



Southern California Firestorm 2003
**Report for the Wildland Fire
Lessons Learned Center**

For:
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This report was prepared by two private consulting firms with the input of federal agency employees assisting the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center.



Mission-Centered Solutions, Inc., a small business enterprise located in the Denver metro area, provides training development and delivery services for government, military, and corporate clients. Our areas of training and expertise focus on disciplines that enhance crew or team resiliency and effectiveness, including leadership, error reduction and management, communication, and crew resource management. We also provide specific training and consulting to assist management of high-risk organizations to bring about and support targeted changes.

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Guidance Group provides strategic services to fire service organizations; and specializes in leadership, strategy and organizational improvement. The Guidance Group provides a unique blend of real world fire management experience as well as facilitative and consulting skills that may not be available within the client organization. The result is a practical, professional and experienced approach to fire service strategy, leadership and organizational needs including strategic planning; professional development; goal setting; collaborative problem solving; program evaluation; and support to field studies and field research.

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The following is an excerpt from the entire report. It is suggested that the reader also view the Introduction to the report to put this section into context.

Documentation

This section describes the lessons learned regarding documentation.

Documentation during Initial and Extended Attack

Incident leaders reported several incidents where good documentation by lower-level leaders at the beginning of the incident became critical later. Delays in establishing effective command and control over a series of large incidents meant that firefighters functioned more independently than usual for long periods of time before documentation began at the incident level. People interviewed reported that when documentation was not started early, problems often surfaced later—from difficulty in tracking resources to accident and liability questions.

Several respondents stated that they began documentation at their level as if they were running their own Type 3 incidents. When leaders on lower levels created documentation, members of Type 1 and 2 IMTs indicated that they were able to tie the documentation of initial attack and extended attack resources into the team's documentation package smoothly and with few problems.

Summary of Lessons Learned—Documentation during Initial and Extended Attack

- Good documentation by tactical leaders became important in providing facts in resolving issues on several occasions.
- Establishing thorough documentation of events and resources assigned by initial and extended attack leaders in the absence of command and control facilitated a smooth assumption into the incident organization.

Damage Assessment Teams

Respondents remarked on the value of damage assessment teams and reports. Thorough damage assessment reports helped the IMT comprehensively document the fire and became the master document used for calculating overall loss.

Respondents recommended that IMTs should anticipate the need for damage assessment and order a team as soon as they realize that structures have burned or are likely to burn. Anticipation and early ordering allows the team to assemble, arrive on-site, and begin assessing and documenting damage before the task becomes too large and while the physical evidence remains relatively undisturbed.

One IC indicated that a damage assessment report is most useful when it documents not only losses but also properties saved. One that same incident, the IMT recommended a particular damage report format as a potential national model. It is a Microsoft Word document with drop down menus. This format was shared by its creator and is available electronically upon request from the Lessons Learned Center.

Summary of Lessons Learned—Damage Assessment Teams

- Thorough damage assessment reports helped comprehensively document the fire event and became the master document to calculate overall loss.
- Ordering a damage assessment team as soon as the IMT knew that structures were likely to burn allowed more accurate documentation of the incident and allowed the team to calculate values saved as well as lost.
- An effective property damage assessment form is available in Microsoft Word format upon request from the Lessons Learned Center.

Cost Apportionment Team

One Type 2 IC reported that when managing multi-jurisdictional fires, it was important for the IMT to order a cost apportionment team immediately to avoid lengthy post-fire efforts to reconstruct events and negotiate costs. The fires quickly spread across multiple jurisdictions and major administrative boundaries at all levels of government (local, county, state, and federal). Suppression costs needed to be allocated or “apportioned” to each jurisdiction. Agencies can better apportion costs if a cost apportionment team is present during the fire’s progression, as decisions are being made and agency representatives are available to answer questions.