



Lessons Learned



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region
Fire and Aviation Management



Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Rita and Wilma

November 14—15, 2005



The devastation experienced in the southern region of the United States this year was of epic proportions. As Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Rita, and finally, Wilma reached landfall so did eight of the interagency Incident Management Teams from the Pacific Southwest Region. Several of our Teams not only responded once, but the majority of them responded multiple times. Their experiences were vast, the duration long, and in many ways, the assignments were life changing—not soon to be forgotten by anyone involved. The Team's dedication to the relief effort and assisting those directly impacted by these disasters, I feel, mirrors that of our leaders in Washington and rises to the expectations of the American people. Though the experiences were rewarding and the Teams made a difference, in many ways they felt their contributions fell short of their true capabilities as National and Regional incident management teams.

After the Teams returned home, I felt we had an obligation to do what we can to make future responses more effective and efficient. Therefore, the decision was made to bring the folks together who best know how things went during the incidents—the incident management teams themselves. For two days, we took the opportunity to look back on the Teams' numerous accomplishments, as well as the lessons they learned, the issues that remain unresolved, and when appropriate, recommendations were made, from our perspective, how the decision makers of our agency, our sister firefighting agencies, and other emergency support functions can develop solutions to resolve those issues.

The National Response Plan was written with the intent that it, “would incorporate the best practices and procedures from incident management disciplines and integrate them into a unified structure.” In the same spirit, we feel it pertinent, through this report, to review our experiences and make relevant recommendations to fulfill that intent.

We want to thank the USDA Forest Service's Southern Region and the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the opportunity to respond and assist with the relief efforts. We ask this report receive consideration in the spirit in which it was written—to fulfill the visions of those who originally saw the need to incorporate the principles and concepts of the Incident Command System into the Federal emergency response system. A system the firefighting agencies have practiced for years and know to be truly successful.

Ray Quintanar

Ray Quintanar, Director

Fire and Aviation Management

Pacific Southwest Region, USDA Forest Service

Introduction

Fifteen Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) are identified in the National Response Plan (NRP). These ESFs were designed in an effort to provide coordination of federal interagency support to both States and other federal entities during Incidents of National Significance—under both the Stafford Act and non-Stafford Act incidents. Developed as a means of interagency coordination during all phases of incident management, some ESFs provide resources, support and program implementation during the early stages of an incident, while others are intended to hold a more prominent role in the recovery phase.

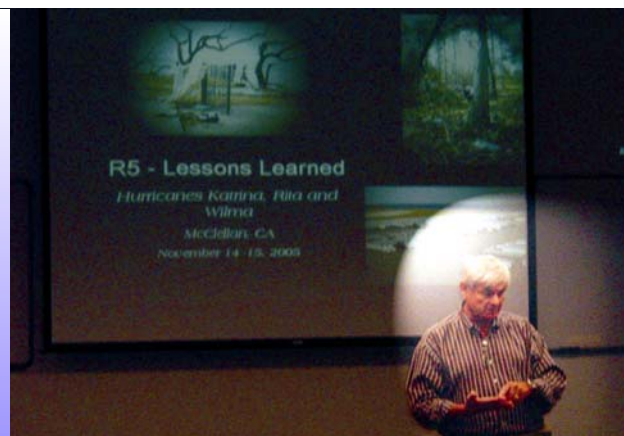


Although the NRP identifies the USDA Forest Service as the primary agency for ESF-4, Firefighting, the Agency is also identified as a support agency for 10 of the remaining 14 functions. As such, during the recent hurricane relief efforts in the Gulf coastal region of the United States and throughout Florida, there were a total of eight interagency Incident Management Teams (IMTs) from the Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5) mobilized in response to the devastation suffered from Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Rita and Wilma. The Region’s five National Incident Management Teams each responded for multiple hurricane assignments, while the three local (regional) teams responded for one rotation each. There were many independent resources from the Region, both personnel and equipment, who responded, as well. To date, the numbers continue to rise, as IMTs and independent resources continue mobilization. As of publication of this report, more than 3,000 resources and overhead have mobilized from Region 5.

