

After Incident Report Lessons Learned Center

The purpose of the After Incident Report is to identify issues that occurred on an incident and how they were resolved. The lessons learned in the report will also be used to refresh or update 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 the incident(s) that they managed. Crews and single resources are also encouraged to complete the questionnaire for incidents they participated in:

Incident Name:

Columbia Shuttle Recovery Project
Corsicana Branch

Dates of Assignment:

2/20/2003 – 3/20/2003

Unit or Jurisdiction(s):

FEMA/Texas Forest Service

Geographic Area:

Southern

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

- The working relationships with NASA, FEMA, EPA and Texas Forest Service were outstanding from the beginning of the incident and provided the framework for an efficient and effective operation.
- Co-locating and integrating work areas for all agencies and all aspects of the ground search operation on the Corsicana Zone.
- Utilizing SAR team leaders for Strike Team Leaders (STL's) proved to require minimal training and helped maintain supervision of search operations when the coordination system could not produce adequate numbers of NWCG qualified STL's.
- Contracting a local Physicians Assistant was cost effective, provided better medical service to incident personnel, and significantly reduced the number of visits to hospital emergency rooms.
- The Space Flight Awareness Team and the evening programs provided were excellent for building and maintaining incident personnel morale.
- Developing and maintaining a space shuttle recovery cage at ICP provided an opportunity for all incident personnel to view recovered parts on a daily basis, maintaining morale and a sense of ownership in what was being found.
- Training of incident field personnel on safety and search techniques conducted by NASA, EPA, DOD, TFS, and SAR was effective, professional, and maintained an adequate workforce for field operations despite constant mobilization/demobilization.
- Establishing a secure ICP and camp by implementing an incident photo ID required to be worn at all times at incident base and while conducting field operations.
- Establishing a secure, restricted area within ICP that allowed sensitive material as well as EPA and NASA to co-locate.
- Utilizing the Information Section to notify and request permission from landowners to conduct search and recovery projects on their property.

- Implementation of the Public Safety/LEO Liaison (identified and developed by the team in 2002) was extremely successful and will be for future “all risk” incidents. The ability to interface immediately with local law enforcement and emergency services personnel, integrate them into our organization, and work with them on a daily basis reaped tremendous benefits for the IMT and community relations. The position is especially critical for incidents and/or ICP’s located in/adjacent to communities.

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

- The ordering process nationally is not staffed adequately for all risk incidents, which creates problems for filling resource orders in a timely manner seven days a week and during normal “off” hours.
 - i. The solution was less than satisfactory, but the solution was to find out where orders were being delayed and calling personnel directly at home.
- The fire cache system is not adequately supplied for providing necessary supplies for all risk incidents, including inclement weather gear, medical supplies, winter sleeping bags, brush chaps, etc.
 - i. We had to purchase, locally and through the buying team, the supplies required for a successful operation.
- Some of the cache systems were unable to provide needed supplies due to inventory activities.
 - i. We worked with caches that were not in the midst of inventorying and supplemented with purchase through the buying team.
- The sensitive nature of shuttle material, maps and other items unique to NASA and EPA required a fenced, secure area restricted to entry that some agencies and members of the IMT were not accustomed to.
 - i. We developed a list of personnel that were provided unrestricted access; all others could only gain access through those personnel.
- Information management was a unique challenge in that all information dissemination was controlled through a Joint Information Center in Lufkin, which was initially very reluctant to provide even the most basic information to the media.
 - i. The IC and the Information Officer worked with Lufkin to sponsor a “media” day, and Lufkin provided a Space Flight Awareness team for us to work with that allowed greater freedom in information dissemination.
- Establishing and maintaining an ICP and base camp for 1500 personnel in a Region that does not generally set up fire camps, compounded by winter conditions, presented unique and often serious challenges for the IMT.
 - i. The IMT worked through most issues and made do when we had to, but we struggled to meet basic health and sanitation needs (especially during the ice storm) and had a large number of personnel fall to the “camp crud”, including most of the IMT, which in turn affected functionality and productivity. Future assignments under similar conditions need to look at different facilities such as military bases (or military logistical assets), colleges, etc. It is important for IMT’s to get out of the mindset of a summer “fire camp” on an all weather/all risk assignment.

