

LESSONS LEARNED 2003

**SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES
FROM AAR ROLL-UPS**



**For: Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center
C/O The National Advanced Fire & Resource Institute
3265 East Universal Way
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- ☀ Scheduled Incident Commander conference calls with coordinating authorities are a good idea. Also consider scheduled conference calls between adjacent IMTs in multiple fire situations.
- ☀ Take full advantage of foreign expertise when assigned through exchange, study or support arrangements. Trust that assigned personnel have something to offer, accept them into your organization, show confidence in them and employ them to the fullness of their abilities.
- ☀ Initial orientation and briefing of the IC is essential to success, as is a formal delegation of authority. These tools unify perspectives, information and expectations.

LESSONS LEARNED RELATED TO THE FINANCE FUNCTION

Use of Incident Business Assistant (IBA)

Background: On one incident, an area command team (ACT) filled the position of Incident Business Assistant (IBA). However, some problems occurred between the IBA and other team members. The Incident Management Team (IMT) was able to overcome this challenge by addressing information flow with the IBA and focusing on closing the communications loop with all players.

Lessons Learned:

- ☀ By filling the IBA position an ACT can improve the quality, oversight, and closure of the finance job.
- ☀ Regardless of whom the IBA works for, when an Area Command is in place, the IBA needs to coordinate very closely with the Area Command team and should be considered as a member of the area command team.
- ☀ When an IBA works with an IMT, introduce them to the IMT members, their functions and their relationship to the IBA duties. Treat the IBA as a part of the team and integrate their responsibilities with those of other IMT members.

The Finance Function on a Non-Wildland Fire Incident: Space Shuttle Columbia Recovery Effort

Background: The recovery effort brought together a mix of agencies that normally do not work together. Working under the Incident Command System and unified command, various local, state and federal agencies including the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA), the environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the USDA Forest Service, the Texas Forest Service (TFS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) were able to respond to the concerns and uncertainties of coming to an assignment such as

the space shuttle recovery. According to respondents, it worked well that each agency applied its own fiscal rules for its portion of the recovery effort. Buying Teams and IBAs were assigned to this complex incident, a practice that, according to respondents, was very successful.

However, other respondents report that the Procurement Unit Leader performed services that are usually assigned to the Buying Team. Consequently, many of the Procurement Unit Leader's responsibilities fell to the Finance Section Chief. According to respondents, for assignments such as this one, an additional procurement person should be assigned to the Procurement Unit, with responsibility for paying vendors, making emergency purchases, and assisting with auditing and posting equipment time during slower periods of the assignment.

Lessons Learned:

- ☀ Assign Buying Teams and IBAs to complex incidents when an IMT is responsible for a majority of the management of a non-wildland fire incident.

- ☀ When working on multi-agency incidents, consider having each agency apply its own fiscal rules for its portion of the mission, rather than attempting to unify fiscal rules.

- ☀ When the needs of the incident require that the Procurement Unit function as a Buying Team, order additional personnel for the Procurement Unit.

Effective Approach to Cost Containment

Background: An IMT considered its ability to overcome a confrontational approach to cost containment and evolve to a partnership with the host agency to be one of its successes. The IMT reports that it initially met with cost containment measures, implemented by the host unit, which the IMT viewed as micro-management. In addition, early in the incident, these cost containment measures had the unintentional consequence of increasing some costs.

The IMT requested and received a review team from the Regional Office to evaluate the situation. This action proved invaluable, and helped the relationship between the IMT and the host unit to evolve into a partnership. The host unit recognized the need to provide a work environment that allows the IMT to incur costs that allow them to improve working conditions and manage cumulative fatigue in the Finance and Planning Sections. This ability to improve the work environment and mitigate team fatigue is critical for the success of an IMT over the course of a long fire season. An IMT cannot expect its people to work in what is essentially an office environment where temperatures exceed 100 degrees and still expect high performance and a quality product.

Lessons Learned:

- ☀ Cost containment begins and ends with the IMT, with support from the host unit. A partnership between the IMT and the host agency provides the most effective approach to cost containment. A micro-managing approach to cost containment by the host agency creates a confrontational relationship and can cause unintentional consequences for members of the IMT and may even actually increase costs.

 - ☀ When the IMT and host agency have different approaches to cost containment, requesting and receiving a review team from the host unit's supervisory office can facilitate background and resolve the issues.
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National Contracts for Crews and Engines

Background: IMTs reported that, while national contracts for crews and engines provided better resources than have been seen in the past, extensive use of contract resources created an unusual burden on their teams' finance sections.