Teams	Rotations	Days
Feser (T1)	2	12/18
Molumby (T1)	2	21/14
Pincha-Tulley (T1)	2	30/16
Gelobter (T1)	2	30/18
Cable (T1)	1	21
Dietrich (T1)	1	Remains Assigned
Smith (T2)	1	28
Johnson (T2)	1	22
Sinclear (T2)	1	30
Crews	54	
Overhead	808	
Buying Teams	2	



*“Help us to help them”—Ray Quintanar,
Director, R5 Fire & Aviation
Management*



Purpose

With so many resources from the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, having been committed to the numerous hurricane relief efforts over the past months, we felt it important to take a look back, take account of our Incident Management Team’s accomplishments, identify the lessons learned, and unresolved issues, as the relief efforts continue.

It is the expectation of Region 5 that the USDA Forest Service will continue to support these disasters throughout the United States as they occur, therefore, we have an obligation to improve our mobilizations and service to those directly impacted during those times. As a result, a two-day lessons learned exercise was conducted at the Wildfire Training and Conference Center at McClellan, California, on November 14—15, 2005, involving key staff and all but one of the Region 5 Incident Commanders, who had experiences and recommendations to share. One IMT remains on assignment in Louisiana and was unable to participate. The goals of the meeting were to identify:

- ways to better assist FEMA in the future;
- ways FEMA can better utilize the Incident Management Teams in the future; and
- training recommendations for the Incident Management Team members, as well as FEMA and the other Emergency Support Functions.

Meeting Format

The meeting was facilitated using a modified Lessons Learned format devised of the following questions:

1. What went well?
2. What were the challenges faced by the Teams, and how were they overcome?
3. What are the unresolved issues, and how do you recommend they are solved?
4. What are the training needs and for whom?



The Team’s mission assignments were varied and ranged from establishing base camps for relief and recovery workers to assisting the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) in Louisiana and operating the major Federal Operational Staging Areas and Receiving and Distribution Centers throughout the region, ensuring the commodities were delivered and distributed in timely manner. The successes and challenges faced by the Teams were as different as were their assignments; but at the same time, in many cases, they were the same. We will call those the common threads.

Common Threads

The following were the common threads addressed during the two-day Lessons Learned session. These issues will be expanded on throughout the report:

- USDA Forest Service consistent message regarding participation in all-risk incidents
- Mission Assignments
 - Delegation of Authority (Broad Objectives) vs. Functionalism
 - Appropriate Organization
 - Mobilization and Team Configuration
 - Better Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities
 - Use of Unified Command
- Concepts of ICS
- Single Point of Ordering
- Recommended Training
- Agency Exit Strategy

Consistent Message Regarding Support for FEMA Incidents

As the level of devastation from the numerous storms directly impacting the southeast region of the United States rose, so did the expectations of FEMA, through the NRP, for assistance from the USDA Forest Service.



FOSA NAS JAX (Hurricane Wilma)



DMORT (Hurricane Katrina)



Stennis (Hurricane Katrina)



Each Region 5 IMT mobilized at the request of FEMA and the USDA Forest Service Southern Region, Region 8, received an in-briefing from the Fire and Aviation Management (FAM) staffs from the Southern Region. Although FEMA’s expectations rose as the season drew on, during the in-briefings from the Region 8 FAM staffs, it was not the impression of the Region 5 IMTs’ that Region 8’s support mirrored that expected by FEMA. In fact, several National IMTs were directed to perform the tasks as requested by FEMA but not to become essential; get out as soon as possible; and it was alright to make some mistakes.

Although the Teams understood the toll extended support from this year’s level of hurricane relief efforts can take on the Region, it was their concerted opinion that senior officials of the USDA Forest Service need to determine if the agency is fully engaged in these relief efforts or not. If so, we need to fully support these activities across the board; and if one Region is extremely impacted, as Region 8 has been this year, it is recommended senior management recognize that fact and provide supplemental, operational support from other less affected Regions.

Mission Assignments

Delegation of Authority

One of the resounding concerns was with mission assignments and the lack of a delegation of authority from FEMA, as well as the varied numbers of entities the IMTs had an obligation to report. Although the NRP defines the Roles and Responsibilities of an ESF primary agency as the Federal executive agent under the Federal Coordinating Officer to accomplish the ESF mission, the same plan indicates that when an ESF is activated in response to an Incident of National Significance, support agencies are responsible to conduct operations when requested by the ESF primary agency.



