

1. Resource Ordering, Automated Systems

What is resource ordering?

When an incident exceeds the capability of the initial response resources, additional resources are ordered through the supporting dispatch office. As an incident grows, the need for additional resources may exceed the capability of the responding agencies. When this happens, there is an interagency system that makes it possible to order resources from other agencies and locations. This system starts locally, sending firefighting resources closest in proximity to the incident. It then has the capability to mobilize resources regionally, statewide and ultimately from across the nation. There are automated systems in place to facilitate this mobilization process at the State and National levels.

Systems in place to manage the resource ordering process

The public had expressed their expectation for a rapid fire department response to the increasingly complex fire situation. A long history of mobilizing to fight major fire sieges in California has led the wildland fire agencies to develop a sophisticated resource ordering and tracking system. This public expectation for rapid coordinated response and fiscal accountability has translated into agency policy and funding for a Multi-Incident Resource Processing System (MIRPS). Similar public pressure at the national level has led to the development of the federal Resource Ordering Statusing System (ROSS). MIRPS is integrated across the California state and federal wildland agencies. The federal agencies also use ROSS to interface with the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. Local government resources are not currently included in either system. In addition, wildfire Incident Command posts are not fully automated into the system.

Impact during this siege

Today, both MIRPS and ROSS are operational. The volume of business during the siege exceeded the capability of the local staffing to keep up with processing the orders. The MIRPS system does not “talk” to the ROSS system so additional staff had to be ordered to enter data into both systems. ROSS is an internet based system operating off of a central database. The perception of command center officers under pressure to rapidly respond to requests for resources is that both systems are “slow” for data entry and information retrieval. The perception of the field fire commanders is that the ordering system was falling 24–48 hours behind in processing orders.

Strategic response

Incident commanders employed two major strategies in dealing with order delays. The first strategy was to adjust firefighting strategy and tactics so that they could be accomplished with the resources on hand. This strategy allowed the fire commanders to get the job done but possibly not as effectively had resources been available. The second strategy was to go “outside the system” and order resources directly to the incident. This strategy has potential to defeat the higher-level strategy of coordinating responses and addressing the highest priority need with scarce resources, but it addressed the immediate need situation for the specific fire.

2. Federal Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) and Environmental Protection

What is the Analysis process on wildfires?

When wildfires occur, they can have dramatic affects on both the natural and human environments. These affects are considered when making decisions on how to manage and control a wildfire. Agency Administrators evaluate alternatives that include environmental considerations, values at risk, cost and social implications. Federal, state and local agencies have various methods of evaluating alternatives.

Systems available to analyze strategies

Federal agencies have adopted the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) to analyze strategic alternatives. This is a formal document required by policy which evaluates the effects of strategic decisions on specific environmental, economic and social issues. Information in the Land and Resource Management Plan is used to evaluate information on Federal land. It is then used to communicate the strategic information and decisions between the Agency Administrator and the Incident Commander, who prepares the fire control objectives. The Incident Commander may participate in the WFSA process to provide advice on fire suppression options. This document is prepared when the fire exceeds initial attack.

Public concerns for environmental protection lead to the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1964 and the Endangered Species Act in the 1970s. The California Environmental Quality Act and the California Rare and Endangered Species Acts were passed in the early 1970s. These laws have had a significant effect on vegetation management within the forest and wildland ecosystem of the state.

In some counties local ordinances have been implemented to addresses specific vegetation management issues.

Impact during this siege

Some non-federal command teams were not familiar of the WFSA process and the requirements of National Forest lands. On other incidents, the boundaries and direction contained in the WFSA were exceeded early in the fire and the information became obsolete and therefore ineffective as a guidance tool.

The scope of the WFSA generally analyzes effects within and near the fire area. During this siege, numerous external factors contributed to large scale impacts affecting infrastructure, commerce, transportation and the daily routines of millions of people.

A county ordinance affecting private land in the San Bernardino Mountains prohibits the cutting, trimming or removal of trees. This ordinance may have contributed to an "overstocked" condition. Four years of drought in this overstocked forest made the forest vulnerable to a devastating bark beetle infestation.

