

August 15, 2011 cjt



## FIRE RETARDANT – BRIEFING PAPER

The U.S. Forest Service has broad responsibilities in the management of wildland fire, ranging from immediate suppression to the lighting of controlled fires to safely restore fire-adapted ecosystems. In managing wildfire, the Forest Service's clear mission includes protection of landscapes, resources, and people. Most wildfires though, are managed without the use of fire retardants. From 2000 through 2010, aerially applied retardant was used on only about 8.5 percent of wildfires on National Forests System lands.

Aerially-applied fire retardant reduces wildfire intensity and rate of spread, decreasing risks to firefighters and enabling them to construct fireline safely. In many situations, the use of retardant in concert with firefighters on the ground allows the Forest Service to safely meet its responsibilities to protect landscapes, resources, and people.

Fire retardants applied to wildfires are usually a mixture of water and chemicals designed to wet the area as well as chemically retard a fire's progression through vegetation. Typically it is colored red so that the application area can be seen from the air. Generally, the chemicals found in retardant are ammonium phosphate and sulfate salts with an iron oxide coloring -- a sticky red fertilizer-like substance with some iron within it.

In response to a 2010 court decision, the Forest Service released a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) in May 2011, for public comment, that will help inform the agency's decision whether to continue aerial application of fire retardant and, if so, under what conditions.

The Forest Service has created an internet website where the public can access additional information regarding wildland fire chemicals found in retardant. For environmental studies go to <http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/fire/wfcs/eas.htm>, and for environmental briefs and information, go to <http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/fire/wfcs/envbrief.htm>.