“Hurricane Katrina was the first time FEMA utilized the ESF-4 as part of the ERT-A. This really helped put us ahead of the power curve” —Rusty Witwer, ESF-4, USDA Forest Service

FEMA, as the primary agency, feels they are unable to issue a “Delegation of Authority” because there are certain functions they do not want to relegate to the IMT. As with any delegation of authority issued by an Agency Administrator, FEMA could retain the authority for any operational component and still issue the Teams a set of broad objectives, much the same as is done during any wildfire incident.



Since the USDA Forest Service is a support agency to the majority of the other ESFs, it is felt a broader role by the incident management teams would be appropriate. By issuing a delegation of authority with broad objectives to the teams, the incident management teams would be more effectively utilized and better able to assist those adversely affected by the incident. Management of logistical support components of an incident without delegated command and control authority for the overall incident is an inefficient use of an incident management team.

Appropriate Organization

The command and control organization used by FEMA is extensive and elaborate, hampering the flow of information up and down the chain of command. In some cases, as in Mississippi, the Incident Commander reported to five different entities—FEMA Operations at the JFO level, Area Command at the Regional level, the ESF-4, state government representatives, and local government representatives (see Organizational Chart #1 in Appendix I). This process inhibited and directly affected the level of success experienced by the incident management teams on behalf of FEMA. If FEMA, Area Command, and the respective State Emergency Management Agency had entered into unified command, the flow of information could have been clearer, the incident better organized, and the ultimate goals more effectively reached (see Organizational Chart #2 in Appendix I).

“FEMA doesn’t understand span of control. They had too much to coordinate”—Jeanne Pincha-Tulley, Incident Commander, CIIMT #3



Organizing according to Organizational Chart #2—much the same as an incident with multiple wildfires and numerous incident management teams assigned, FEMA would have the ability to assign each incident management team a geographical area. The NRP allows a support agency, such as the USDA Forest Service, to:

- Conduct operations when requested by DHS or the designated ESF primary agency;
- Participate in planning for short or long-term incident management and recovery operations and the development of supporting operational plans;
- Assist in conducting situational assessments;
- Furnish available personnel, equipment or other resource support as requested by ESF primary agency;
- Provide input to periodic readiness assessments;
- Participate in training and exercises aimed at continuous improvement of prevention, response, and recovery capabilities;



- Identify new equipment or capabilities required to prevent or respond to new or emerging threats and hazards, or to improve the ability to address existing threats; and
- Provide information or intelligence regarding their agency's area of expertise.

By exercising the organization depicted in Organizational Chart #2, the incident management team could work within the above-stated parameters and incorporate other ESFs into their organization as agency representatives or technical specialists then assign resources to provide the required support to accomplish their respective ESF.

NRP's reference to Incident Command in the "Structure for NRP Coordination" further supports Organizational Chart #2, as it indicates the focal point for coordination of federal support is the JFO and an area command is established when the complexity and incident management span of control considerations so dictate. (For reference, Appendix I, Organization Chart #4, depicts the FEMA Organization (from the JFO) used in Mississippi).

Use of Unified Command

After Hurricane Wilma, the Incident Commander was successful in immediately entering into unified command with the FEMA Incident Commander in the operation of the major Federal Operational Staging Area (FOSA) at the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida. Although there was some disparity in the interpretation of unified command,

there was no upward reporting requirements for the Team other than to the ESF-4. Commodities were very rapidly disseminated to strategic points throughout the state affected by Hurricane Wilma and the FEMA mission was efficiently met (see Organizational Chart #3 in Appendix I).

Upon the IMT's arrival, the FEMA Incident Commander had a Deputy Incident Commander, Operations Section Chief, and Logistics person under his command. He was acquainted with ICS and possessed a Field Operations Guide, ISC 420-1. Initially, it was common for the FEMA Incident Commander and his staff to make independent decisions without consultation with the IMT. Once the IMT demonstrated their competency and FEMA understood their capabilities, the operational component of the FOSA was turned over to the IMT. In essence, the FEMA Incident Commander delegated the authority for the operations of the FOSA to the IMT, with the exception of the Tasking Branch and numbers reporting associated with the Tasking Branch. (see Appendix II for a sample ICS-203 referencing Agency Administrators, ICS-204s demonstrating Branches and Divisions, and a ICS-215).

Imperative to the success of unified command is the inclusion of the appropriate individuals into the Command and General Staff meetings, operational briefings and planning meetings. It is recommended FEMA receive the appropriate training to better understand the process and benefits derived from unified command relative to maintaining span of control during an incident.