Strategic response

Federal agency policy dictated that all fires were to be suppressed and that no fires were to be managed for resource benefit. Agency Administrators decided that all fires would be fought aggressively to protect life and property as well as to gain perimeter control of their incidents. Teams adjusted their operational objectives to take into consideration environmental concerns. San Bernardino Area Command proceeded with strategic decisions while the WFSA information was being updated. In the San Diego area all fires were managed under one WFSA and a single interagency letter of delegation.

Due to the size and predicted cost of the large fires on National Forest land, they quickly met the criteria that required the WFSA to be approved by the Regional Forester instead of the Forest Supervisor. A process was established to centralize the WFSA process at the Regional level to accomplish this task.

3. Incident Complexity

What is incident complexity?

Incident complexity refers to the number and variety of issues and challenges that decision makers must consider during an incident. The size of an incident, number of concurrent incidents, and number and types of resources required are also considered. Incident complexity also takes into consideration the magnitude and speed of growth of the event. The amount of attention the incident attracts from elected officials, the media and the public can add additional complexity to the incident itself. Span of control is a term used to describe the number of things any one person must supervise or manage at one time. Systems are in place to gauge span of control issues so workloads can be divided into manageable increments.

What systems are in place to manage incident complexity?

Experience in managing complex wildfire incidents has led the wildland fire agencies to adopt a common organizational structure called the Incident Command System (ICS). The ICS includes common communications, training and associated management infrastructure. This system was developed through the FIRESCOPE program, in direct response to public pressure for a more efficient fire response after a similar fire siege in 1970.

The ICS system answers the public and political demand for having someone in charge during a disaster. The ICS allows for expansion as the complexity of an incident grows. Large, complex incidents managed under the ICS system require a large cadre of trained professionals. Federal agencies and CDF have developed incident teams that are dispatched to an incident as a single unit. The National system also includes teams called Area Command Teams that are used to supervise multiple incidents on behalf of the Agency Administrators.

Complexities that existed for this siege

- Numerous large fires burning concurrently.
- Large fires exceeding span of control guidelines.
- Fires involved multiple jurisdictions resulting in overlapping or concurrent responsibilities.
- Great deal of involvement by media and elected officials.
- Differences in agency policy.
- Fires that burned in towns and wilderness areas simultaneously.

There were multiple large fires burning close to each other competing for the same scarce resources. Several organizational issues surfaced during the rapid development of this siege. Several of the fires grew so large that the incident commanders were forced to exceed span-of-control guidelines until organizations could be adjusted. Incident commanders were having difficulty providing logistical support over long distances. Team leaders attempting to fill assignments found that trained personnel were scarce.

Strategic response

- Larger incidents were split into two incidents, sometimes along jurisdictional boundaries. This had the effect of improving span-of-control, simplifying logistical support, and reducing the number of fires that required the oversight of an Area Command Team. An adverse impact of this strategy was that more trained ICS team members were needed.
- Resources from one agency fought one side of a fire while resources from another agency handled the other side of the fire. The adverse impact of this strategy came in coordinating so that the correct type of resources were available for the tasks at hand.
- A Federal Area Command team was assigned to supervise multiple fires reducing the span of control problems for the Agency Administrators.
- An Interagency Area Coordination Team was assigned to the San Diego Area to help coordinate area fires.

4. Priorities (MACS) and Agency Oversight

What is priority setting?

When large or multiple incidents occur, the demand for resources can exceed availability. This can result in competition between incidents or between different activities on a single incident for the resources that are in short supply. When this happens, decisions must be made on where to assign the scarce resources. This is usually done by establishing criteria such as lives or values at risk, and the effectiveness that a resource may have on a particular assignment. On a single incident, priorities are established by the Agency Administrator and Incident Commander. On multiple incidents, a group of people representing the affected agencies will meet to set priorities.

What is agency oversight?

Large agencies such as the CDF and the U.S. Forest Service are split into management units making it easier to manage organizations and geographic areas. Some authority and responsibility is delegated to the supervisors of the management units and some is retained at the higher level of the organization. When large incidents occur, the amount and complexity of the workload can exceed the capability or authority of the management units. Then, higher level managers are required to execute their responsibilities and/or assist the managers of the management units. This is often accomplished by the higher level managers traveling to the management unit and working there as long as they are needed.

