

THE LEARNING CURVE

FIVE LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES FROM AFTER INCIDENT REPORTS JUNE 2003 – 4TH EDITION

INCIDENT COMMUNICATIONS:

“Common Speak” Lingo Needed

The Exotic Newcastle Disease (END) is a highly contagious and deadly virus that can affect all species of birds. It is one of the most infectious diseases to affect poultry worldwide. The only way to eradicate this disease is by the rapid destruction of all infected birds, imposition of strict quarantines, and an in-depth surveillance program. When two groups as diverse as the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the Interagency Incident Management Teams (IMT) were assigned to the eradication process, they soon realized they could not communicate effectively unless each group’s acronyms usage was mutually understood.

Lesson Learned: This led to the Incident Information staff putting together two acronym guides for APHIS and Incident Command System (ICS) terminologies. All IMTs and APHIS staff then incorporated the use of these guides throughout the incident structure. To access the *How to Speak APHIS* guide, go to:

http://www.wildfirelessons.net/Library/Emergency_Mgt/How_To_Speak_APHIS.doc

To access the *How to Speak Incident Command* guide, go to:

http://www.wildfirelessons.net/Library/IncidentMgt/How_To_Speak_Incident_Command.doc

Based on the success of these guides to date, one of the resulting recommendations was for an APHIS representative and an Interagency IMT person knowledgeable in ICS terminology to jointly expand these lists into a more comprehensive guide for future utilization.

SAFETY:

Using Safety Technical Specialists

The multiple safety-related objectives of the Exotic Newcastle Disease (END) incident were satisfied using combined safety staffs from the Incident Management Team (IMT) and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). APHIS assigns a safety officer to its Regional Emergency Animal Disease Eradication Organization (READEO.) This organization is activated when there is a disease outbreak in a region.

Lesson Learned: A technical advisor or specialist skilled in dealing with biological agents may also be necessary to support the APHIS and IMT safety officers. A resource list of qualified individuals with specific technical skills that might be required should be available in each agency’s preplan to facilitate their rapid deployment and integration into an incident organization. These specialists can then be easily incorporated into the

ICS organization as either staff assigned to the safety officers or as technical specialists within the Planning Section.

Emergency Plan Drills

IMTs supported FEMA, NASA, and the Texas Forest Service during the Columbia Shuttle Recovery effort. This incident occurred during the Southern states' spring tornado season. The potential for severe weather was therefore a significant safety consideration.

Lesson Learned: One of the IMTs revised the existing Severe Thunderstorm/Tornado emergency plan and executed three live-action drills in a three-week period to ensure familiarization of the crews in Texas with these plans. The IMT equated conducting these drills to proficiency in Standards for Survival and fire shelter deployment. The emergency plan also detailed evacuation and sheltering of personnel at three separate facilities that the IMT managed in the event severe weather occurred. In addition, detection, notification, proper personnel response actions, and resumption of normal operations were covered in severe weather procedures that were all part of the written briefing package given to each crew on arrival. To view the briefing package that contains the emergency plan, go to:

http://www.wildfirelessons.net/Library/Emergency_Mgt/IC_Expectations.doc

INCIDENT INFORMATION:

Educating Forest Neighbors

During a 2003 Michigan wildfire, private residents adjacent to the local forest saw the positive results of their fire prone property protection efforts. They had taken the time to remove woodpiles, debris, and brush piles away from their residences. They had also raked leaves and kept the grass mowed. One owner, though, lost a cabin, trailer, two sheds, and a garage because long grass and leaves were left unattended rather than removed before the spring fire season. The local forest understands that educating these fire prone property owners is a continuous effort and is committed to the process.

Lesson Learned: The forest now uses the striking visual examples from this fire to illustrate that homeowner efforts really are effective. The results of this project are now being incorporated into the local Firewise and other community education programs. In addition, the summer seasonal fire staff is being tasked with conducting door to door visits to explain these property protection techniques. These visits will include distributing pamphlets regarding protection techniques to fire prone property owners. To view photographs of how properties can be protected through private property owner efforts, go to:

http://www.wildfirelessons.net/After_Incident_Reports/2003_AIRs/Type_4/East_Lake_Mi_kel_AIR.pdf

PLANNING/OPERATIONS:

Strategic Application of Resources

During the Columbia Shuttle Recovery, 20 member search teams were assigned to Divisions with the task of searching for shuttle debris within two nautical miles from the centerline of the Columbia flight path. Search and rescue experts were assigned with each of the strike teams to assist the searchers in effectively using the search grid system. This statistically designed grid search consisted of 100% coverage of an area with at least a 75% probability of detection target. Technical specialists begin the process by physically identifying the grid to be searched on the ground after which they identified and contacted landowners to receive permission to search on their land. These specialists then identified the necessary access routes to the grid site. The grid method is conducted by searchers lining up next to each other and walking in a line covering the area directly in front of them. Recovery and decontamination teams were also assigned to each Division* and were then called upon as debris was located. Because of the potential toxic and pyrotechnic material component of the debris, these Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) contractors would then identify and recover the items which were then catalogued for NASA evaluation.

Lesson Learned: A unique and specialized all risk assignment requires the extensive dynamic and strategic preplanning in the search areas before search and recovery resources could be assigned. It was imperative that the technical specialists projected resource needs days ahead of search and recovery team assignments to facilitate pre-search contact of private land owners, determining access routes, and laying out the search grids. Any glitch in the preplanning process altered how and where resources could be deployed.

**Use of ICS terminology of "Divisions" for this incident was incorrect and should have instead been identified as "Groups" because the mission was functional, not geographical in scope. The various teams were performing their specific functions in different geographical areas each day. Components of each division were not assigned, mapped, or tracked as they would be in a wildfire incident by physical location, but by the group or type of skill resource they provided and their deployment availability to the recovery efforts.*