THE EAST BAY HILLS FIRE

AN ACTION PLAN... TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

A Report to the Chair of the OES Fire and Rescue Service Advisory Committee/FIRESCOPE Board of Directors

October 1992

PREFACE

On April 25, 1992, Fire Chief William Maxfield (as the Chair of the OES Fire and Rescue Services Committee/FIRESCOPE Board of Directors) appointed a working group to develop action plans implementing as many of the recommendations in the OES report on the East Bay Hills Fire. The working group members were:

Gary Costamagna
Fire Chief
City of Sacramento

Michael Guerin
Assistant Director for Response and Recovery
California Office of Emergency Services

Richard Henry
Director, Aviation and Fire Management
Region V, USDA Forest Service

Neil Honeycutt
Assistant Fire Chief
City of Oakland

William C. Teie, Chair
Deputy Director for Fire Protection
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

David D. Walizer
Chief Deputy Director
California Office of the State Fire Marshal

INTRODUCTION

The working group reviewed the 53 recommendations outlined in the OES report to the City of Oakland. Several factors were used to select the issues that would be developed. They were:

- The issue was of statewide importance.
- The issue was of such a nature that the members of the working group could, within existing authorities, complete the recommended action.
- The issue could be accomplished in a reasonable time.

THE ISSUES, BACKGROUND AND ACTION PLANS

1 FIRE WEATHER FORECASTS

The National Weather Service issues fire weather forecasts twice a day; once in the morning to provide the latest weather information for the day, and then in the afternoon, as a forecast for the next day. These forecasts are provided to the forest agencies, but delivery of the forecasts to the fire service, public, concerned utilities and other governmental agencies is random and haphazard.

1a. Utilize the FIRESCOPE computer equipment as the source of the fire weather forecasts for the fire service. Develop a bulletin board that can be accessed by a personal computer and modem. Provide the NWS forecasts and the latest situations status for the state and nation. ACTION: OES

UPDATE: The daily NWS forecasts are now being automatically loaded into the FIRESCOPE computers. Work has begun on providing this information to the fire service. The FIRESCOPE Ops committee will be used to develop the local fire department access protocols and a user's guide.

1b. Develop an informational package that describes the National Fire Danger Rating System "adjectives" for the utilities (PG &E, SMUD, Southern Pacific Railroad, etc.) and governmental agencies (CalTrans). Provide a central point that this information can be secured. ACTION: CDF

UPDATE: A process to provide this information is in place. CDF is developing an informational package that will describe the Fire Danger Rating System and how the various utility companies and governmental entities can access this information.

1c. Develop an informational package (to include the software) that will allow fire service

administrators to access the CDF Automatic Lightning Detection System and Remote Automatic Weather Stations data files. Develop a "low tech" fire weather handbook for local government fire personnel. ACTION: CDF

UPDATE: The software for this program has been developed. The FIRESCOPE computers will have to be programmed to store this information. NWCG has just developed a fire weather training video. CDF will secure a copy for review.

1d. Develop daily statewide public service announcement for television, describing the potential fire danger within the State. The announcement would alert the media and public as to potential fire danger in their community based on temperature, humidity and windspeed. The components could be combined to give a low, medium, high or extreme danger rating. Request the National Weather Service to add a Red Flag element to the NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts and to issue a special weather bulletin whenever they predict a Red Flag condition. ACTION: CDF

UPDATE: The NWS is willing to test this concept. CDF will be working with the Sacramento Weather Service Office to develop the parameters of the test. They are also willing to discuss the development of a policy that issues special weather advisories when "Red Flag" warning are given.

1e. Develop a bulletin board for "situation status". Individual incident status (ICS 209) information would be available to the California fire services.

UPDATE: The FIRESCOPE Ops committee will be asked to develop this "sit stat" bulletin board.

2 MUTUAL AID COMMUNICATIONS

Reliable communications is vital to the success of any emergency operation. This includes communications on the incident between fire engines, command staff and communications center; between communications centers; and, between other all levels of government. Several communications related issues need to be addressed. Some of these are:

- The need for predesignated TAC frequencies.
- The "movement" of fire service communications to 400 and 800 MHz radio frequencies is compounding mutual aid communications problems.
- The fact that there is no industry standard for 800 MHz radio communications, does not allow equipment purchased from one vendor to communicate with equipment from another vendor.

2a. Develop a list of radio frequencies that can be used as TAC nets during major disaster operations. The list will include the national mutual aid frequencies and frequencies presently allocated to federal, state and local governmental agencies. The list will be organized by county and who has to be contacted to secure authorization for its use. ACTION: CDF, OES, FS and FIRESCOPE.

UPDATE: A list of frequencies that could be used as TAC nets is being developed. This list of TAC nets will not conflict with the FIRESCOPE frequency agreements. A letter will be sent to APCO asking that they assign three additional mutual aid frequencies to California. These frequencies are to be in the 154-155 MHz band.