What systems are in place to manage priority setting?

The Multi Agency Coordinating System (MACS) was formed in response to problems encountered during the 1970 fires in southern California. MACS are in place throughout California and many other locations nationally. One of the responsibilities of the MACS is to set priorities for use of fire fighting resources in the event of multiple fires. In Southern California the MACS group is composed of Chief Officer representatives from each of the fire agencies and the State Office of Emergency Service. This group convenes for the duration of the need. Policies and procedures are in place to guide the MACS process and the various modes of coordination and staffing. The MACS group receives intelligence from all of the fires including the status of the fire, values at risk, damage potential, weather, and incident complexity. They then evaluate each fire and the fire's resource needs using the established criteria of 1) Life threatening situation, 2) Real property threatened, 3) High resource or other damage potential, and 4) Incident complexity. The fires are assigned a priority for receiving available resources.

Impact during this siege

During the 2003 fires the Southern California Geographic Area Coordinating Center (South Ops) facility was used for both the MACS function and much of the agency oversight. The facility was impacted by the demand for telephones, data lines, and workspace for additional staffing. This demand overloaded the existing facility infrastructure. The problem became more exacerbated with the arrival of State office staff, federal agency office staff, media, and elected officials, all of whom had a need to participate in the event. Coordination center staff were displaced from their workspace. Eventually, temporary office trailers were brought in to help relieve the demands on the facility.

Several agencies were not able to send a representative or support staff to the MACS organization because local fire activity in various cities and counties demanded their attention. Chief officer vacancies also left agencies shorthanded. Priority setting discussions were held via telephone conference calls. The demand for intelligence predictions, predictive service forecasts, and geographic information system products exceeded the capacity of the permanent staff at the GACC. At times the nexus between the intelligence and decision making was not up to date.

Strategic response

Local agencies retained resources within their jurisdiction and individual fire chiefs made agreements with their counterparts to share resources on adjoining fires. This provided them with a fluid flow of resources, which were outside of the resource tracking system. Incident Commanders ordered resources outside of the system directly from their agency to obtain the needed firefighting resources. Several agencies took independent actions on fires spreading into their jurisdiction without coordinating with their neighboring jurisdiction. An impact from these strategies was that type 3 engines and hand crews were not necessarily allocated to where they could be best used for perimeter control.

Life safety and real property protection were the first priorities. Low priority wildland fires grew larger, ultimately threatening life and property as the fires approached communities. The San Bernardino National Forest activated an Area Command team to facilitate management of their incidents. This reduced the workload for the Forest Supervisor and allowed for the movement of fire fighting resources between the Old and Grand Prix incidents without the direct involvement of the GACC or MACS.

CDF Agency Administrators from the State Office and U.S. Forest Service Agency Administrators from the Regional and Washington offices came to the area to assist with political issues and other duties required of them. In addition to other required duties, the U.S. Forest Service Director of Fire and Aviation Management for the California Region (Pacific Southwest Region) monitored the overall situation as it evolved and placed orders for Federal National teams so there would be adequate and timely management available for incidents involving Federal jurisdiction.

5. Resource Depth

What is resource depth?

Resource depth refers to the overall number of resources available to respond to incidents at one time. During times of heavy activity, there may not be adequate numbers of resources to meet all the requirements.

As discussed earlier, the Incident Command System (ICS) allows personnel from participating agencies to work together under a common system. Each agency has a limited number of resources that are allowed to leave the home unit at one time. The limit is usually referred to as the “Draw Down” level which means the agency has allowed as many resources to leave the unit as possible and still maintain staffing to provide emergency response for the home unit.

Firefighting and the required support operations require years of training, experience and a strict qualifications system, primarily for safety but also because people must know how the ICS system works in order to be effective in the organization. It is not safe or practical to hire people who are untrained or inexperienced to work directly on the firelines. Some jobs and services are contracted, but most of the leadership and actual firefighting must be done by trained and qualified personnel.

What was the resource availability during the siege?