3. What changes, additions or deletions are recommended to various training curriculums?

- All risk incidents will require a national training curriculum to be developed to train Incident Management Teams in a variety of arenas and topics outside the present wild land fire training sessions. Additional mnemonics, positions and qualifications for all risk assignments need to be created.
- Commitment within Agency Line Officers of all agencies needs to be made for managing all risk incidents.
- Dedicated, full time incident management teams are a necessity.

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

- Length of commitment:

The length of commitment for the variety of resources assigned to the incident. The wildland fire guidelines apply to fire, and the National Mobilization Guide simply says that FEMA assignments can be up to 30 days; there is a need for NICC to establish the length of commitment for crews and miscellaneous overhead that is consistent between geographic regions. Utilizing National Contract crews for all risk assignments presents several issues that need to be resolved when commitment length exceeds 21 days.

- Qualifications and physical fitness:

Incident qualifications for all risk incidents like the shuttle recovery project are not well defined. The normal red card qualifications and attendant physical fitness requirements were waived for crewmembers, and we had to substitute non-NWCG qualified personnel in some instances for supervisory positions (Strike Team Leaders). Waiving requirements places a risk and burden on the IMT managing the incident (requiring some on the ground training as well as ensuring that dispatched personnel are physically capable of doing the work) and the mobilizing agencies (ensuring that the assigned personnel are in a physical condition that will allow them to perform). This problem could lead to unintended and unacceptable results. While fire qualifications may not be the answer, at least there is comfort in knowing that certain training, experience, and physical fitness comes with the product. At the minimum, we need to be sure that dispatched personnel are in a physical condition that will allow them to safely perform the duties of the assignment.

- Funding Issues:

The National Response Plan provides flexibility on pay issues, which creates confusion regarding which agency is actually paying for what (FEMA or responding agency). The problem is compounded by the interagency mix of personnel on IMT's particularly those personnel from fire districts or States. Agency administrators may be reluctant to send personnel on future assignments if they believe salaries are coming from their own pocket. In addition, pay "rules" (such as overtime rates, etc.) do not match compensation for fire assignments yet the management and workload are just as complex and grueling.

FEMA needs to make an early decision on funding issues and widely disseminate that information to responding agencies. In addition, the issue of the funding for non-federal agency personnel needs immediate attention and resolution.

Finally, the overtime rate issue needs to be resolved immediately.

- Separation of IMT's Aviation Branch:

The entire aviation operation was managed from Lufkin in an Area Command role, by personnel from Texas Forest Service and NASA. We were asked to detach all of the team's aviation managers (AOBD, ASGS, ATGS (2)) and have them report to the adjacent team's aviation managers in Palestine. This proved to be problematic. Lufkin tried to manage from a tactical rather than a strategic perspective creating significant safety and other related problems for the combined air management resources at Palestine. Rather than tactically managing the air mission, air managers were constantly trying to implement tactical plans from Lufkin that did not correlate with daily operations of ground search teams creating safety conflicts and other issues. Some of the Incident Helicopter Operation Guide's flight safety standards were compromised. Because the air wing was detached, the ability of the IMT to assist in resolution of the issues was compromised.

Resolution of the issue is two-fold. Agencies being incorporated into Area Command need training on the appropriate role of that function (in this instance NASA) as well as recognizing the capability of IMTs to manage the air resources in the area of their responsibility. The separation made no sense, the IMTs involved have the expertise, experience, and capability to manage air operations on the area assigned.

Please submit this report to the Lessons Learned Center at the National Advanced Resource Technology Center (NARTC) attention Paula Nasiatka (pnasiatka@fs.fed.us or Fax 520-670-6413)

Thank you for completing the report. Others can learn from your experiences.