

FEMA Assignments

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Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act

The Fire Suppression Assistance Program provides reimbursement for state fire suppression costs authorized by FEMA declaration.

- A. Section 420. The President is authorized to provide assistance, including grants, equipment, supplies and personnel, to any State for the suppression of any fire on publicly or privately owned forest or grassland which threatens such destruction as would constitute a major disaster.

- B. A Presidential Declared Emergency is authorized under the provisions of Title V of the Stafford Act and can be approved “based on a finding that the situation is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of the state and affected local governments”. This does not replace or supersede Fire Suppression Assistance Grants, however it was used in limited circumstances during 1993 and 1996 in Texas.
 - a. Eligible applicants are states, political sub-divisions of states, Indian Tribes and qualifying private nonprofit institutions.
 - b. No hazard mitigation implementation funding is available.

- C. Presidential Declared Major Disaster as provided by Title IV of the Stafford Act is to supplement the efforts and available resources of states, local governments, and disaster relief organizations in alleviating damage, loss, hardship, or suffering following a disaster.
 - a. Eligible applicants are states, political sub-divisions of states, Indian Tribes and qualifying private nonprofit institutions. No hazard mitigation implementation funding is available.
 - b. An array of assistance is considered, including clearance of debris, emergency protective measures for the preservation of life and property.
 - c. Hazard mitigation grants are available for eligible projects in the disaster area.

Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000:

In October of 2000, the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief Act was amended. There are some positive benefits that should result from this amended law.

The law reads: “The President is authorized to provide assistance, including grants, equipment, supplies and personnel, to any State or local government for the mitigation, management, and control of any fire on public or private forest land or grassland that threatens such destruction as would constitute a major disaster”.

Something that is new to the new is coordination with State and Tribal Departments of Forestry. This is great news.

Presently, FEMA is working on the definitions of the entire program. They will be defining things such as mitigation. All of this will be completed so they can implement the program October 2001.

Federal Response Plan

Provides the framework for all agencies to work together and provide the assistance to disaster survivors.

FEMA Organization

The Director of FEMA is a cabinet member for the President. There are many political appointees heading different departments within the agency. The new players may have different perceptions of how the agency will respond and it may be different than we have experienced in the past.

Federal Emergency Assistance

The President may direct any Federal Agency, with or without reimbursement to utilize the authorities and resources granted to it under Federal Law...In support of State and local emergency assistance efforts to save lives, protect property and public health and safety, and lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe.

FEMA's Role

Coordinate the delivery of Federal assistance. Activate and deploy interagency emergency teams. Operate facilities to assist affected individuals, support operations and provide public information.

Provide mission assignments. The purpose is to direct performance of reimbursable work of delivery of services toward fulfillment of an unmet State need, or support to other Federal responders. The work specified in the Mission assignment must be beyond the normal responsibilities of that agency's charter. Tasked agencies use their own funds and seek reimbursement from FEMA. This is done on a Request for Federal Assistance form and serves as the approving and obligating document for mission assignments.

Emergency Support Function No. 4 Firefighting

The Forest Service National Fire Suppression liaison represents the wildland firefighting agencies in Washington, D.C. providing overall support to and coordination with the Emergency Support Team. This position also provides national leadership to regional ESF-4 representatives. Provides coordination and facilitates between EST, ROC and DFO personnel. Identifies resources required to support response activities, facilitate acquisition and allocation of resources.

Role of Principal Advisors:

Each Forest Service Region has one or more Principal Advisors that work with State Forestry and State Emergency Management Agencies when wildland fires have exceeded the capability of the State Forestry organization due to extreme conditions.

The role of the Principal Advisor is to gather fire behavior information and complete a written assessment of the fire situation so the State may request fire suppression assistance. The Principal Advisor should not make recommendations to the State, as to whether or not their request may or may not be approved rather they must remain a neutral party providing fire behavior information so the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) can make an informed decision as to whether or not the request meets the requirements for the potential to constitute a major disaster.

There are many circumstances that FEMA must consider when making decisions to approve fire suppression assistance for any State. For calendar year 2001, floor costs will still be a consideration. Floor costs are an archaic design for determining fire suppression needs. However, they have been the only method devised to date that the Office of Management and Budget will accept.

Floor costs are determined by adding a State's fire budget for a period of 7 years. The fire suppression costs for the high and low year are thrown out, leaving a balance of 5 years. .05 divides that total amount and the result is the floor cost. A state must have spent that amount prior to requesting federal assistance.

IMT and Fire Suppression Assistance:

An Incident Management Team may run into incidents that involve FEMA. It depends upon the State as to how well the situation plays out. Some states have strong fire management organizations and good ties with emergency management. However, there are times when misunderstandings occur depending upon which agency has the lead. In cases, where EM doesn't understand firefighting it further complicates the role for everyone. Some states such as Florida have now worked out the kinks when fire is the disaster.

Patience and flexibility are the key components to remember when working with these organizations. It's not business as usual.

There are other considerations this year. FEMA has a new administration. Traditionally, we have experienced a good working relationship with their agency. Until new players get in place, we're not sure of their expectations.