Local, state, and federal political leaders strive to allocate sufficient funds for fire fighting. Federal agencies have defined a Most Efficient Level (MEL) of staffing to achieve an economically efficient organization. State and local governments balance risk of fire damage and cost with the cost of maintaining a standing fire fighting force. Budgets at all levels tend to be fixed responding slowly to changing social demands for resource protection.

At the time the siege began most of the agency funded fire fighting resources were staffed and ready for assignment. Some additional resources had been funded or prepositioned in Southern California in anticipation of a large fire event. There were no large fires anywhere else in the nation so the national resource availability was about normal for mid October.

Impact during this siege

Some of the State and Federal pre-designated command teams had vacancies from personnel being committed to the incident in significant management positions. Some multi-jurisdictional incidents that met the criteria for a Unified Command did not receive proper staffing due to scarcity of personnel.

The ordering process for resources began immediately, but it takes time to move large numbers of resources over long distances (see resource ordering section). There were times when required resources were not immediately available.

The need for engines was huge. Most agencies in Southern California and several in Northern California sent more engines from their units than ever before. Many of them were below their drawdown levels. In San Diego County, engines had been sent to fires in other counties, reducing resources that could have been available for the Cedar Fire.

OES and many other units became very creative in bringing engines out of maintenance schedules, ones that had been “decommissioned” and engines set aside for training purposes back into service. These were normally used for backfill so the primary engines could proceed to the fires. In some locations, crews from one agency were matched with engines from another.

Strategic response

The first strategy was to draw on existing closest resources that were trained and ready. As firefighters were assigned to the fires, local, state, and federal resources throughout northern and central California fell well below prudent reserves. This strategy proved very risky as northeast wind conditions fueled several large fires in Northern California. OES activated an established Inter-State Compact to share firefighting resources during events like this. Oregon engines staffed a fire and covered stations in Northern California as CDF resources were sent south. Nevada and Arizona sent engines and crews directly to the southern California fires. OES activated all of their reserve engines and mobilized the largest force of local government engines in history to be sent to wildland fires.

The Forest Service activated agreements and drew in resources from many other states. Other federal wildland firefighting resources were tapped. One Marine Battalion was ordered by the U.S. Forest Service, but cancelled before being deployed due to wet weather setting in. OES activated many California National Guard helicopters.

Early in the siege, CDF ordered aircraft that were off contract to be placed back in service. As the regular fleet of airtankers became committed, the Forest Service requested MAFFS aircraft from other states. CDF requested that OES activate 2 military MAFFS aircraft in California. As MAFFS were activated, the strategy was to focus their effort on the Ventura County fires close to the MAFFS Base and move the regular airtankers to other fires. This simplified the complex job of safely managing tactical air space over the fires.

CDF and federal managers made extensive use of private sector contractors for support operations. The U.S. Forest Service decided to not use Federal contract engines. During the siege, local government fire chiefs used private sector ambulance services to cover empty fire stations in order to continue basic medical emergency response. As the fire fight came to a close, public unease remained high. Agency Administrators held forces at incident bases and delayed demobilization just in case the Santa Ana winds returned. This strategy eased public worry in southern California but delayed the return of engines to home communities and reassignment to other fires. This also created additional logistical support demands and increased cost.

CDF chief officers collapsed two standing teams into one team to field enough trained personnel to properly staff the team. The U.S. Forest Service filled team vacancies with other qualified personnel who were not regular members of the team. Both efforts proved successful in insuring Incident Management/Command teams had adequate, qualified staffing.

6. Pre-fire Success

What are pre-fire activities?

There are many activities that took place prior to the start of these fires that reduced the adverse impacts during the fires. Some were done years earlier, and some were done more recently in response to the drought and mortality of the vegetation. They involved planning for disasters, fuel treatments around communities and evacuation routes in the wildlands. These activities took place in several areas involved in the siege. Many of the pre-fire activities had significant impact on the outcome of the fires.

What had been done?

Previous to the wildfires of 2003 there were many actions take by agencies and communities in preparation for conflagrations in the southern California area. Many agencies conducted fuels treatment projects within their jurisdictions. These activities included fuel breaks, pre attack planning, prescribed burning, preplanning of the incident, community education and evacuation plans. (See the section titled Prelude to the Siege, page 8, for a more complete description.)

