

Peat Fire Hazards

- Smoke / Ash exposure: A distinctive feature of peat fires is their duration. Firefighters may be exposed to gasses and smoke for extended periods, often all day for multiple days.
- Hot ash pits: Hot ash pits are often masked/hidden by soil, vegetation, snow, etc. These may be adjacent to an open pit that has burned under the surrounding earth leaving overhangs that a person or equipment can easily fall through. Pits that may seem cool and shallow, may have burned deep and hot. Burning peat could be covered by a thick layer of very fine ash that would not support any weight. Not only are there burn injury concerns, but also sprains/strains/breaks from a sudden fall.
- Peat fires regularly require the use of equipment and machinery. Consider closed cabins with dust filtration if possible. Consider low ground pressure equipment and accessories like swamp/access mats for excavators. Keep in mind a recovery plan for stuck equipment. Because of the use of heavy equipment and often a mix of contractors and staff with varying experience, there are the usual hazards associated with working alongside equipment on fire.
- Falling trees: Peat fires regularly burn through roots and will burn away all the supporting soil/peat that keeps trees upright. Consider keeping people completely out of some areas with lots of trees. Reassess often.
- Like any fire, consider suppression methods that can limit firefighter exposure to these hazards. This can increase equipment to reduce personnel, flooding, allowing some areas to burn out if they are contained and will hit mineral soil or water table in an acceptable timeframe.
- Peat fires can evaporate soil moisture making more peat available to burn than what it may initially appear.
- Hot steam from hitting the burning peat and hot soil with water
- Visibility issues for firefighters, equipment, and vehicles due to smoke.
- Complacency and fatigue. Multiple long days on the same piece of ground.

Peat Fire Prevention

- Check Drought Code: It is said that peat becomes available at about 250. Keep this number in mind but remember that actual risk of peat becoming involved has many variables. Is the peat disturbed (ag, development) or was it moved/piled like along ditch banks or adjacent to old peat mines. Are there deep plant or dead tree roots that can contribute to holding and moving the heat downward (reverse ladder fuels).
- Monitor, monitor, monitor. Patrol, monitor, and return to check suspect sites after wildfires or Rx burns. Small peat fires can be relatively easily extinguished even with hand tools and a little water. What are your contingency plans to attack peat early should it become an issue?