



Fire and Aviation Management

Briefing Paper

Date: March 21, 2003

Topic: Support of All Risk Incidents

Issue: The USDA Forest Service and the DOI agencies' missions appear to be expanding to include many national disasters. We have the incident management and support skills and abilities and are willing to respond in the face of any national emergency.

Background: Agencies have assisted with multiple incidents since the onset of Fiscal 2003. From the first commitment of a food distribution mission on the island of Chuuk at the beginning of the fiscal year, resources have been providing effective, efficient support to incidents. Other emergency response activities requiring assistance include: Response to Typhoon Pongsona in Guam and Chuuk; APHIS support for Exotic New Castle Disease (END); support to Australia firefighting efforts; and the Columbia shuttle disaster recovery effort. We continue to coordinate interagency/international emergency support activities.

At the same time, ongoing support to fire suppression and other fire management activities must continue.

Key Issues:

- The all-risk incidents have all been long-duration events that have required rotation of personnel and other resources. Some Incident Management Teams (IMTs), Area Command Teams, and other miscellaneous resources have exceeded 50 days on all risk assignments already this year (12 T1 IMTs, four T2 IMTs, and two Area Commands since January). Fire season has now begun and supervisors are already dealing with fatigue management issues. Pay cap restrictions may be another issue as the season progresses.
- To support these incidents, Coordination Centers and dispatch offices have been staffed in 2003 seven days a week for extended shifts. The majority of these centers are not funded nor staffed to meet these additional requirements over and above the wildland fire mission. The above-mentioned fatigue and pay cap issues are the same.
- Commitment of telecommunications equipment is at an unprecedented level for non-wildland fire support. For instance, the commitment of telecommunications equipment to the Columbia Shuttle response is second only to the 2002 Biscuit Fire.
- Large numbers of personnel have recently been committed to all-risk incidents. The END incident averaged almost 400 wildland fire personnel per day at its peak. The Columbia incident is averaging more than 5,000 personnel per day. It is expected that the shuttle recovery mission assignment will continue to require this level of staffing, which includes about 150 crews, through April 30.



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- With this level of commitment, there are already impacts in the ability of all the agencies to achieve targets on agency lands. For instance, the employees who respond to these incidents are the same employees who also plan and implement fuel reduction and prescribed fire programs, very high priority programs mandated by the National Fire Plan. Additionally, all the other non-fire programs are negatively impacted by the demands upon their employees who constitute the “militia,” a major component of our incident response capability.
 - All-risk assignments managed through the Federal Response Plan do not reimburse for base pay, with some exceptions. For the Forest Service alone, an estimated \$16 million will be spent through the duration of the shuttle recovery effort.
 - There is confusing and conflicting agency/interagency direction nationally on base pay supporting Federal Response Plan incidents. This has often limited managers’ willingness to commit personnel, not knowing whether their base accounts would be reimbursed.
 - Pay inequity issues are raised on non-wildland fire incidents: Full time-and-a-half pay is not available for non-wildland fire incidents; bi-weekly pay caps are lifted for some but not other agencies; hazardous duty pay is not defined or addressed in the all-risk environment, yet legitimate hazards are encountered.
 - There are numerous authorities issues raised on a daily basis. One example is the reimbursement of state and local governments in national emergencies. Partnerships that have been long established in fire management efforts are at risk if there is not a resolution for reimbursements. For instance, IMTs are configured with a significant number of key personnel from state and local cooperators. These cooperators generally have no legislative pay authorities to support non-wildland fire incidents. This has severely impacted IMT cohesiveness, and increased mobilization times as coordination centers have been forced to locate additional qualified federal employees to substitute. Another example is the difference in federal agency authorities to respond to all-risk incident management, particularly those which are not federally-declared disasters such as the END incident.
 - As homeland security levels increase, state and local government IMT members may not be available, even for wildland fire, as they have their own agency security responsibilities.
 - It is anticipated that Incident Management Teams and resources will be tasked to respond to future national all-risk emergencies. For instance, under national threat levels orange and red, we are required to put Type 1 IMTs on two-hour standby; in level red, we also must stage one Type 1 IMT.
 - The agencies are receiving daily contacts and requests from numerous federal departments and agencies for ICS training assistance since the release of the Presidential Directive on February 28, 2003. The Forest Service and other agencies are responding with personnel to meet these training requests.
 - Due to these all-risk commitments, up to 30% of regional training courses have been cancelled, due to lack of instructors and selected trainees. Similar impacts exist to national level courses. This results in reduced wildland fire preparedness.
 - Fiscal personnel assigned to IMTs are also the same personnel addressing competitive sourcing mandates; competitive sourcing has the higher priority, so often these employees are not being made available for IMT assignments.
 - It is important that the departments have a consistent view of priority criteria as established by the National MAC Group in view of the expanding missions/role. Resource management work is not being accomplished when these employees are assigned to support all risk/homeland security assignments.



It is paramount to the success of our respective bureau missions that leadership addresses and resolves the above issues in the context of Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5 as soon as possible.

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