Impact during this siege

The fires covered huge areas that included many of the pre-fire activity areas, and prompted the implementation of some of the pre-planning that had taken place in anticipation of a disastrous fire event.

Strategic response

Completed pre-fire fuels treatment activities were used on the Cedar, Otay, Roblar 2, and Old fires. County fire safe building requirements played a significant role in reducing structure losses in Ventura and Los Angeles Counties. These communities were able to “shelter in place” rather than face evacuation issues. This reduced the impacts to emergency evacuation shelters in the fire area. The MAST program in the San Bernardino Mountains played a major role in the preparation of the communities for a large fire. Preplanned and identified evacuation routes, completed structure protection plans and strong relationships with the affected agencies, communities and elected officials resulted in a efficient and effective coordination of activities in the Old fire area. Hazard tree removal along State Highway 18 facilitated the success of holding the fire along the Rim of the World and prevented the fire from entering Lake Arrowhead, Rim Forest, Sky Forest and Crest Park with full force. The media reported on the success of the community in preparing for the disaster.

Fire commanders incorporated many fuels management projects in their strategies for fighting fire. They used a Bureau of Land Management fuel break to contain the east side of the Otay fire in San Diego County. Pre existing fuel breaks were used the first night to contain one side of the Roblar 2 fire at Camp Pendleton Marine Base. A Prescribed burn and fire that occurred in 2001 played a significant role in containing the eastward spread of the Old fire towards Running Springs south of Keller Peak. Prescribed burns and hazard tree removal on the northeast side of Lake Arrowhead near the Mountains Community Hospital helped firefighters turn the fire away from the Hospital and surrounding development.

Sheriff's personnel were included in a Unified Command at the incident commander level and were full participants. The use of preplanned evacuation routes in the mountain communities, led to safe evacuation of 30-40,000 residents without impeding fire fighting efforts. Pre positioned fire fighting resources were immediately brought to bear on the incidents as they developed. Strong initial and extended attack was successful in containing other fires before they could become major incidents.

The U.S. Forest Service had completed a pre-fire fuel reduction zone around the Strawberry Peak Communications site. This mitigation prevented the site from being damaged, allowing critical communications for all the major responding agencies.

7. Safety

The foremost issue during a fire is firefighter and public safety. Safety policies have evolved over many years of experience and are shared among all fire agencies. Every situation has a well established, proven safety guideline. With few exceptions, fire agencies have common safety practices and procedures. There are a small number of specific safety policies that are different between the agencies, but accomplish the same goal. When there is more than one agency working on an incident, implementation of different policies are addressed and coordinated by the incident commander.

What was the safety environment on this siege?

Over several years the public, politicians, and agency administrators had come to recognize the inherent dangers that wildland firefighters have dealt with on a routine basis. Firefighter deaths, both in the air and on the ground, occur each year on wildland fires across the United States. OSHA had become involved in the investigation of firefighter deaths. CDF experienced a mid-air collision, killing two veteran pilots. Several federal airtankers had crashed as aging aircraft succumbed to the flight stress of wildland firefighting. The 30 Mile Fire in Washington resulted in a mandatory list of safety action items the Federal agencies were responsible to implement on each fire. Books on historic wildland fire fatalities became popular at big-box bookstores.

Impact during this siege

There had never been a situation in history where this many firefighters and citizens were involved in a wildfire disaster at one time. In spite of the best efforts, citizen deaths accumulated. The death of the Novato firefighter while trying to protect a house brought increased national focus to the siege. The firefighter death increased an already high level of management concern for safety. Citizen and firefighter safety was frequently discussed and analyzed on the 24-hour broadcasts.

Safety exposures came from many sources that are common on individual incidents, but the magnitude of the siege caused more exposure by more sources at one time than ever before. Examples were flames, smoke, high wind, hazardous materials, burning buildings, massive evacuations, heavy traffic, people refusing to evacuate in time, pilots reported large pieces of debris thousands of feet above the fires damaging some of their windshields, damaged power lines, steep terrain, and much more.

The mandatory work/rest cycles for firefighters were impossible to meet at times as there was no relief as communities and the public were at risk for days on end.

