

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
Tucson, Arizona 85706**

June 1, 2004

LESSONS LEARNED RELATED TO THE LIAISON FUNCTION

Area Command Liaison with Agency Representatives

Background: On one fire, three agency representatives were assigned, including representatives of local and state government agencies who were not the delegating authorities. However, the Area Command Team (ACT) did not include an assigned Liaison Officer. The team recognized the critical need to establish a position to provide a day-to-day interface with the agency representatives, and to staff that position with a person who understood the cultures of the agencies the team was dealing with (city, county and state agencies other than the natural resource agency with jurisdiction).

Lesson Learned: With the complexity of incidents increasing, area command teams should formalize the Liaison Officer role for the future. The Liaison Officer is a standard component of the ICS as part of the Command Staff and that should be reflected in area command teams.

The Importance of the Liaison Officer

Background: Several Incident Management Teams (IMTs) reported the actions of their Liaison Officers as notable successes during 2003. Generally speaking, IMTs found that their use of a Liaison Officer greatly increased the team's ability to coordinate with other agencies, organizations and private citizens; and provided improved cooperation, enhanced credibility and reduced time demands on other members of the Command and General Staff.

One IMT found that having a Liaison Officer that understood the intricacies of working with county and state officials proved invaluable. On their incident, cooperation between the IMT and the local agencies needed improvement when the IMT arrived, because there were hard feelings from experiences on previous incidents and with previous teams. The IMT found that dealing with difficult personalities, and issues that existed before they arrived, detracted from their ability to do what was in the best interest of the public. Some local emergency managers, unfortunately, let their ego get in the way of doing the right thing. The IMT included two non-federal Liaison Officers, who, according to the IMT, did an excellent job of keeping lines of communication open between all cooperators. Another IMT benefited when the County provided a person funded by the National Fire Plan to help as a local liaison with landowners.