Joint Operational briefings and planning meetings assist in the understand of ICS



Team Configuration and Mobilization of Teams

It is vital to the success of the mission that the Incident Commanders be afforded the opportunity to bring the appropriate team configuration to an incident. Each mission assignment is different and requirements vary. During Hurricane Wilma, Region 8 and FEMA mobilized an advanced party consisting of the Incident Commander, Planning Section Chief, and Logistics Section Chief prior to the hurricane reaching landfall. It is recommended that in the future the Incident Commander, as well as the entire Command and General Staff, be considered the “advanced party.” Upon receipt of the IMT’s mission assignment, the Incident Commander, in consultation with the Command and General Staff, would order appropriate team resources. The exception is when a decision is made to implement a FOSA, the Incident Commander along with a full team configuration should be mobilized immediately so they can arrive concurrently with FEMA, prior to the first truck arriving at the FOSA.

It is recommended the National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG) abandon the 33-member team configuration and allow the Incident Commander to evaluate the complexity of each assignment and order resources accordingly, to include trainees.

The integration of a FEMA Comptroller with the IMT proved effective. The Comptroller was available to interpret the Team’s mission and provided a direct access to FEMA, in many cases, streamlining the process. Additionally, it is recommended that all IMT’s convert ICS-213 forms for requisitioning supplies and services to the FEMA Form 60-1. If the signature of the onsite FEMA representative is secured on the Form 60-1, the purchase is appropriately considered a FEMA purchase and not a “Team” purchase. This practice also assists with the tracking of any FEMA accountable property purchased during the incident.



“We need ICS trained command structures—there is too much redundancy. We have to find a way to meld all the organizations together.”—Bill Molumby, Incident Commander, CIIMT #2

Concepts of the Incident Command System (ICS)

It was apparent no matter which mission assignment was reviewed there was a tremendous need across the board for a better understanding of the concepts of the Incident Command System. This is not limited to FEMA but includes the other ESFs involved in the emergency relief and recovery efforts. Everyone seems to understand the organizational chart associated with ICS, but there is a



true disconnect understanding the functionality of each position and how those positions integrate and work together during an incident.

Single Point of Ordering

Multiple, sometimes redundant or conflicting, points of ordering with different ordering protocols, turn around times, and multiple approval processes existed during the FEMA responses. The NRP provides for different lead agencies for ESFs. During an emergency, FEMA Operations places specific request to FEMA Logistics, FEMA Transportation, etc., in order to support the operational needs. Forest Service and associated fire agency dispatch and coordination centers, procurement unit leaders, and buying team standard operating authorities and practices may or may not be consistent with authorities and controls established by FEMA for the emergency.

Development of a single point of ordering, with clearly defined Incident Commander and other personnel delegated fiscal authority level (commensurate with the complexity of the incident) would improve the emergency response efficiency and effectiveness.

Additionally, the use of pre-existing contracts for emergency activations would be helpful. Pre-season contracts for specific pieces of equipment and types of services, with known prices, for activation in emergencies would improve response times and decrease the overall long-term cost to the government for such emergency services. A good example are the fire agencies' emergency equipment rental agreements.



“The process of ordering and tracking resources was very confusing. There is no database to track resources ordered by FEMA and assigned to the incident.”—Allen Johnson, Incident Commander, South Central Sierra Interagency Incident Management Team

FEMA was unclear of the role of the Area Command structure Region 8 had in place during Hurricane Katrina. There were issues raised when orders for both staffing and equipment resources were placed and the orders were either canceled or re-routed to other areas based on their perceived priorities and not FEMA's. The IMTs, ESF-4s, Buying Teams and FEMA representatives involved in this Lessons Learned all agreed there should be a single ordering point.



Recommended Training

During the Hurricane Katrina relief effort in Gautier, Mississippi, on three occasions the incident management team was afforded opportunities to demonstrate how the Incident Command System can be used in the management of all risk incidents. The Team worked together with the New York Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT), as they assisted the officials of Jackson County with their preparation and planning for the relief and recovery process by mentoring the IMAT members in the functional areas of ICS. Likewise, a senior member of the Moor Park Fire Department shadowed the Team for a significant period of time in order to become more familiar with the Incident Command System to assist with implementation at his home base in California. Lastly, at the request of Washington Office, Fire and Aviation Management staffs, Veterinary Services National Incident Management Team #5 (APHIS) joined the IMT for a portion of the assignment, taking an active role in the operational briefings, planning meetings, and preparation of the daily Incident Action Plan. The APHIS Team closed out with the IMT using the After Action Review process detailed in the Incident Response Pocket Guide.

