



Forest Service

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News Release

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Kaibab National Forest employee honored for forward-thinking safety initiatives

WILLIAMS, Ariz., Dec. 19, 2019 — A Kaibab National Forest employee was recently recognized for his outstanding leadership in developing innovative approaches to employee safety and in assessing risk in complex and potentially hazardous working environments.

James "Jim" Burton, who serves as the assistant fire management officer for the Williams Ranger District, was the recipient of the Regional Forester's Excellence in Safety and Occupational Health Award for the Southwestern Region of the Forest Service. The award recognizes "outstanding contributions toward the advancement of the Southwestern Region's Safety and Occupational Health program goals and objectives" through "exceptional, proactive and innovative approaches to hazard recognition, prevention and employee protection," according to the nomination guidelines.

"Jim has helped to shift the dialogue on how leadership makes decisions regarding safety, acting as a driving force in regional discussions about how we analyze and accept risk," said Geordie Beck, forest safety manager for the Coconino National Forest and former forest safety manager for the Kaibab National Forest. "He continually educates employees about the values and principles of [Operational Risk Management](#), allowing for more safe, effective and efficient operations."

Burton was honored, in part, for sharing his expertise in Operational Risk Management and working to build awareness of its usefulness and applicability across disciplines on the Kaibab National Forest as well as more broadly throughout the Southwestern Region.

Operational Risk Management is described as "a continuous, systematic process of identifying and controlling hazards" in order to "ensure that the actions taken on a daily basis result in the best possible outcome for our agency, the land we manage, our employees, our partners, and our public," according to the Forest Service's Operational Risk Management website. The process works to improve operational effectiveness by anticipating hazards and reducing the potential for unintended outcomes.





"Over the years, most of our safety efforts have been compliance-based. I've been working to shift decision-making and communication around risk, allowing our employees the ability to make the most informed risk decisions to increase the certainty of outcomes," said Burton. "This is important to me because we are increasing the probability of successful operations where everyone comes home. This award was an affirmation that this effort is a valuable endeavor."

Burton was also recognized for his commitment to sharing risk management approaches with key members of incident management teams. Incident management teams are available for assignment to manage large-scale, complex incidents - such as wildland fire - across the United States. By working with these teams to examine alternative strategies that better consider exposure tradeoffs, assess risk to highly valued resources and assets, and seek opportunities for realizing the beneficial effects of fire, Burton has helped to foster broad awareness and increased use of Operational Risk Management tools.

"Jim's advocacy for Operational Risk Management directly supports the Forest Service's core values of safety and service," said Heather Provencio, forest supervisor of the Kaibab National Forest. "Thanks to his leadership, dedication and willingness to freely share his expertise, our employees have new, comprehensive tools to help assess risk and hopefully make the most safety-conscious decisions possible."

The award was presented by Southwestern Regional Forester Cal Joyner at a ceremony in Albuquerque this past summer.

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Jim Burton was the recipient of the Regional Forester's Excellence in Safety and Occupational Health Award.