One IMT pointed out that a good Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) can make a substantial difference, because they can effectively assure that resources fulfill their contract obligations. According to this team, a COR is needed for each IMT or, at the very least, at each Area Command. Respondents reported that there were many problems with crews from the Pacific Northwest, particularly the English-speaking requirement. One IMT handled these issues before the crews checked in to the incident, and they believe that this proactive approach saved the IMT countless problems.

An IMT assigned to the recovery effort reported a similar experience with contract resources. The host agencies assigned one COR and one Interagency Contracting Officer Representative (IACR) to the entire incident, which required the COR and IACR to represent crews assigned to all four branches of the incident, plus the staging area.

This IMT also reports that the heavy use of contract crews resulted in numerous potentially serious language barrier incidents in the medical unit. Additionally, with as many as 49 contract crews under one warehouse roof, there were several violent conflicts between crewmembers during periods when the COR and IACR were not available. The IMT's Human Resource Specialist was required to resolve these issues in the absence of the COR and IACR.

In addition, the IMT found that CORs responsible for contract crews need to be very familiar with the contracts. In one instance, when the IMT first arrived, the COR on-site gave erroneous contract interpretations in answer to contract questions.

Finally, with the heavy use of contract crews, the IMT increased the cost of their branch by as much as \$100,000 per day (25%) in part because contract provisions were not enforced. The agencies paid (through contract provisions) the contractors to provide PPE, boots, transportation, and other minor services, and then provided those same items to contractor personnel at government expense when needed.

Lessons Learned:

- ☼ Extensive use of contracted resources continues to place strain on IMTs, particularly the finance section.
- ☼ A good Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) is essential for managing large numbers of contract resources to ensure that resources fulfill their contract obligations. A COR may serve each IMT or, at the very least, a COR should work at each Area Command.
- ☼ CORs that are responsible for contract crews need to be fully familiar with the contracts.
- ☼ Contracts may need to include an alternate pay schedule when circumstances require the government to provide goods and services such as personal protective gear, clothing, laundry and transportation.
- ☼ Protocols need to be developed to ensure contract crew CORs are available on the incident 24 hours per day once the crew numbers exceed some threshold (perhaps 10 - 15 crews.) Having the COR staying in a motel does not work because the problems tend to erupt at night.

Emergency Equipment Agreements

Background: One IMT reports that the team met with better success at signing up equipment quickly and efficiently when compared to other fires in the same area because they went through the cooperating state agency. Some Federal agency requirements significantly add to delays in getting equipment signed up and operating, even in emergency situations.

Lesson Learned: IMTs may be able to sign up equipment quickly and efficiently by working with a cooperating state agency.

Location of Buying Team and the Incident Supply/Ordering Units

Background: One IMT reported that having the Buying Team and the Incident Supply/Ordering units located in the same office increased ordering and procurement efficiency because IMT and expanded dispatch personnel were able to work together, communicate efficiently and without delay, answer questions, and resolve ordering and purchasing issues immediately.

Lesson Learned: When Buying Teams are assigned, consider co-locating them with the incident Supply/Ordering Units at the incident to improve their efficiency, effectiveness and cooperation.

Payment Processes for Services Provided Under MOU

Background: One IMT reported that they were challenged by an inability to pay for services performed by other government agencies under a memorandum of understanding (MOU.) For example, the IMT provided emergency road signing through an existing regional MOU with the state Department of Transportation, but no payment process was in place to pay for the service. The team overcame this challenge by having their Procurement Unit Leader put together a service agreement providing the basis for payment.

Lesson Learned: Service agreements or other payment processes are needed to pay for services that other government agencies provide under memoranda of understanding. In the future the agencies need to systematically provide IMTs with appropriate templates. However, for now, IMTs need to be prepared to create these payment mechanisms on their incident.

Vehicle Insurance Coverage For Government Employees Driving Outside the Country

Background: Forest Service employees who entered Canada driving a Forest Service vehicle were not covered by the Tort system in case of an accident. Therefore, private insurance coverage was purchased and checked out to individuals/vehicles as needed. Washington State employees were already covered by their agency.

Lesson Learned: Agency employees may not be legally covered by their agency when driving an agency vehicle outside the country. Private, supplemental insurance is available and can fill the gap.