It is recommended training be afforded to all ESFs in an effort to educate them to the benefits of unified command to eliminate the redundancy and meld the organizations together during an all-risk incident. It is likewise recommended that All-Risk Incident training be developed for members of the National and Regional Incident Management Teams to better acquaint them with the National Response Plan and FEMA operations. Also recommended are:

- Expanded Logistics Chief training to include the establishment of camps occupied by non-fire agencies, non-governmental organizations, and evacuees.



APHIS Team Members take active role in Operational briefings and the planning process



“We need to share both our experiences and expertise with others in order to make a difference.”—Dave Sinclear, Incident Commander, Nor Cal Team #1



- A joint FEMA/USFS Orientation Package for Incident Management Teams be developed which would contain must know, need to know and nice to know information and be presented to incident management teams deployed to FEMA incidents for the first time or for Teams that have not recently responded to FEMA incidents.
- Develop an Operations Plan for the common FEMA Mission Assignments (i.e., Receiving and Distribution Operations, Federal Operational Staging Areas, Support Camps, etc.). These Operations Plans would consist of information which would assist the incoming incident management team in meeting the expectations of the assignment including a review of each functional area's operation, staffing, supply and equipment recommendations, maps, recommended vendor list, sample incident action plan, narrative, orientation booklet, and operational forms. (see Appendix III for an example of the FOSA Operations Plan recently developed after Hurricane Wilma for the Jacksonville Naval Air Station). These documents would be maintained by Region 8 staff and distributed to the incoming incident management team at their in-briefing.



*“Just provide us the clear expectations and we’ll get it done” —
Jim Smith, Incident Commander, Central Coast
Incident Management Team #7*

Agency Exit Strategy

Length of assignments for the incident management teams were as varied as their assignments. Some incident management teams were committed to 30 day assignments excluding travel while others were the normal 14-day assignments with extensions up to 21 days inclusive of travel. The level of commitment by specific team members for the second assignments varied. This was due in part to the unpredictability of the length of assignment and proved to be a challenge for the Incident Commanders when preparing for deployment. It is highly recommended that the Agency embrace a hard-fast exit strategy so that incident management teams, as well as their supervisors, understand the length of commitment prior to deployment.





*“We need to realize, as they exist right now, FEMA is an emergency management agency, not an incident management agency. Their mission is commodity focused . The Forest Service mission is incident focused and is why the Incident Command System works so well for us.”—
Aaron Gelobter, Incident Commander, CIIMT #4*

Conclusion

The Pacific Southwest Region, Fire and Aviation Management, committed an extensive number of resources to the hurricane relief efforts this year. Our commitment remains strong to assisting the people directly affected by these disasters both within and out of our Region. We feel it is our obligation, as an Agency, to do so. Likewise, it is our responsibility to work toward perfecting the processes involved in all-risk management as it relates to the USDA Forest Service and the National Response Plan. The main body of this report covered the “Common Threads” discussed during the two-day Lessons Learned session and is limited to the incident management teams who participated in the Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Rita and Wilma relief efforts from the Pacific Southwest Region.

Appendix IV contains the notes taken during the session, and Appendix V contains the Remedial Action Management Program (RAMP) forms available in electronic format. Hardcopy RAMP forms are available from each of the eight Teams from Region 5 upon request. This report is intended to enlighten both the decision makers who did, and those who did not, directly experience these assignments to the incident management teams’ perspective of how the role of the USDA Forest Service, as well as our fire agency counterparts, can be more effective and efficient in All-Risk management in the future.



Appendices

Appendix I: Organizational Charts

- Organization Chart #1: Reporting to five different entities
- Organization Chart #2: Recommended Organization
- Organization Chart #3: FOSA Organization reflecting Unified Command
- Organization Chart #4: FEMA JFO Organization

Appendix II: Sample ICS forms 203, 204, and 215 demonstrating Unified Command Organization

Appendix III: Sample Operations Plan

- FOSA Operations Plan, Jacksonville Naval Air Station

Appendix IV: Lessons Learned Notes

Appendix V: Remedial Action Management Plan (RAMP) forms

