INVOLVEMENT OF THE CDF MAJOR INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM DURING THE TUNNEL FIRE

Mention the term "CDF Major Incident Management Team" to some in the Fire Service, including some within my own agency, and numerous questions immediately come to mind. Hopefully, I will address most of these while relating the involvement of a CDF Team during the Tunnel Fire.

Perhaps the first question would be: "What is a CDF Major Incident Management Team?" The answer could be: a select number of Incident Command System Command and General Staff personnel organized to manage emergency incidents. While true, this is only part of the story.

The ICS Chief and Officer positions staffed on a CDF Team are those which experience has proven to be required on each incident, regardless of the magnitude or incident type. These positions allow the team to immediately begin functioning upon arrival plus act as the core from which to build the total management structure an incident requires. This group, or "team", becomes very paramilitaristic in nature and function driven, while on-scene.

One logic behind organized "teams" is to avoid the some of the problems associated with assembling an on-incident group of personnel who probably haven't worked together before and expecting that group to function smoothly. This can happen! We, in CDF have been doing exactly that for over forty years! However, each time such a group has been organized, some very predictable interactions take place. One we call the "mating dance".

This "mating dance" involves everyone, and I mean everyone from the I.C. on down, expending a large amount of their time experimenting with everyone else in the group to assure no one's toes are stepped-on or feelings hurt. This is time wasted!

Organized teams eliminate the vast majority of the "mating dance" because team personnel have already interacted through drills, trainee assignments and previous incidents. Experience with team members builds consistency and those personal relationships necessary for a smooth flow of incident actions.

For team assignments, the relationships between all the players becomes an integral part of team success. In fact, a team I. C. continually monitors this interaction because without it, he does not have a "team" and incident management suffers.

Another question could be: "how are personnel selected for team assignments?" Basically, everyone has successfully performed their individual functional assignments on previous incidents. In addition, CDF teams are encouraged to use trainees upon each activation. One reason for trainee use is the opportunity to work with a person under a real and stressful situation as an evaluation for future team assignments as well as providing "extra" hands for position relief. Kind of a spring training prior to the season.

Department chiefs, agency administrators or jurisdictional officials would probably be asking the next question: "why does a management team make sense for me"?

First, we must define "proper incident management". As members of the Fire Service, we all know and understand the principles of extinguishing a fire. As entry firefighters, we have doused that dumpster enough times to know how much water and how long it will take. As a captain, we know the problems of getting our engine people engaged in the fire tactics we want. On that rare occasion, a captain can even get those damn truckees to fit into the attack plan. The chief officer, having withstood enough truckee bashings to get the white hat, becomes responsible for even larger and more complex incidents. The fires are now all out so... this must be "proper incident management", right?

Yes, the fires are out ... the incidents were managed. But, no, pumping water or venting a roof is not all that your department did on an incident. Someone, somewhere, processed the document that paid for the cold drinks and lunches the chief ordered, even if he was two hours late. And did you ever wonder how the Information Officer can talk about your dumpster fire? He or she was probably never on the fire.

"Proper incident management" means dealing with many more aspects of incident operations than putting the wet stuff on the red stuff, although that is surely paramount. But consider some of these facets of incident management:

establishing efficient use of all resources through formalized planning,

assuring the safety of employees and the public,

satisfying the media and VIP informational needs,

dealing with the financial ramifications generated by the incident

These and many more non-traditional fire ground details must be dealt with in the course of properly managing an incident, be it the single dumpster or an interface fire that takes out 2,000 structures. And to assume that any single person can accomplish all of this management alone is dealing both the incident and that person a poor hand.

One advantage an organized team brings to an incident is that each member arrives prepared to tackle a specialized position and is not directly concerned with all other aspects of the incident command. This, coupled with the interpersonal skills each member has developed, leads to incident management by specialists who bring their individual talents and contributions into support of the incident commander's objectives. A real Team effort.

Additionally, benefit can be realized due to the dedication of a team through to the incident's conclusion. Personnel cannot be "split" between normal department duties and those of an extended incident. Such splitting interrupts the consistency of incident management. By dedicating a team to an incident, agency administrators are committing to the best possible conclusion of the emergency through a continuous management structure.

But enough about management teams in general. I suppose the next question which comes up is: "what can a CDF Major Incident Management Team do for me"?

It is a good time to mention a CDF Team's mind set towards incident management. This is easily summarized as: "we can manage anything". I mean that exactly as it sounds. By utilizing the Incident Command System in its intended application, a team

staffed with the necessary specialized functions can manage any type of emergency or other situations requiring the management of personnel and resources.

For example, by reviewing the management structures of Desert Storm or the IBM Corporation or a construction company building a bridge, you only have to transpose the ICS titles onto those structures to visualize how ICS, through a management team, could perform. In addition, ICS and a management team can be employed for non-emergency operations. The structure of this workshop, for example, is based on ICS and is under the direction of a management group. Of course, once past the primary management positions, technical specialists become necessary for individual situation success. This is exactly what happens on an incident.

The point is, each incident does not require an overall manager with detailed knowledge of each aspect of that incident; technical expertise can be brought to the I.C. and staff. However, each incident **does require management**, be it an initial alarm or a major commitment of multiple jurisdictions.

Of primary concern to all administrators is the relationship between a CDF Management Team and their jurisdictions. And rightfully so. Luckily, this relationship can take a number of different forms.

