Greening Fire Sustainable Operations AKA Incident Recycling Program

Fire camp is a busy place with hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people. Just like a city, these fire camps generate huge amounts of waste. Paper and cardboard, water and Gatorade bottles, stacks of wooden pallets, food waste and non-recyclable trash.

One technique that fire managers utilize to reduce this waste challenge is by ordering recycling specialist contractors to provide on-site recycling and trash service in fire camps. Data collected during the 2020 fire season indicated that on-site recycling reduced landfill waste by 30 – 40%. This equates to thousands of pounds of recycling.

Interested in seeing how efficient and thorough a recycling program can be? Reducing Landfill Waste at Fire Camp - A Pilot Program Tested at the Whitewater Fire- YouTube highlights one of the recycling contractors at work, and everyone seems pleased with the success of this program.

Beyond the intangible benefits of doing the right thing for the environment, there are other benefits:

- Reduced waste hauling costs: Effective recycling services reduce the need for dumpsters and servicing by 50% to 80%, further reducing costs to the incident (For example, reducing daily service for four dumpsters on a single incident could save up to $18,000 per week).
- Reduced burden on Logistics, Facilities, Supply & Camp Crews: The recycling vendor arrives with trash and recycle bins/bags (as well as trash/recycle signage), Supply does not need to transport or store these items, and Logistics does not need to order them. Because the vendor services the trash/recycle stations across the incident, the waste management burden is greatly reduced/eliminated for camp crews.
- More organized and clean fire camp: professional recycling services make the camp feel more organized, clean, and well managed.
- Increased positive public perception that land management agencies are reducing the long-term negative impact of incident waste in local community landfills.

The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

Recycling in fire camp is an essential part of our mission.

Photos taken on Inyo Creek Fire, Lone Pine, CA. June 2021.