Some non-federal incident command teams were assigned to fires with Federal jurisdiction, but were not trained in the requirements of the 30-mile Hazard Abatement Plan which is required on fires on National Forest land.

Some local fire departments did not have radios that could communicate with State and Federal radios. The 800 megahertz radio systems were not able to meet the heavy communication demand between firefighting resources. 800 megahertz systems manufactured by different vendors were not able to cross-communicate.

Strategic response

Firefighter and public safety was the most important issue and first objective on every incident. All of the agencies involved continually discussed safety and how to prevent accidents and deaths.

Aircraft were grounded or reassigned to other fires for safety and effectiveness reasons as winds exceed operational thresholds.

In some locations, Incident Commanders separated crew fire assignments by agency to accommodate specific agency safety policies, especially the differences in the shift lengths and work rest cycles. CDF

used a 24hr on/24hr off cycle, while the Federal agencies use a 16hr per day maximum, resulting in two 12hr shifts per day. It was difficult to mix the two cycles.

Fire commanders decided not to request some military aircraft. This strategy recognizes the different training levels of the pilots and skills needed for wildfire aviation operations and effectively eliminated a potential safety concern.

Agency Administrators assigned a Major Accident Investigation Team to investigate the firefighter death. This allowed the incident command team to focus on the remaining firefight.

Agency Administrators attempted to split fires and assign additional Command/Management teams to prevent span of control safety issues.

Some resources worked for 48 hours without relief to continue to protect lives of citizens and attempt to get them out of harm's way. Work/Rest cycles were implemented as soon as relief resources arrived.

8. Military Resources

What does it mean to use military resources?

Military resources are not deployed for normal wildfire activity. During times of heavy wildfire activity the demand for firefighting resources may exceed the availability of regular firefighting forces. Procedures are in place to activate the National Guard for aircraft and vehicles, and the regular military for aircraft and fire crews. The military does not keep their ground personnel trained and qualified in firefighting. When they are activated to become fire crews the wildland fire agencies must train the designated military unit before they can be sent to an incident.

What was the military status during this siege?

Authorities exist to use military resources within limits. The Economy Act of 1932, as amended (31 USC 1535), authorizes an agency to place orders for goods and services with another government agency when the head of the ordering agency determines that it is in the best interest of the government and decides ordered goods or services cannot be provided as conveniently or cheaply by contract with commercial enterprise. Specifically, the head of an agency or major organizational unit within an agency may place an order with a major organizational unit within the same agency or another agency for goods or services if—(1) amounts are available; (2) the head of the ordering agency or unit decides the order is in the best interest of the United States Government; (3) the agency or unit to fill the order is able to provide or get by contract the ordered goods or services; and (4) the head of the agency decides ordered goods or services cannot be provided by contract as conveniently or cheaply by a commercial enterprise.

Wildland fire agencies have developed operational agreements, plans, processes, and procedures for activating military resources to support wildland firefighting demands. These plans are developed for the more frequently activated resources such as National Guard helicopter crews and C-130 MAFFS. The plans are put into use as the normal firefighting resources become fully committed. This mission tasking gives the base commanders the authority and responsibility to maintain specialized equipment and conduct training for personnel. Less frequently activated resources such as ground troops can be activated but must receive wildfire training and equipment before being sent to the fire lines. This can be a time consuming process.

Impact during this siege

The fire problem evolved through four phases during this siege. In the first phase from October 21–24, several large fires burned under average bad fire weather conditions. These fires were driven primarily by fuel and topography conditions. The wildland fire agencies reacted swiftly, assigning southern California resources to the fires and moving additional resources in from outside the area. The second phase, from October 24–26 saw the weather change to an offshore Santa Ana wind pattern. Existing fires burned out of control and new fires quickly became major conflagrations. Fire fighting resources were rapidly deployed and additional resources were ordered from outside the area. The third phase from October 26–29 occurred when the Santa Ana winds died down and an onshore wind pushed the fires in the opposite direction. Additional out-of-area resources were now being drawn from greater distances. In the fourth phase, after October 29, the weather changed to a cool moist pattern, slowing fire growth and reducing fire intensity. Inclement weather grounded aircraft in many places while ground resources made good progress in controlling the fires.