A CDF Team is staffed to assume command of any situation upon request of the responsible jurisdiction. There will be a need to legally transfer authority from the jurisdiction to the Team I.C....usually in the form of a Letter of Authority which details the team's authorities, responsibilities and their immediate supervisor. This formal transfer can be a benefit in many occasions but, it can also be detrimental to some incidents due to outside pressures. This transfer is entirely up to the requesting jurisdiction. We can work for anyone.

A second method of utilizing a CDF Team is to have it be subordinate to the responsible jurisdiction as deputies. This method allows the jurisdiction to remain as the visible incident authority while using the skills of the CDF Team as a guide through a complex situation the jurisdiction might not be comfortable managing. This was the situation in 1991 when a CDF Team was subordinate to the California Department of Fish and Game on the Cantera Haz Mat Spill in the Upper Sacramento River. Fish and Game does not routinely manage incidents as complex as Cantera and therefore, does not go to the expense of maintaining such expertise within their department. Through interdepartmental agreements, CDF now responds with the necessary personnel and resources to aid Fish and Game, as well as other State agencies, with emergency incident management.

Another method of employing a CDF Management Team is to have it interface into a Unified Command Structure as an equal partner with the same responsibilities and authorities as other involved jurisdictions. Team members fill those functions as necessary to complete the incident's management structure. This was the method employed for the CDF Team during the Tunnel Fire.

The Tunnel Fire ... how was this new or different?

First, does everyone clearly understand the term "Unified Command"? A quick definition could be: "A jurisdiction with responsibility within an incident becomes an equal partner in the command of that incident". The four primary jurisdictions in the Tunnel Fire felt that a Unified Command Structure was the best way to address each agency's concerns. I want to emphasize an important point...**CDF did not "take-over" the Tunnel Fire; we interfaced into an existing Unified Command Structure as an equal partner, just as the jurisdictions of Oakland, Berkeley and Piedmont had prior to the CDF Team's arrival.**

"How did this Unified Command work?" First, the Incident Commanders from the four agencies set the **incident's objectives** in print. These objectives became the management team's goals or "marching orders".

Next, the four I.C.s appointed the key section chiefs and staff officers required by the incident. In some cases, CDF Team personnel were in deputy roles providing consistency between operational shifts. Other positions were staffed by CDF Section Chiefs or Staff Officers, as needed. Every choice was a unanimous selection based on the needs of the incident and the availability of personnel.

Finally, the I.C.s set the actions for the incident. While most of these priorities remained constant throughout the fire, some changed as the incident progressed and, finally, wound down. Some of these priorities included:

- Establishing assignments for all in-coming resources
- Continuation of incident operations within the incident objectives and action plan
- The establishment of a Unified Information Section to meet the needs of the media and elected officials
- Coordination with law enforcement
- Providing for new incidents within the cities
- Support of incident personnel
- Paying for everything
- Demobilization of resources.

What were the **"lessons learned"** by the CDF Management Team on the Tunnel Fire? The most important lesson was actually the reinforcing of the old fire ground adage which goes:

> "The two easiest things to do on an incident are walk in and point out everything the initial attack staff is doing wrong...or...walk in and ask 'what can we do to help?'"

It's up to the assisting personnel to decide which to do. Of course, it doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out which is most useful to those personnel already on-scene.

Also reinforced was the whole Fire Service "can do" attitude. I cannot recall any instance of personnel being pushed to a point of non-performance. When the going got really tough, the truly tough were wearing Fire Service uniforms. Additionally, an individual's rank or department had little to do with the ability or desire to perform.

We learned as well that there is a genuine desire in municipal departments to expand their knowledge of complex incident management. Having limited numbers of large incidents which involve hundreds of personnel or resources has short-changed the departments of the opportunity to experience these incidents. As the CDF Team had previously been through complex situations, including the Loma Prieta Earthquake and multi-branch wildland fires, the municipal personnel pushed to glean as much

information as possible. To meet this demand for exposure, each CDF person engaged in providing on-the-job-training. While the feeling that your actions were being closely monitored was distracting, it was very rewarding to have another department's personnel perform "under the gun" with little training or exposure to the selected task.

However, there is one area in which the Fire Service as a whole, and CDF in particular, needs to expend a great deal of effort to improve. This is the working relationship between the incident and the media. It is very difficult for a paramilitaristic structure like that of incident command to relate on a human level but, this is what is necessary. I am personally poor at dealing with the media and this is not an acceptable flaw in command personnel. Some departments have professional persons schooled in the art of media relations. These people are truly worth their weight in gold.

The disadvantages of poorly dealing with the media are many. The most important is that the general public is done a disservice. Improper or ill-timed information causes too many problems and concerns for the public. It is up to the Fire Service to provide correct and timely information during incidents. **To improve this aspect of fire operations is a must.**

And, finally, a lesson from the Tunnel Fire which must be learned by fire people nationwide is that no single agency can handle all incidents on their own. The tall isolationist walls around our jurisdictions have to crumble so better service is provided to the taxpayer. No department is an island.

The immediate need for vast amounts of resources to combat the "Fire of the Future", as the Tunnel Fire is now called, demands quick responses across agency boundaries. And folks, there will be another Tunnel Fire. This, coupled with our need to respond quickly and professionally to non-fire emergencies such as floods, earthquakes or environmentally damaging releases, will test us all. Challenging the typical Fire Service "can do" attitude, I urge you to deliver these services by building bridges between jurisdictional islands.

Thank you