

Personal Observations and Lessons Learned

from the Dump & Quail Fires

Training Item by Jim Weeks – N1LGQ on July 10, 2012

1. In the case of the Dump fire in Eagle Mountain June 22-25, 2012: People in the community were so generous! Many wanted to help in any way they could. Some brought in a single bag of fruit and snacks. Some a case of water or drinks others multiple cases.
2. The amount of donated goods (food, water, drinks, snacks of all kinds, pastries, muffins, fruit, loaves of bread, batteries, etc) was incredible. A large retailer delivered a tractor trailer load of water and left contact info to call if ANYTHING else was needed. Another retailer donated boxes of AA batteries (over 3,000 in total).
3. There was so much stuff that special arrangements had to be made to store all the donated supplies at the fire station.
4. On Friday the 22nd of June volunteers from the community, many who were from CERT, made approximately 300 sack lunches for firefighters and other volunteers.
5. On Sat the 23rd the incident escalates to level 2 and FEMA took over funding and incident command. Things changed!
6. FEMA is now authorized to spend federal money allocated for the incident. They order whatever they need regardless of what supplies were stockpiled. Consequently, there was no place to send the 250+ sack lunches and all other perishables stocked were I was located. They had to be hauled off to the food bank to avoid going to waste.
7. Same with non-perishables...Fire Station 2 has a supply of non-perishables that will last them a very long time.
8. The local state, county, and city are still responsible to cover 25% of the costs with FEMA picking up 75%. However, volunteer efforts can offset the 25%, IF they are documented in detail. It wasn't apparent to me why we needed all the detailed info until after the event was over. In some cases we had to backtrack to capture info we missed.
9. For anyone who has been through the CERT program you know the emphasis that is placed on documentation. The need to document every detail is critical. Names, addresses, call signs, phone numbers, check-in and check-out times, assignments made, etc. Additionally, keep a detailed log of all net control traffic.
10. In the case of the Quail fire in Alpine July 3-6, 2012: I was stationed in the MACC (Multi Agency Command Center). It is a high-tech motor home with eight computer flat screen monitors, seven are stations with keyboards, seven UHF/VHF radios including a dual band and multiple commercial radios monitoring different TAC frequencies used by police and

fire, one HF rig, a closed circuit remote control TV camera to monitor the incident. The CP was also incident command center and the net control center. At the Dump fire they were each in three different locations.

11. The command post is noisy and full of distractions! People are coming in and out all the time. People are talking and discussing issues. The generator is within the vehicle structure contributing further to the noise. Multiple radios are passing traffic. Everyone entering and leaving must be logged in and out with detailed contact info. It is hard to hear!
12. As net control station it is a challenge to listen, stay focused, and capture all the details which are typed on one of the monitors using Microsoft Word. There were times when I was answering CP calls and doing all the documentation on the computer, including the in and out logging. At other times CP traffic was answered by the incident commander or designated law enforcement official while I logged all the details in the computer.
13. There is surprisingly not a lot of information about the status of fire broadcast over the radio. It was unclear to me at both fires what the Public Information Officer (PIO) was communicating to the media, although the PIO for the Quail fire did stop by the CP.
14. Social media, especially twitter, is a phenomenal tool to get close to real time info, with some qualifications. Many tweets are exaggerated or inaccurate, so you have to be wary of the sources. Even so the number of homes involved and people evacuated was frequently over stated by so called official sources. I often read on twitter info 15 minutes before it was reported over the radio. Also much of the response from the community was driven by Facebook posts. I am now a regular twitter user!
15. You never have enough connectors, cables or spare batteries. My jump kit was used at the Dump fire. An external antenna was mounted on a small tree outside the fire station.
16. Communications inside some buildings is difficult. Transmission signals are blocked by building structures. Such was the case for the HAM's stationed at the High School evacuation center for the Dump fire where the Red Cross was also located. An interior/exterior mounted antenna might have helped rather than just the HT/whip.
17. Despite the thousands evacuated for the Dump fire only 13 stayed overnight at the evacuation center.
18. Every incident is the event we drill for and every incident becomes a drill for the next one that we prepare for.
19. Although the real thing is much harder than being NCS on our weekly net. Doing so multiple times was invaluable in preparing me for what I experienced.