Financial Management

FEMA has proposed a change in payment to other agencies. They have indicated they will not pay base 8 for cooperators. This has some cooperators upset because they do not have emergency dollars to pay their agency employees.

Advice to Incident Management Teams

Be flexible.

It's not business as usual.

Media coverage is often intense.

Disaster and Emergency Operations

For decades, forestry agencies across the United States have responded to and managed wildland fires, which was their primary responsibility in natural resource disasters. Recently, however they have taken on major responsibilities beyond wildland fires. State forestry agencies are responding to a greater number and variety of natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, winter storms, and tornadoes. These broader responsibilities have significantly affected the ability of some state forestry agencies to pay adequate attention to their primary mission. In addition, severe fire-danger conditions recently in Florida, Texas and New Mexico- have significantly strained resources of state forestry agency resources.

California's devastating fires in Oakland and Berkeley in 1991 led to the formation of their Standardized Emergency Response System. The California legislature enacted a law requiring the state and local governments to adopt the standardized system, which is based on the Incident Command System.

The Standardized Emergency Response System significantly improved emergency management during recent floods compared with past responses to such disasters. Despite the improvement, the events had a major effect on the forestry agency by reducing the time it had to prepare for the upcoming fire season. Increasing the number of agencies that can help with emergency management and response would help better manage the effect of all-risk response on its primary mission- wildland fire management and suppression.

The USDA Forest Service's role has also expanded. The agency is more involved on the ground, particularly in areas near national forests, and has significantly increased its technical and financial assistance to states and affected communities in non-wildland fire emergencies and disasters. Traditional programs of State and Private Forestry branch of the Forest Service have been applied in the new context of disaster response and long-term mitigation.

Each Forest Service Region has one or more Principal Advisors that work with State Forestry Agencies and State Emergency Management Agencies when wildland fires have exceeded the capability of the State Forestry organization. The role of the Principal Advisor is to gather fire behavior information and complete an assessment of the fire situation so the State may request federal emergency management assistance. The role of the PA is not to make recommendations to the State, but remain a neutral party providing fire behavior information so the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) can make a decision as to whether or not the request will be approved based on the potential to constitute a major disaster.

There are many circumstances that FEMA must consider when making decisions to approve fire suppression assistance for any State. For calendar year 2001, floor costs will still be a consideration. Floor costs were described in the previous segment.

Most forestry agencies want to continue their involvement in non-wildland fire management and response but believe better communications and delegation of responsibility would help them balance their primary missions with the demands of all-risk response.

Coordinating responses and delivering services during and after an emergency are always challenges. In some states, the forestry agency and state emergency management agencies (SEMA's) have a long history of coordination and collaboration. In other states, the relationship is relatively recent. When roles and relationships are new, state forestry agencies may not understand how SEMA's function or how those agencies relate to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Conversely, FEMA and SEMA's may not be aware of the wide range of skills and resources that are potentially available to them through Incident Management Teams. Challenges also can arise because IMT's and SEMA's differ significantly in their organizational structure, legal mandates, and experience with disasters.

As the roles of Wildland Fire Agencies in non-fire disasters have changed, so have the working relationships among forestry and traditional emergency management agencies. Generally, though, SEMA's and FEMA have welcomed and used the expertise available to them from the Wildland Fire Community.

How many of you have been involved in the management of a major non-fire incident using ICS? What types of incidents were they?

How many of you have ever been involved in a FEMA assignment? Were there any differences in the assignments? What were some of the major differences?

A. Mobilization.

Your Team will be mobilized in the normal manner to which you are accustomed. It is not unusual for FEMA to activate teams and place them in a staging area. This is usually the case for Hurricanes and floods. The reason for this is that they don't know what the extent of the disaster will be until after it occurs. If the state doesn't ask for assistance then FEMA will not respond. However, your team will need to be in place in the event that you are needed for the disaster. This is valuable time you can use to order and obtain any special supplies you might need. It also gives the team members time to decide how they will operate.

B. Agency Administrator Briefing/ Delegation of Authority.

This process should be handled in the same manner as on a fire incident. However, there maybe some different guidelines imposed on your team. Mostly FEMA will give the team a fixed amount of money to operate with

and your team will have to stay under that amount. Your team will probably not have any input into this original figure. However, it is usually possible to come back and increase the amount if necessary. Therefore, the Finance people will need to track daily costs very closely. Don't be surprised if you are given broad authority in spending matters. During the Oklahoma City Bombing Incident the Team could purchase any item for under \$500,000, without higher approval.

You may also be limited to the number of people that you can use on the incident. There again this number is usually negotiable. However, it will have to be justified by your IMT members.

It's also very important for the IMT to understand whom it is they are working for on the incident. This may sound very simple, but in some cases it is very complex. The person working in ESF 4 should be able to help you with this in most cases.

C. Development of Alternative Strategies/ Select a Strategy.

In wildland fire we use the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) process to look at and evaluate, various strategies for achieving the incident objectives. For non- fire incidents this is not the case. Although no formal process has been developed for non-fire incidents it is important to apply a similar approach to these incidents.

