



COVID-19 Mitigations and Lessons from Two Incident Management Teams

“After two IMT deployments and a third fire which required the deployment of multiple Strike Teams, we were able to COVID test a total of 252 personnel. All of those tests came back negative. We have learned an awful lot over the last couple months, but the one thing that was most critical to us was the ability to get that testing included as part of the Demob process. It certainly made me feel a whole lot better about sending employees back to their families and coworkers in their home unit.”

Erin Albury
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Both Blue and Green IMTs Considered Coronavirus Mitigation an ‘Incident Within an Incident’

The Florida Forest Service’s Blue Incident Management Team and Green Incident Management Team were each deployed to large fires during May 2020, one in the Florida Panhandle, and one in southwest Florida.

Because of the wide-ranging and ongoing efforts needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic, each Incident Management Team considered coronavirus mitigation as an “Incident Within an Incident”.

Lessons

These two IMTs learned many lessons about mitigating the threat of COVID-19.

Operational Briefings

- ❖ Fewer personnel attending in person. Have Crew Bosses or Division Supervisors attend and pass that information on to their personnel.
- ❖ Keep microphone on a stand. Speakers use cloth face coverings.
- ❖ Repeated message of CDC recommendations and steps to prevent disease were shared at each and every briefing.
- ❖ The location of morning operational briefing should be as large an area as possible to allow for social distancing.
- ❖ QR codes were used to allow personnel to get copies of maps and IAP on their phones—without contact with other personnel.



Both the Blue IMT and Green IMT practiced several best practice mitigations for their Operational Briefings.

- ❖ One IMT had a large area for its morning operational briefing and used that opportunity to check and record each person’s temperature.

Logistics, Meals, Facilities

- ❖ No sit-down restaurant options. All meals were individually boxed meals.
- ❖ Meal roster signing was completed one strike team/crew at a time and was conducted with them: not sharing pens, staying 6-foot apart in line, and receiving hand sanitizer just prior to receiving the meal box. Food unit personnel wore gloves as needed.
- ❖ Logistics was tasked with “Camp” maintenance to include cleaning high-touch areas.
- ❖ Cleaning supplies were made readily available and given to crews for cleaning equipment between shifts and upon demob.

PPE

- ❖ Masks, gloves and hand sanitizer were readily available at all locations (staging, ICP, Ground Support, Finance, Plans, Meeting locations, etc.).

Plans and Finance

- ❖ Digital images of paperwork were emailed or texted as needed (CTRs, Vehicle Logs, 213’s, etc.).
- ❖ Check-In and demob were handled remotely when possible. Therefore, all crew members would not have to move through ICP. Check-In personnel went to staging (large outdoor area) to pick up paperwork as needed.
- ❖ Larger meetings rooms were secured to allow for social distancing.



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Operations

- ❖ To minimize the number of contacts with the pilot, only one supervisor from the Operations section was allowed to fly the fire for the duration of the incident.

PIO

- ❖ Media members had to drive their own vehicles to the fire line.
- ❖ Social distancing and mask use were required on stage at press briefings and VIP tours.

Demobilization

- ❖ Both Incident Management Teams were able to secure COVID-19 nasal swab testing before sending any personnel home from the incident. In some cases, testing was done a day or two ahead of travel to ensure test results were received before the employee returned to their home district. Following the test, personnel were isolated to the greatest extent possible.



Firefighters receive COVID-19 nasal swab testing prior to demob.

‘A Snapshot in Time’

When discussing testing before demobing from an assignment, Dr. Jennifer Symonds, Fire and Aviation Medical Officer for the U.S. Forest Service, believes that it’s important for our workforce to understand that “a negative COVID-19 test is only a snapshot in time. A negative test just means that, at the moment of testing, they were negative. 12, 24, 48... hours after the test sample was obtained, the result could be different.”

Although the ability to test wildland firefighters prior to returning home to their families could be a valuable resource, when and how that is accomplished is important. For instance, if firefighters are tested while demobing rather than upon returning to their home unit, they would need to be very cautious in travel status in order to avoid possibly contracting the virus en route home.

For more on what COVID-19 test results mean, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html>.

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