



Lessons Learned- Oct 2007

S.D City Eng. Co. 103 in RB





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California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Communications

Initial Attack

Incident Resource Management

Firefighter Fatigue

Evacuations

Shelters

Re-Entry

Road Closures

Damage Assessment

C.E.R.T / Info Centers

Logistics

Air Operations



Lessons Learned- Oct 2007

COMMUNICATIONS

We must solve the issues of VHF/800Mhz before we start killing our Firefighters

- This must be a State wide project that allows us to use both systems when VHF command and tactical channels are not available. Did it work on the RICE? Ordered to change on my initial response, refused due to safety concerns.
- This issue should be a top priority at the highest levels of Fire Services/government. We can start in San Diego County.
- Assign VHF frequencies on I/A veg. fires regardless of ECC
- Or, Assign 800Mhz frequencies on I/A veg. fires regardless of ECC. Change only with a 2nd shift change.
- Set up caches of radios for this use?



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Initial Attack Philosophy of CAL FIRE

Fire Protection Objective: Suppress 95% of all wildfires to 10 acres or less

In North County, 12 fires, after the start of the Witch Fire, were kept to under 10 acres. How they stopped the Coronado Hills fires is really amazing based on what I saw.





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Station/District/City Coverage

You must keep enough resources to respond to initial attack/emergencies to meet this goal, regardless of what is happening around you. This is a difficult decision to make, but if only one of these fires becomes established, a new major fire is probable under the conditions we faced.



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If initial attack had not occurred, what could the possible results be?

- 1. Pauma fire moving down north side of Hwy 76 to connect with Rice and follows the San Luis Ray River drainage to Oceanside.**
- 2. Poomacha moves through Valley Center, Deer Springs via Old Castle, moving southwest across the I-15, jumps Twin Oaks Valley by 1100 hours.**



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Resource Management

- 1. Must find a fix to ROSS or find a system that works in California. Have bypass procedures set in place to address issues this season or until fixed to get resources moving from incident to incident.**
- 2. Have ICT report only to ACT, ACT to MAC group, this will cause less confusion. ACT works for County Unified Command/Unit Chief.**
- 3. Pre-staged resources must be in place a minimum of 12, prefer 24 hours prior to wind event if coming in from out of County.**
- 4. In County pre-stage, cancellation of days off, etc., is a State and Fed activity that should be implemented by local fire agencies via State and Fed. funding when conditions warrant.**



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FIRE FIGHTER FATIGUE

As discussed in Resource management, 12-24 hours rest prior to deployment of out of County resources will help address many safety issues.

- Some resources came to fire with over 12-24 hours of driving time. When they arrived, they went to work as fresh crews. Some crews were deployed, re-deployed, placed on R&R, to be woke up 4 hours later. In one known case, a CAL FIRE out of County ST-Engines was on different fires for 69 hours, all initial attack-homes burning, with little quality down time.**



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F/F Fatigue and Safety

- One out of County ST-Engines, local Govt, drove 12 hours, finish a 24 hour shift, went on R&R for 3 hours to be woke up surrounded by fire in their hotel. They re-deployed and stopped the forward progress of the Poomacha Fire in Valley Center. Heroic yes, but at what cost if they would have been hurt or killed in the process.
- When you receive replacement resources from other fires, demand to know how long they have been deployed. This is a problem with State and Federal resources especially, who will complain little even with the 16 hour rules.



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Evacuations and revision of the warning system.

1. You must be in Unified Command with Law Enforcement from the start. Same vehicle, same room, same command post. No exceptions. This worked extremely well on most incidents.
2. Have pre-designated evacuation zones if possible or set zones and trigger points during fire event. If possible, do not do large areas at once, to avoid traffic jams which increases the risk to the evacuees. Beware of Fire Safe Council reverse 9-1-1 programs that do not follow zones.
3. A revision to Red Flag Warnings is critical. Use of Category 1-5, similar to the hurricane warning based on winds, is needed. Our ability to stop certain category fires is impossible, and the warning system should be set up in that manner, with preparedness levels to match these events.



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Shelters- Best made plan goes south

Never depend on assisting agencies to meet the needs of your emergency.

In the Valley Center area, no Red Cross assistance was provided for 48 hours. A Shelters with 3000+ people and animals was set up at the High School, well out of the way of the Witch Fire until the Poomacha Fire started. It was planned for 200 max. from the other fires only. Valuable fire resources were used to meet the needs of these people. A ST of ambulances and several medical helos were used to address their medical needs, especially when the smoke impacted the area from the new Poomacha fire.



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Shelters/Road Closures/Re-Entry

- **Have pre-designated citizens trained to Red Cross shelter procedures. CERT is a perfect group for shelter training/ animal sheltering and Info Centers.**
- **A County wide policy on road closures and re-entry needs to be implemented and streamlined. Many areas ran out of food, water, were unable to get key utility personnel in to closed areas, including going coming shift Firefighters. Pre-designated ID cards, procedures to assist National Guard when they are mobilized. Many citizens say they will not evacuate again. A new problem for the next event. Shelter in Place Training a priority?**



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Damage Assessment Teams

My opinion: Best in the Nation

Must have:

County

City/Fire Dist Rep. (CERT?)

Red Cross



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C.E.R.T.

Expanding the training of CERT. I believe it is critical in rural San Diego County. Local Animal Rescue, Shelter Managers, Info Center Operators all worked very well for us during the fires. Additional training is a high priority to make them proficient.



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Non-Agency Resources- Local Govt.

Contract Resources – Bulldozers, Water tenders, fuel tenders, facilities

Agreements and training before fire season

All contracted resource vendors listed in Emergency Resource Directory at

Cal Fire Emergency Command Centers. *What about in other local Disp. Centers?*

Is this possible or practical?

Call When Needed Aircraft

Must be “Carded”

Must sign contract

List maintained by Cal Fire aviation staff and shared statewide

45 Helitankers, 150 Helicopters, 2 Water scooping Air tankers, 1 DC-10





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Logistics

What do you do when you are faced with needing:

•Food, Fuel, drinking water, R&R/sleeping/lodging for personnel, shelters for citizens and animals. We never lost main electricity or water services in most areas.

Needs of the community vs. needs of the emergency responders. Do you have plans in place to address all of these issues when the normal help you depend on is not coming? Community support is critical to feed, house, and supply your personnel. How long could you hold out? 72 hours? We were at 36 hours when we ran out of all the above during the Guejito fire burning north, the Witch burning west, and the Poomacha burning south/west. All fires impacted the area within a 24-36 hour period with little assistance from outside. There was nothing left to send. No set plans were in place



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Air Resource Issues

One issue with aircraft that needs to be addressed formally is how to safely meet the needs of incidents that are in close proximity to each other.

We must not allow fire perimeters to dictate unsafe operating procedures. Virtual walls or fences must be maintained, where air resources from one fire may need to be added to IAP's of another fire. Example: Aircraft north of Hwy 76 to serve Poomacha, south will serve Witch, even though the Poomacha was also south of Hwy 76.

Ground and air resources must have the proper radio channels and a map of the divisions/ groups /air resources working there.