Try and determine what it is that you are trying to accomplish. If you are running a receiving and distributing center, then you are moving freight. Operations will be involved in working with loading and unloading cargo. Will the cargo be coming in by trucks, airplanes, or railcar? Do you have the personnel to handle the loading and unloading of this cargo? Will you need any special types of equipment?

In any All Risk incident it is imperative to consider alternative strategies before deciding on tactics.

D. Personnel Management/ Safety

The welfare and safety of incident personnel and the public should remain the top priority on any incident. The LCES process can easily be adapted to FEMA assignments. Case in point, our team was assigned to work a hurricane assignment in St. Croix. There were three more hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean at the time. We decided that our safety zone would be back to Atlanta, GA and that our escape route would be on the C-130 delivering supplies. As you can see this gives a whole new meaning to the terms escape route and safety zones.

E. Community/ Media Relations.

As with wildland fire there can be intense community and media interest in these events, sometimes even more. For non-fire incidents the biggest thing you may have to explain is what your IMT is doing there. It is

important to try and keep everything in perspective and remember what you are there to do, help those in need. Your team may not have hot water to shower with and have to eat MRE's for a few meals. But remember there are some people without either food or water. So don't complain and don't brag to the media. On a hurricane incident in Miami, Florida, a military officer was bragging, to a news reporter, about how or IMT had gotten hot meals for the staging area personnel. As he was describing how good the prime rib steak was he had for dinner, the reporter asked " And what did the people in Homestead, Florida have for supper?" Guess what the lead story was for the six o'clock news?

F. External Influences and Considerations.

All of the same factors and pressures that can come to bear on a wildland fire can affect management on a FEMA assignment. On these incidents it is more common to not have "Full Authority", but rather be managing a portion of the incident. There will be many different agencies to work with and some of them maybe doing the same thing you are assigned to accomplish. Often times the military will be working along side or in close relationship to your team. Try to find out early how you can work together to accomplish the mission that is assigned. It will make life better for both of your groups.

Expect lots of visitors, the President, Congressmen, Senators, Governors, State Legislators, County Officials, Local Government, and Civic Leaders. All of these people want to be informed on what's going on and some of them will try to tell you how you need to be running things.

There will be lots of incidents within an Incident. These will have to be dealt with in the best and manner possible. Try not to get your team over extended. If you need more help ask for it or recommend it to the requesting agency.

FINAL TIPS FOR SUCCESS ON FEMA INCIDENTS.

- The kinds of incidents your team may get involved with on a FEMA assignment are almost limitless. Everyone will be different from the last one. However the principals of ICS will work, take time to educate the cooperators working with you to these principals.
- Planned events allow for prior planning and preparation but are usually tightly funded. The budget must be closely analyzed against the objectives to be sure they are realistic and within reach financially.
- On most FEMA assignments the worst is over. The IMT will be dealing with people under very stressful conditions and be trying to manage the effects of the disaster, rather than actually controlling the events of the disaster. You're dealing with "MOP-UP" operations.
- On some incidents, the local emergency service and law enforcement personnel may in fact be the victims of the incident. Critical Incident Stress Management Teams maybe be needed.

- The steps in dealing with the incident are the same as on a large fire, but the methodology will be different. Planning for instance will have difficulty predicting future conditions on the incident, tracking all resources (especially volunteers), and managing technical specialists and resources that are not trained in ICS. Intelligence gathering and analysis are very important. The reporting of this information can be vital to the success of the operation.
- Different states will want the information in different formats. This is because each FEMA Region is different. How you report the information may determine if the incident gets FEMA funding or not. This can cause a huge financial impact to the State.
- Logistics and Operations will have overlaps and will need to work closely together to be sure that they do not adversely impact each other. Both will be dealing with the same resources and in many cases similar tasks. Procurement maybe difficult due to competition for resources.
- Safety plays a very key role in pro-actively dealing with stress, adverse working conditions, team rotations and assignments to assure quality briefings, proper assignments and adequate support for all incident personnel. Hazards maybe unfamiliar and require analysis and guidelines.
- Finance will play a key role on FEMA incidents in projecting costs and wading through all the funding sources and regulations. Projections, actual costs and accurate estimates or the incident will be required and closely scrutinized by all officials. A Cost Unit Leader will be critical to meet the reporting requirements and dollar constraints.
- Information Officers will have large roles on these incidents, both internally and externally. In many cases this function will need to be split to adequately handle in internal needs and the external pressures.
- The Incident Commander will need to be aware of the politics of the areas in which they are working and realize that there will be overlapping jurisdictions.
- Air Operations will need to know that there maybe many other air operations on the incident, but not under the control of the IMT, that will need to be coordinated with.
- Specialist are important to order, no team will have all the expertise required. You may have to name request people by position.
- The Deputy Incident Commander will be important in helping the Incident Commander in dealing with all the jurisdictions and communications.
- Plan for the worst, come fully equipped, especially in communications and logistical support.

- Uniforms and symbols are important to fit the situation and to demonstrate management presence.
- Make sure you know whom it is that you work for, what they want done and what are the politics of the situation.