

Hurricane Katrina - Louisiana Support

California Interagency Incident Management Team 2

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September 2 - 20, 2005

AAR Rollup - Lessons Learned

CIIMT 2 received two separate mission taskings during their assignment to Louisiana. The first was to establish and manage a base camp operation in support of the **Disaster Mortuary Response Team (DMORT)** at St. Gabriel, LA. That assignment began September 3 and continued through September 12. The second mission task was to manage a 1600-person Base Camp to support **Urban Search and Rescue (US&R)** operations at Metairie, LA. That assignment began September 13 and continued through September 20. Both missions were unique for an IMT, in that management of the operational component was not an assigned mission task. This required the IMT command staff to fit into a unique relationship with the operational component at both locations. At the DMORT Base, it was with the DMORT operations section chief. At the US&R Base, it was with the **Incident Support Team (IST)** incident commander. Both operations provided unique challenges and rewards.

1. What was the most notable success at the incident that others may learn from?

- **Exposing the DMORT organization to the Incident Command System.** DMORT personnel were from the medical, mortician, and law enforcement professions and had little or no training in ICS. When it was recognized that there was no clear planning cycle, written action plan, or way of validating operational success, CIIMT 2 offered the DMORT OSC assistance in the planning function. This included bringing in basic ICS concepts and procedures such as the IAP, the planning meeting, written objectives, ICS 204's, and an organization chart. While it was not our mission task, the importance of exposing DMORT to ICS was viewed as a benefit not only to them, but to any IMT that would follow. Since DMORT was tasked under the National Response Plan, their operational component should function under ICS. Anything that CIIMT 2 could do to further that implementation was viewed as a success. While this attempt was basic and non-traditional according to ICS (no 215 or conventional planning meetings), it established the groundwork for future training and implementation of ICS.
- **Maintaining the financial integrity of the DMORT.** Clearly identifying which expenses could be ordered and purchased through the IMT channels and which should be procured through FEMA channels. The frustrations experienced by the DMORT using FEMA's procurement channels to obtain supplies in a timely manner, often caused them to attempt to circumvent the FEMA ordering and purchasing channels. More than once CIIMT 2 was asked to purchase or otherwise procure items in support of DMORT operational needs. The CIIMT 2 successfully orchestrated a meeting between FEMA logistics and the DMORT logistics to work out the lines of authority, processes, and contacts. The most important clarification was identifying who was responsible for ordering logistical base vs. operational supplies at this base camp. In the end, a clear

division was developed and a positive and active procurement process had been established for the DMORT logistical section through their FEMA contact.

- **Unified Command for USAR Operations.** A unified command was established for USAR operations comprising FEMA, US&R (IST), various law enforcement agencies, military commands and CIIMT 2. The complexity of the search and rescue mission required daily interagency coordination and planning to literally save lives. Unique components of the operation included tasking military and law enforcement units with protection of the search teams, identifying Coast Guard, Fish & Wildlife Service, and other agencies with water transportation needs, and requesting field logistical support from various military units (82nd Airborne & ANG). Establishing a unified command provided for deliberate daily communication between the represented agencies, brought ownership and buy in to the operational plan, and established working relationships that would have otherwise been distant and disconnected. A daily Commanders meeting facilitated this relationship. The unified command structure was unique in that it involved FEMA, fire department, law enforcement, and military commands.

2. What were some of the most difficult challenges faced and how were they overcome?

- **Many of the personnel at both base camps were not well versed in ICS.** According to the National Response Plan both DMORT and US&R/IST should have been NIMS compliant. It was obvious that compliancy has been widely interpreted among these and other groups responding under the NRP. For DMORT, the basic ability to communicate strategically, identify organizational leadership, and display a plan that all could agree upon was non-existent when CIIMT 2 arrived. This lack of planning and organizational leadership presented many operational issues both internal to DMORT and relationally to CIIMT 2. As mentioned in question #1, CIIMT 2 attempted to implement the planning function of ICS. The first step was an opportunistic approach by identifying those personnel in DMORT who were interested to learn ICS vs. those who were ambivalent or otherwise not interested. In many cases, incremental changes in processes and terminology were utilized to gain acceptance. Realistically, the long-term success of this endeavor depends upon a deliberate effort to train and implement ICS down to the technician level in DMORT. For the operations, ICS was actively implemented at all levels. Many of the participants had a good understanding and operational knowledge of ICS while some only had the online training.
- **For the US&R/IST organization it was evident there were issues with qualification and incident complexity.** Some of the individuals performing their IST positions had not taken their ICS positional training. Others had the training but never performed in the positions they were assigned to, hence were placed in positions without the assistance of a mentor or trainer. The full implementation of ICS within US&R/IST is critical. A component of that implementation includes a training & qualification process (which means much more than taking a class). US&R must also acknowledge the limited capabilities of their ISTs and be proactive in recognizing and requesting outside assistance, aka, IMT. IMTs can provide the immediate assistance in logistics and planning while providing the mentor/trainer that is currently missing.

3. **What changes additions or deletions are recommended to Wildland Fire Training Curriculums?**

- **“S” series curriculums should acknowledge the existence of all risk incidents.** We are doing a disservice to students who attend S-420 & S-520 if we are not open to exploring the applications, problems, and solutions these courses are teaching relative to all risk. While it is important to maintain the integrity of the wildland fire theme in these courses, they are missing the mark if they do not explore the full complexity, and show the applicability and modifications necessary for IMTs when faced with these different scenarios.

4. **What issues were not resolved to your satisfaction and need further review? Based on what was learned, what is your recommendation for resolution?**

- **FEMA management of DMORT and US&R teams as mentioned above.** While US&R is well on it’s way to implementing ICS, it would appear DMORT has not even begun. Both teams are experts in their field technically, but DMORT lacks the organizational structure in both logistics and planning that ICS would provide. US&R also needs help in managing their personnel assigned to ISTs. Training in NIMS and implementation of a qualification process will go along way to bringing up the performance of both DMORT and US&R/IST.
- **Fixing the ordering process for these teams within the FEMA framework.** Both DMORT and US&R experience similar issues with placing orders, following up on orders, tracking orders, and receiving orders. This frustration was voiced continually by all levels of these organizations. How this problem is fixed should be discussed with the assistance of the Wildland Fire logistical and finance community to help them streamline their procedures.
- **Use of IMTs in support of US&R operations.** There was a definite resistance to accepting the help of an IMT by the US&R/IST. The resistance was based both in perception as well as territorialism. This issue will not be resolved easily. There clearly is a benefit to using an IMT on larger, more complex incidents. Individuals must learn to lay aside their personal feelings, egos, and focus on what is best organizationally and operationally. Not only does this free up US&R personnel to perform their operational mission, it provides a management structure with the experience and organization which can quickly focus on support and planning while IST manages the operational and safety aspect of the assignment. This can be implemented in several ways. See below;
- **Identifying US&R Incident Complexities.** This fits with the previous remark. US&R should develop an incident complexity matrix whereby they can determine their organizational and logistical needs prior to engagement. A simple low, moderate, and high adjective rating. A US&R/IST can provide the “initial attack” and low complexity incident support. An IMT with moderate planning and logistical skills would then be ordered and used on those types of incidents that required a middle-range of incident support. On highly complex incidents, an IMT with advanced skills in managing large geographical, political, and integrated organization should be used.

