

“The Pack Test” Work Capacity Testing for Wildland Firefighters: Ensuring Wildland Firefighter Safety

What is the Pack Test?

The Pack Test refers to work capacity tests used to qualify individuals for the three levels of wildland firefighting duty:

- Arduous
- Moderate
- Light

The Pack Test measures:

- Aerobic capacity
- Muscular strength
- Muscular endurance

All wildland firefighters must meet minimum levels of fitness requirements for the type of duties they are assigned:

Arduous: involves field work calling for above-average endurance and superior conditioning. All firefighters are required to perform arduous duty.

Moderate: involves field work requiring complete control of physical faculties and may include considerable walking, standing and lifting 25-50 lbs. Safety officers and fire behavior analysts are examples of moderate duty positions.

Light: involves mainly office-type work with occasional field activity. Examples include: staging area and helibase managers.

Testing wildland firefighters for work capacity is important for several reasons:

- Personal safety and health
- Coworker safety
- Improved operations

About Arduous Work

Wildland firefighting demands a high level of fitness to safely perform physically demanding work in difficult environments.

Firefighters, strike team leaders, line scouts, and others assigned arduous duty must be prepared to work in steep

terrain; and in extreme temperatures, altitude, and smoke-while maintaining reserve work capacity to meet unforeseen emergencies.

Prior to reporting for work, applicants are **strongly encouraged** to train for arduous-level work capacity.

“Pack Test” Training

Training for the Pack-Field-Walk test is important. Start training at least 4-6 weeks before you are scheduled to take the test. To be in shape for work duty, you may want to train in the footwear or boots you will wear on the job. Footwear should be ankle high and protect the ankles.

Begin training before you report for work. Start by walking. Train for the test level you will need to pass for the duties you will be required to perform.

Start training for arduous and moderate duty without a pack. Gradually increase distance and begin carrying appropriate weight. Increase the weight until you can meet the requirement for arduous or moderate duty.

The chart below provides test criteria for arduous, moderate, and light duty performance:

Fitness Requirement	Test	Description
Arduous	Pack Test	3-mile hike with 45-pound pack in 45 min.
Moderate	Field Test	2-mile hike with 25-pound pack in 30 min.
Light	Walk Test	1-mile hike in 16 min.

More on Training

Before you begin to train for testing or substantially increase your level of activity, consult your physician. This is especially important if you are over 40 and have been inactive; have a history of a heart condition, chest pain, loss of balance; or have a joint or bone problem that could be made worse by a change in physical activity.

Once you are cleared to begin training, here’s what you’ll need:

- Adequate footwear that will cover and protect feet and ankles while testing.
- Comfortable clothing.
- A pack. The type of pack is personal choice, but it must weigh either 45 or 25 lbs, depending on whether you are testing for arduous or moderate duty.
- An accurately measured, safe, and level course.

Taking the Test

- Testing will be monitored and any problems should be brought to the attention of the test monitors.
- No jogging or running is permitted.
- The test is Pass/Fail only.
- Choose your own pack or a standard firefighter backpack pump will be provided.
- Packs will be weighed before and after testing.

For More Information:

Personal health, physical fitness, and work capacity all work towards making conditions safer for firefighters and the people they protect. Ask your local fire management office for more information.

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