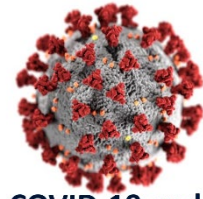


Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: The Benefits of Creating an IMT Medical Officer

Location: Southwest Team 1 – on the Sawtooth Fire, Arizona



**COVID-19 and
Fire Season 2020 Lessons**
For the latest on COVID-19 visit

[CDC.gov/COVID19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)



IMTs are Designating Individuals to Manage COVID-19 Tasks – and the Benefits of Creating a ‘Medical Officer’ Position

Prior to the start of this fire year, Southwest Team 1—identified the role of a Medical Officer to assist with the added complexity introduced by the coronavirus.

Managing an incident at any complexity level can be challenging. The challenges get more complicated as the complexity level increases and the coronavirus has added to the workload faced by many in managing fires on the ground.

Several Incident Management Teams have added ad hoc team members to fill novel positions and/or are carrying duplicates of common ICS positions to take on COVID-19 related challenges. In addition, other teams are planning to treat COVID-19 exposures/cases as an Incident Within an Incident. The common thread between all of these approaches is designating an individual(s) to manage COVID-19 related tasks, thereby allowing other team members to focus on their duties.

Years earlier, the members of the Southwest Area Incident Management Team 3 wrote and presented a white paper outlining the concept of a Medical Officer to the Southwest Coordinating Group. It involved creating a position equal to that of the Safety, Liaison, and Public Information Officer that would focus mainly on the growing complexity of managing medical response to injured or sick individuals on incidents. Until this year, this idea had not gained much traction in the wildland fire community.

This concept has now been modified and utilized to focus on COVID-19 related issues to minimize coronavirus distractions for IMT members performing their normal duties. The Southwest Team 1 IMT selected one of their Operations Sections Chiefs whose day job is involved heavily in EMS response to act in this capacity for 2020 fire season.

Takeaways

- ❖ Having a position (Medical Officer) designated to be the main source of coronavirus information and manage COVID-19 incidents enables other team members to focus on their duties, especially as teams mobilize for their first assignment.
- ❖ Ad hoc positions that reflect and are founded in the IMT’s current practices help with its incorporation. Some approaches are Medical Officer, Medical Section Chief, Medical Unit Leader just for COVID-19 related incidents etc. The main idea is to add an individual to take on work and not add work to an individual.
- ❖ The ad hoc position may need to be multiple positions depending on the incident due to: the complexity of COVID-19 spread in the community, number of agencies/departments on the fire, number of COVID-19 related

incidents on the incident, etc. For example, an internal team of Medical personnel, information, and a liaison could be useful if there are multiple exposures.

- ❖ Use ICS to expand and contract capabilities to address the extra work load presented by COVID-19. Ad hoc roles may be useful in other sections to assist with additional out-of-the-norm work practices (i.e. managing virtual meetings and collaboration software).
- ❖ Consider using such practices on lower complexity incidents or initial attack if possible.
- ❖ The Southwest Team 1's Medical Officer's urban Fire/EMS position and professional network enhanced their ability to understand and navigate recommendations and the public health system. Our municipal cooperators have been operationally entrenched in COVID-19 response and bring a different level of understanding public health and EMS systems that can enhance wildfire management.
- ❖ Basic training regarding COVID-19 may provide a consistent baseline understanding that all resources can operate from regardless of level or unit. Introductory training to public health principles for positions such as Medical Unit Leader or as ad hoc positions such as Medical Officer may assist in communicating and working with public health officials should an exposure or case occur. This may include infection control, epidemiology, and contact tracing.
- ❖ Interactions, shadowing, reverse shadowing and sharing information with other individuals filling in similar roles across IMTs can help quicken learning in the wildland fire community.
- ❖ Familiarization with various CDC and participating agencies'/departments' guiding documents and practices is helpful when acting in these roles.

**The "Medical Officer" concept was utilized on the
2017 Frye Fire Strep Throat Outbreak incident:**

<https://www.wildfirelessons.net/viewdocument/frye-fire-strep-throat-outbreak-20>

Helpful Resources

- ❖ Fire Management Board Medical and Public Health Interim Guidance for Prevention of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) During Wildland Fire Operations:
<https://sites.google.com/a/firenet.gov/fmb/home/covid19-portal/wildland-fire-ops-interim-guidance>
- ❖ CDC Wildland Firefighter FAQ:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/wildland-firefighters-faq.html>
- ❖ NWCG Medical Unit COVID-19 Concept of Operations Plan:
<https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/emergency-medical-committee/medical-unit-covid19-cop>
- ❖ What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws:
<https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws>
- ❖ Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>
- ❖ Consider documents that cover similar occupational and condensed group living settings:

- Agriculture Workers and Employers: Interim Guidance from CDC and the U.S. Department of Labor:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-agricultural-workers.html>
- Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html>

❖ State/local government guidance (potentially available on state/county/city websites or through establishing contacts with local entities, state/local emergency operations center, etc.).

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