny access based on more severe criminal convictions. Fort Wainwright security will not screen the approximately 700 EFF/AD personnel until close to the date post access is needed in order to utilize up to date background information on the individual.

In addition, all BLM AFS and ADOF EFF/AD firefighters coming onto Fort Wainwright for mobilization and/or demobilization to and from any wildland fire incident must be screened for post access by Fort Wainwright Security. During times of large crew mobilization, such as when four 20-person EFF crews are transported by a jet to work on fires in the Lower 48, copies of crew rosters will be given to post security for screening. Fort Wainwright security has assured us they can screen the rosters within the three days between crew rostering and mobilization. However, since the waiver process takes up to 30 days to complete, firefighters not cleared will not be allowed on post and or to travel with the crew. Crews coming from or heading to Lower 48 are mobilized from Fort Wainwright largely due to its close proximity to the BLM AFS facilities including the cache that equips EFF/AD firefighters with protective clothing and gear. Some crews, including those from the Lower 48, utilize the dining facility and stay overnight at BLM AFS barracks on Fort Wainwright during large, multi-day mobilizations. Having crews mobilize through Fairbanks International Airport would greatly complicate the process.

Regular BLM AFS employees undergo an extensive background check to include fingerprinting performed by the Department of Interior human resources prior to employment. Since EFF/AD are hired on an as-needed basis, they are not considered regular employees and do not undergo a background check when hired. Due to an already substantial workload, HR cannot conduct background checks on the approximately 700 EFF/AD hired in advance of wildfire season.

NEXT STEPS

BLM AFS is trying streamline the process of gathering information to submit for screening by requiring EFF/AD fill out AFS/ADOF job applications during spring refresher training and pack testing. These forms ask whether the applicant has any felony or misdemeanor criminal convictions. If the individual answers yes to either one of these questions, they will be given an explanatory cover letter and a copy of the Fort Wainwright access waiver request. This would give BLM AFS a way of detecting advanced screening requirements well ahead of fire season and give the EFF/AD more time to apply for a waiver. If it is discovered through a subsequent background screening that an EFF/AD did not initially disclose their criminal convictions on the annual screening form, they will be dropped from the program.

BLM AFS is working to formulate a plan to address the security screening for contract crews and other EFF/AD traveling from the Lower 48 for fire assignments.