

Incident Name: **Rodeo-Chediski - Fire Information**

Incident Type: Type 1

Assignment Dates: June 19, 2002 to July 5, 2002

Unit or Jurisdiction: Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest

Geographic Area: Southwest

**Most Notable Success:** By being up front and straight forward with the media, I feel that we elevated some trust and confidence from the public in our Government representation and in our ability to battle wildfires. The 2002 fire season hopefully raised awareness for need to manage fuels and cut trees around houses. Now is the time to strike and get ordinances passed and get Community Forest Projects going and to begin putting up true fuels reduction projects and getting them cut and burned and cleaned up. I think that we all feel that this season was just a precursor to what will come next dry winter and hot, windy spring.

Also, we built some strong relations with the media by treating them as professionals and as partners in getting the message out to those who needed it most. We developed a "protocol" for dealing with access to the fireline, base camp, Incident Mgmt. Team and several other issues. That is something that needs a lot of refinement, but is necessary to have the "rules of engagement" before both sides, prior to any problems developing.

**Most Difficult Challenges:** GETTING PEOPLE—Information Officers and workers. The dispatch system is still very much broken and even though center managers and dispatchers are not to blame (they try very hard), we have a terrible time in getting folks who are available, cleared to go by supervisors and waiting by the phone. At one point, I had a need for 7-8 line qualified Information Officers and had three on the incident. I had 12 phone lines on a rollover switch, but could only staff 6 at a time, and needed people about 24 hours a day. In the Information function it is so critical that we get trained, functional personnel...WHEN WE NEED THEM,...that we as a fire service, might put the fire out, but lose the battle of scrutiny in the media. This will continue to be a challenge in all of our ICS functional areas, but is critical that we give timely and accurate information out to all facets of media on a local, regional national and international basis.

**Recommended Changes, Additions, Deletions to Training Curriculums:** We need to emphasize in S-203 Introduction to Incident Information and S-403 Information Officer that people need to talk in simple straight-

forward language that does not use a bunch of technical jargon and science, but just plain talk. Much more training and evaluation needs to be done before a camera, to help get folks familiar and comfortable with doing live interviews. Our Incident Management Teams also need some information training as well, for when they are asked to talk on TV or radio or make a statement to a news print journalist.

**Unresolved Issues:** The general public and most of the homeowners in forested areas do not believe or accept that our forests are in an unnatural and "disaster waiting to happen" state. We need to get with agency folks, university professors and emergency management professionals, environmentalists, planners, and anyone else who will be a part of looking for solutions to the fuels and urban interface dilemma. Otherwise we will soon be going to more frequent and larger, more aggressively burning fires as the norm. Along with that will be homes burned, firefighter memorials and funerals for locals who refuse to evacuate. Not a pleasant scenario, but so realistic and just around the corner, actually is now!