This rapidly changing fire weather dynamic created many issues for the fire managers. During the second phase of this rapidly escalating crisis, fires burned with extreme rates of spread and intensities. The Cedar Fire grew at a rate of over 2 acres per second during a 10 hour run. The Simi Fire, a spot fire from the Verdale Fire, grew at a rate of over 3 acres per second during a one hour run. Fire fighters could not be deployed fast enough to keep up with the fire growth during these periods of extreme fire behavior. The fires killed many people, tens of thousands were evacuated from many communities, thousands of homes were destroyed, and a congressman in San Diego lost his house. A public outcry emerged calling for the fire agencies to use any available firefighting resources. The Congressman made strong demands for fire managers to immediately use military resources.

Strategic response

Early in the siege, multiple orders were placed for call-when-needed aircraft to support firefighting operations. As the pool of these private sector aircraft became committed, the wildland fire agencies turned to military sources. CDF, working through OES, requested 8 California National Guard Blackhawk helicopters on Oct. 25, requested 3 Nevada National Guard Blackhawk helicopters on Oct. 27, and requested 2 Firehawk helicopters from the Oregon National Guard on Oct. 28. The helicopters reported to the Los Alamitos National Guard Base and were then assigned to specific fires based on incident needs. CDF, working through OES, also requested 4 helicopters from the Washington National Guard on Oct. 29. This order was cancelled prior to arrival of the helicopters as the fire situation improved.

CDF, through OES, requested the 2 California National Guard MAFFS C-130 AirTankers on Oct. 25. The U.S. Forest Service, through the National Interagency Fire Center, ordered the 6 remaining MAFFS C-130 Airtankers from bases outside California. All of the MAFFS airtankers were deployed to the Channel Island facility for fire-by-fire mission assignments.

On Oct. 28, the U.S. Forest Service, through the National Interagency Fire Center, ordered a battalion of Marines (500 troops) to be assigned to the Cedar Fire. This order was cancelled a day later as the weather changed.

9. Public Information

What is the need for public information?

There is a critical need for useful and timely fire information for the public, the media, medical personnel, evacuation center managers and others when a wildland urban interface fire causes a large number of civilian deaths, loss of homes, businesses, vehicles and personal property. This information is demanded during evacuations, and in the weeks following the incident. Civilians whose safety and property are immediately threatened by the fire want and need information that helps them cope with the fire and its consequences. With adequate information, people can ensure their families are safe, evacuate livestock and pets if needed, better prepare their property to survive the fire, and evacuate and reoccupy in an orderly fashion. Civilians actively seek information and elected officials also demand more information and want it immediately. Elected officials sometimes compete to announce fire information.

Impacts during this siege

The Southern California fire siege occurred over seven counties in one of the most heavily populated areas of the nation. The fires caused numerous evacuations that impacted thousands of civilians. The fire siege grew quickly. People at county and other government offices provided good information, but the incident was so big and developed so fast that information resources were stretched too far. Fire Safe Councils were prepared to help disseminate information but many of their members were evacuees during the fire.

Strategic response

The Incident Command System includes an Information Officer on the Command Staff. All of the federal and state teams staff this function with additional personnel as needed for the incident. Incident PIO's used a variety of strategies to get information out including news releases, local radio station interviews, on scene media briefings, and information kiosks at evacuation centers.

In July of 2003, the Mountain Area Safety Task Force developed a joint information center that would be a central point of information for the public and the media during a large wildfire in the San Bernardino Mountains. The cooperating agencies hosted a team to develop a Joint Information Plan and a facility was selected for the Center. The Joint Information Center was activated on October 27, 2003. Between 10/27-11/10/03 the Center logged over 23,000 calls for an average of over 1450 calls per day. Over thirty people including agency employees, volunteers, Fire Safe Council volunteers and others staffed the Center. The phone bank operated 24 hours a day and seven days a week. The primary subject of the calls ranged from basic fire information, evacuation information, road closures, and the lifting of evacuations and citizen re-entry into communities.

