

After Incident Report Lessons Learned Center

The purpose of the After Incident Report is to identify both successes and challenges on an incident that can be used as a learning tool for others. The lessons learned in the report will also be used to improve training curriculums. Issues and trends that are identified may have Information Collection Teams assigned to them in the future for further analysis and resolution.

Type 1-5 incident commanders and agency administrators are requested to complete the following questionnaire for each incident they manage. Crews and single resources are also encouraged to complete the questionnaire for incidents they participated in:

Incident Name and Type: Columbia Response – Type 2 **Dates of Assignment:** 4/13/03 – 5/3/03

Unit or Jurisdiction(s): TX-TXS-03513 **Geographic Area:** Nacogdoches Texas

Report Submitted by: Mike Dietrich's IMT **Phone Number:**

1. What was the most notable success at the incident that others may learn from? Please explain.

Communications – The relationship developed early in our tenure to pass information from agency to agency on issues affecting the incident. Cooperators talked often and at length to ensure each agencies needs were addressed. This provided for not only a smooth transition when SoCal IIMT 3 assumed command, but strengthened the relationship as time progressed.

2. What were some of the most difficult challenges faced and how were they overcome? Please explain.

See Appendix A attached

3. What changes, additions or deletions are recommended to wild land fire training curriculums?

Ensure we place effort and emphasis on all risk incidents. This will require a policy change for the Wildland agencies, but needs to be addressed.

4. What issues were not resolved to your satisfaction and need further review? Based on what was learned, what is your recommendation for resolution?

See Appendix A attached

Appendix A Lessons Learned

Incident Command

- Unified Command was critical in meeting the objectives of the incident.
- The Divisions should have been technically called Groups, which fits better with ICS and how the gridding was done. This is based on the functional nature of the gridding, recovery, and decontamination nature of the assignment.
- More training on the ICS under NIIMS needs to be done for all risk agencies.
- It worked well that each agency applied its fiscal rules for its portion of the recovery effort (EPA, NASA, USFS).
- Availability of wildland agency personnel for all risk incidents needs to be addressed. There are substantial problems in filling resource orders for a variety of reasons including mission of the Forest Service.

Safety

This assignment presented a number of unique challenges for the Safety Officers. Typically, dangerous situations are eliminated or the objectives altered to avoid the risks to incident personnel. This assignment required that personnel search hazardous areas by a variety of means. Mitigation methods were employed to minimize those exposures. Specific examples of challenges include:

- Providing evacuation and sheltering of personnel in the event of severe weather events in the field and in camp. Detection, notification, proper actions and resumption of normal operations were covered in written severe weather procedures that were part of the IAP.
- Providing medical treatment for respiratory illnesses for a significant portion of the incident population. Having clinic hour in camp by a professional health care practitioner significantly reduced treatment costs, loss of time and the number of follow-up visits.
- Gauging the effectiveness of PPE and flexibility in the application of alternatives. Most crews were not prepared for this non-traditional assignment. Wildland firefighting PPE did not adequately protect against the many and varied hazards. Snake chaps, rubber boots, mesh goggles and insect repellents were successfully utilized to provide protection from venomous snakes, biting insects and thorns and briars.

- Providing specific safety training for English and non-English speaking incident personnel. The use of bi-lingual translators and multi language safety messages helped in the exchange of important safety related topics.
- Coordinate and establish multi agency/ contractor accident and injury procedures and protocols in advance of the need. Most other agency/ contractor polices did not mesh well at the time of the injury or illness. Agreed upon incident specific protocols and procedures eliminated many misunderstandings and conflicts.

Recommendations:

- Require that incident specific hazard mitigation plan be a part of the IAP. This plan would give specific directions on major hazards to personnel from natural or incident hazards (i.e. severe weather, flooding, fire, etc.)
- Establish professional health care professional clinical hours at the base camps.
- Make available Agency/ NWCG bi-lingual safety related materials including six minutes for safety for non-English speaking crews.
- Establish incident specific accident and injury protocols and procedures for all incident personnel regardless of their individual employment status.
- Ensure that the Medical Unit reviews all return-to-duty medical releases prior to redeployment of an individual to line assignments. Individuals have been cleared for duty by non-incident medical professionals but are unable to perform the assigned task at the health/ fitness levels required.

Operations

- Technical specialists were used when field observers were indicated. Field Observers bring equipment, training and physical fitness standards which would have been more appropriate to the assignment.
- Search patterns were set by flagging smaller interior lines using two methods within grids. One used geographic features and one used north south flag lines. Despite very heavy ground cover the later method was more efficient.
- The center of the search managerially was the EPA and Search Division Supervisors. For the most part issues of pacing, positioning of resources and safety were worked out at that level using a conflict resolution protocol. The line of authority was established through trial and error. Search Divisions were expected to be the last word as far as SOCAL IMT 3 was concerned but this needs to be established from the beginning.

- The OPS/DIVS debriefing was very successful in this situation. This end of shift time to discuss the shift operations both for the present and next operational period was invaluable. It worked even better when EPA, SAR and NASA representatives attended. Additionally when the Sit and Logistics functions sat in the background this worked well to make minor adjustments.
- Work rest guidelines and R&R with contract crews was an issue. In retrospect, the Section Chief should have had a better grasp of the National and Region Six crew contracts ahead of the incident. A written agreement with the crew supervisor setting the last operational period would have improved the planning process.
- Related to the previous issue IRSS provided valuable information for building the 215 for future operational periods. It would have helped to identify at check in if the contract crews were national or regional. Having a field for last operational period for all resources that could be queried and edited would be helpful.
- Ideally, from a pure ICS standpoint the divisions should have been identified as groups as they were functional units that were not associated with a single geographic area throughout the incident.

Finance

Procurement

On this assignment, the Procurement Unit Leader (PROC) provided a lot of services that are usually assigned to the Buying Team. Because of this, a lot of the PROC responsibilities fell on the shoulders of the Finance Chief. For future assignments like this I would suggest an additional procurement person (micro-purchaser) be assigned to the PROC. This position would be responsible for paying vendors and making emergency purchases and during slack times could assist with auditing and posting equipment time.

Time

You can place your name in the time officer signature block. Initials will be required and will be treated like a signature on the OF-288.

Planning Section

While no serious section issues were encountered on this incident, an area of concern was the absence of onsite GIS. Map acreage was being estimated using manual dot grid techniques from the onset of the incident. This method led to an inflated cumulative acres searched count and underestimation of acres remaining to be searched. The acquisition of GIS capability at the ICP enabled the team to resolve the error and successfully plan for and obtain adequate resources to complete assigned search grids. Early on-site GIS support is recommended.

Computer Technical Specialist

I-suite - Check-in recorders learned fast, but should be exposed to the program before an incident. Most entry errors were due to lack of formal training and different SOPs in different regions.

SAR

While SAR achieved our primary mission of training the crews and ensuring the search effectiveness in the field, we could have provided operations with a more in depth statistical breakdown of crew effectiveness if we staffed one SAR Instructor to every search division.