Shelter Deployment Notes from the Field

The following notes come from crews who have deployed fire shelters in the field.

- Carry your fire shelter where you can easily reach and remove it without taking off your pack. Never carry your shelter inside a pack. Practice removing it with all of your gear on, the same way you will carry it on the fireline. Practice removing your shelter while running or walking fast.
- Once an entrapment becomes likely, protecting your airway should dominate all of your decisions while attempting to escape or deploy shelters.
- Always attempt escape where success is likely. When escape is questionable, your first priority is to take your fire shelter out of the carrying case and remove the plastic bag by pulling the pull-tab. Carry the folded shelter in your hands ready for quick use. While trying to escape it can be partially opened to use as a heat shield against radiant heat but not for hot gases or a flame front that would leave your airways unprotected. When speed is essential for escape, get rid of all of your tools, saws, packs, etc., to travel as light as possible.
- Whether you are trying to escape or trying to find and improve a deployment sites, it is critical to leave sufficient time to get under your shelter before hot gases or the flame front arrives. It is more important to be on the ground before the hot gases and flame front arrive than to be in your shelter. Finish deployment on the ground as rapidly as possible. If you only are partially deployed, protect your head and airway with your shelter as a top priority.
- Before the flame front arrives, the air is often very turbulent. This results in longer deployment times and the necessity to hold your shelter tightly so it isn't blown away or damaged.
- Moving of people after they deploy, but prior to adequate dissipation of heat and smoke hazards, is contributing to the number of fatalities and serious injuries. Once you deploy, stay under the shelter. No matter how bad it is under the shelter, the heat can be 10-20 times worse outside the shelter.
- If trapped without a shelter, lie face down with arms curled around your head no matter how bad your back is being burned. This is your best chance to survive. It is always hotter above ground level than at ground level, so keep your nose and body pressed to the ground.
- If you are under a fire shelter and the inner layer of glass cloth starts to separate from the aluminum foil, the glass cloth may burn you, but it will cool off rapidly. If this occurs, it is critical to remain under the shelter and keep movement to a minimum as the foil can be torn easily. Even if the foil breaks open and flames enter, it is still worse outside the shelter. When conditions are so extreme that a fire shelter starts to fail, severe injury and death are very likely if you leave the shelter. You can still survive if you stay under the shelter.