

The Learning Curve

TEN LESSONS LEARNED and BEST PRACTICES

AFTER INCIDENT REPORT SUMMARIES SECOND EDITION - 2002

INCIDENT COMMUNICATIONS:

Unified Command in Fire Use

In a recent fire use incident success was achieved among the Unified Command consisting of two state agencies and a federal agency. These organizations were able to interact effectively because clearly delineated responsibilities were agreed upon up front. All involved understood that the goal was to suppress the fire on private lands and manage it for resource benefit on the federal land. Establishing and then clearly communicating these objectives to all responders was key to this understanding.

Host Agency Participation

An initial goal that cannot be overemphasized is the forming of a cooperative liaison between the host agency and the responding Incident Management Team (IMT). This liaison should include the active participation of an agency level administrator and resource advisor at every briefing and planning meeting. Since the IMT is responsible to the agency administrator, this participation needs to occur through all phases of the incident.

SAFETY:

Safety Component in Briefings

During all operations briefings, each spokesperson should include remarks about safety concerns specific to their section or unit. These additional remarks by each speaker focusing on safety add emphasis to the various safety issues being confronted. These remarks also broaden the overall safety insight of the entire incident command structure and are easily incorporated.

FIRE INFORMATION:

Effectiveness of Town Meetings

During the initial attack phases of two large Southwest Oregon wildland fires, a Type 2 IMT assigned to the incidents took immediate action to provide answers to the public's growing number of questions and concerns. The IMT set up multiple town meetings in local communities and arranged for the incident commander, operations section chief, and an agency administrator to be present to provide updated briefings and answer questions. These early town meetings

proved instrumental in disseminating accurate first-hand information to the local communities and media. They also helped establish rapport and credibility, well before the fires grew in size and complexity.

OPERATIONS:

Unique Suppression Tool

Incident commanders and operations personnel should be alert to unorthodox equipment that may be used as aids in suppression in some geographic areas. Four-inch standpipes capable of being charged to 600 PSI and normally used to make snow at a ski area delivered large volumes of water on a wildland fire in California. This tactic was a significant aid in the containment of one flank of this fire.

Large Spot Fire Threats

On a recent wildland fire in the canyon country of Colorado, airtanker support was instrumental in containing a 50-acre spot fire in a vertical canyon threatening nearby residences. The initial Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) had prohibited aerial retardant use due to a nearby river but the agency administrator saw the need to make a change in the WFSA when fire behavior predictions threatened this subdivision. Two medium helicopters delivered water during the day and an airtanker laid a retardant line to help hold the spot fire overnight. The combination of these air resources worked to hold the continuous fuels preventing the fire from making a run up the canyon walls toward the structures. The fine performance of all the aircraft pilots in containing this large spot fire was acknowledged by the IMT at the end of the incident.

PLANNING:

New Mapping Tool Available

FireMapper (Thermal-Imaging Radiometer) is available on request through the Geographical Area Coordination Centers in Northern and Southern California. (It can also be ordered for fires outside of California). This new technology measures the intensity and dynamics of fire fronts – properties that affect the rate of fire spread, smoke production, and forest damage – and makes fire information readily and widely available. This remote sensor platform is carried aboard a U.S. Forest Service owned aircraft. Once an incident is flown, the resulting map data can be posted to the Web and pulled down for use without the need for an interpreter. Dr. Phillip Riggan at the Riverside Fire Lab in California is lead on the project. To view FireMapper images from recent fires go to: <http://www.fireimaging.com>.

Tapping GIS Resources

If the host agency has GIS capabilities, a variety of local maps can be produced from data layers that will assist in the management of the incident. For example, maps containing roads and trails, structures, power lines, helispots, vegetation

types, and cultural resources can be generated. The real value of GIS, however, is its analysis capabilities to support decision-making. By using GIS you can determine the best site for an Incident Command Post (ICP), containment lines, escape routes and safety zones. For more information on firefighting and GIS go to: <http://www.esri.com/news/arcuser/0100/firetools.html>. For an article on how GIS provides critical support for wildfire response go to: <http://www.esri.com/news/arcuser/0101/geomac.html>.

LOGISTICS:

County Incident Command Trailer Used

Incident commanders should consider contacting local Sheriff's Department, Office of Emergency Management (OEM), or similar local organizations regarding availability and use of their incident command trailer. In a recent wildland fire in rural Wyoming, there were no land phone lines, poor to non-existent cellular phone coverage and poor two-way agency radio coverage. A County-owned incident command trailer was obtained. It came equipped with a satellite telephone as well as powerful radio antennas that allowed for phone and radio communications between the incident command post, fireline personnel and area dispatch.

FINANCE:

Structural Loss Assessment

Where there is a high risk of structural involvement, the need for a damage assessment team should be anticipated and ordered commensurate with the potential number of structures at risk. The goal should be to have enough personnel available on scene to complete an initial damage assessment within 24 hours.

Remember – A lesson learned is applying knowledge gained to a real world environment. Please pass this on to others.

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October 2002