Governor Davis initiated and facilitated daily conference calls with wildland fire officials and elected representatives from the affected region. Fire officials were given the opportunity to brief the elected officials on key events of the day and responded to questions. These conference calls continued throughout the fire siege.

Governor Davis also initiated and facilitated daily conference calls with wildland fire officials and members of the press corps. Fire officials were given the opportunity to brief the press on key events of the day and responded to questions. These conference calls continued throughout the fire siege.

President Bush, Governor Davis, agency administrators and key elected officials toured the fires and conducted numerous on scene press conferences at key incident locations such as evacuation centers, disaster assistance centers, incident bases, and elsewhere. These press conferences helped focus media attention to emerging issues.

10. Cost Sharing

What is cost sharing?

The California Health and Safety and Government Codes define authorities local governments use to provide fire protection services. The Public Resources Code defines the responsibilities of the Director of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for providing wildland fire protection on State Responsibility Area (SRA). When a local district provides fire suppression and prevention for structures on SRA, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection retains responsibility for fire suppression and prevention on the timbered, brush, and grass-covered lands. Federal laws define the responsibilities for federal agencies for fire protection on federal land. State and federal agencies have specific authority to hire resources when needed to assist with the wildland fire fighting effort. The Government Code also defines specific authority for state and local government to give and receive mutual aid. The California Disaster and Civil Defense Master Mutual Aid Agreement defines the basic authorities of state and local government for assisting through mutual aid.

As a wildland fire spreads across multiple jurisdictions, the various authorities and responsibilities of the affected jurisdictions come into play. Fiscal management can become cumbersome so various agreements have been developed to allow the agencies to share the cost of fighting a wildland fire. Under the Incident Command System, responsible jurisdictions work together as one team in a Unified Command to fight the fire and then share costs based on specifics of the incident.

What had been done?

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the federal wildland fire agencies have entered into a master wildland fire agreement called the California Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement (commonly called the Four Party Agreement) that sets up the process for cost sharing on individual fires. Further, the state and federal wildland fire agencies and the State Office of Emergency Services have developed a California Fire Assistance Agreement with the wildland fire agencies that defines policy and procedures for paying local government for firefighting resources (assistance by hire) during wildland fires. National Forests and local government as well as CDF and local government have developed many local agreements.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), under the authority of the Stafford Act, administers grant programs through the State OES. These federal grants assist state and local government entities that are faced with the high cost of a large wildland fire. These FEMA grants pay 75% of the cost, a significant help on a large complex incident. As an incident grows in impact and the President declares a disaster, then the assistance from FEMA increases. FEMA also provides assistance to the victims of the disaster. Application for the FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) is normally done on a fire-by-fire basis through OES.

Impact during this siege

The size of the fires, the number of homes destroyed, and the number of homes threatened required a considerable response of local government resources in addition to the wildland agency resources. This response posed a significant fiscal issue for local jurisdictions. On the Grand Prix fire, members of the Unified Command discussed who should order (and pay for) engines to protect structures in the path of the fire. The magnitude and intensity of the fire and the associated resource order to meet the threat to structures posed a significant fiscal threat to the local jurisdiction given the normal cost sharing procedures.

OES and FEMA administrators were processing many Fire Management Assistance Grant requests. The FMAG process calls for very tight reporting times and the large number of grant applications for the many fires threatened to overwhelm the administrative staff.

Strategic response

Incident commanders for most fires relied on established cost share policy and procedures as defined during the siege. Orders for resources were made based on operational need and fiscal issues were taken care of through normal business practices. On behalf of the Grand Prix Unified Command, the forest supervisor from the local national forest spoke directly to a county supervisor to seek a resolution to the question of who should be placing resource orders. For expediency, CDF and the US Forest Service incident commanders on this fire initially ordered five strike teams of engines each to meet the immediate structure protection needs of the incident. Subsequent resource orders went smoothly, following established procedures.

State wildland agency administrators developed a Cost Apportionment Process (see appendix) specific for this siege. This agreement provided consistency to the cost apportionment process and simplified the process when possible.

OES administrators discussed the FMAG workload with FEMA. The two agencies agreed to file one FMAG application for all of the fires in Southern California. This greatly simplified the administrative processing and cost tracking for the jurisdictions involved.