2b. Develop the specifications for a CALIFORNIA FIRE MUTUAL AID RADIO. This will be a high-quality, low wattage mobile radio that will allow the user to access the mutual aid frequencies. The radio could be installed in fire department equipment that normally operates on radio frequencies outside the 151-174 MHz band. ACTION: OES and CDF

UPDATE: Specifications for this radio are being drafted.

2c. Require all 800 MHz systems sold in California to include the "non-trucked" national mutual aid frequences on the mobile radios. Also, request APCO to develop an industry standard for digitized band radio equipment. ACTION: OES

UPDATE: The standardization of 800 MHz systems is not possible. That should have happened years ago. The new issue is a national standard for digitized systems. This issue is under discussion. A draft letter is attached, asking the FCC and APCO to insist on a national standard.

2d. Automate the OES Fire and Rescue request ordering system. ACTION: CDF, OES and FS.

UPDATE: The development of INCINET (the automation of the ICS system by CDF) may have application.

2e. Make greater use of the CDF inter-regional intercom. Add the Sacramento County Communications Center and the Los Angeles County Fire Department Communications Center to this intercom. ACTION: CDF and OES.

UPDATE: Work has already begun on this action item. Cost figures have been developed and engineering has begun.

2f. Work with the cellular telephone industry in an attempt to provide PRIORITY SERVICE privileges for emergency response personnel. ACTION: OES

UPDATE: The OES Telecommunications Section has begun working on this issue. The carriers are concerned about the cost. Alameda County has been able to get one of their cellular carriers to assign a prefix to emergency personnel. OES will sent letter to the Public Utilities Commission requesting their assistance.

2g. Continue to work with the Federal Communications Commission, broadcasting organizations and public information officers on better use of the Emergency Broadcasting System and the Emergency Digital Information Systems. ACTION: OES

UPDATE: The EDIS is being expanded to cover Southern California on an expedited basis. Training in use of both systems is ongoing. OES will work on providing access to EDIS for the fire service through the FIRESCOPE computer system.

2h. Consider methods for emergency cross-patch of fire radio systems which operate in various frequency bands. Consider this option at stationary sites and in portable configurations. ACTION: CDF and OES.

UPDATE: The specifications for the mobile relays are being developed. Funding the purchase may be a little more difficult.

3 MANAGING A MAJOR URBAN/WILDLAND FIRE

The California Fire Mutual Aid System is so well organized and "practiced" that mobilizing great numbers of engines is routine. But, managing them on the fire ground is another issue.
The working group feels that a special training course needs to be developed for the local government chief officer. The course would focus on the strategy and tactics of a major urban/wildland fire disaster, how aid is provided and how aid that is given is managed. Special emphasis must be placed on the logistical challenges of a major disaster.

3a. Develop a course that provides local government chief officers with a knowledge base to:

- Recognize a urban/wildland disaster in the making.
- Establish a base to manage a major incident.
- Provide support when responding with a strike team of engines in support of another agency.

This course will be named "Urban/Wildland Fire Management". It will not be part of the Command Series, but an approved special class.. ACTION: CDF, FS, OES and SFM.

UPDATE: The course outline is complete. A group is pulling together the lesson plans from existing courses. The first class will be held at the CDF Academy later this fall.

3.b Develop an additional course that deals with managing an urban/wildland fire prevention program. ACTION: CDF, FS, SFM and OAKLAND & SACRAMENTO FDs.

UPDATE: Work on developing the course outline will start this fall.

4 MODEL GUIDE FOR PREPLANNING AN URBAN/WILDLAND FIRE

Managing an urban/wildland fire is not just fire fighting in the conventional way. There are special, unconventional fire fighting strategies and tactics, special logistical needs and planning requirements.

4a. Develop a model guide that can be used by local government fire agencies to preplan their area. The guide will contain information on where to establish staging areas, incident bases, logistical facilities, etc. The guide would also address the established special actions when a "Red Flag" warning has been issued or other special local "triggers" are reached. ACTION: Sacramento and Oakland FDs.

UPDATE: Work has begun on this project. Once the draft document is completed, it will be forwarded to the FIRESCOPE Ops committee for review and publication.

4b. Once the guide is complete, it must be included in the rewrite of Command II, (Major Incident Management series). ACTION: SFM

5 RESPONSE PROCEDURES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL

Special training is needed for those local government emergency services personnel on how to mesh their response activities with other agencies and jurisdictions. In addition, there needs to be a "fail-safe" communications system between the various OES coordination centers and the various fire/rescue area and region dispatch centers.

5a. OES should continue to develop formal mutual aid procedures for local government emergency services personnel. The Operations Area Satellite Information Communications System (OASIS) will tie the various county/city OES operations centers together. This does not solve the need for a "fail-safe" communications net between the fire service dispatch centers.

UPDATE: The OASIS project may fulfill part of this requirement. Guidelines and procedures will be developed with input from the California Emergency Services Association.

5b. Upgrade the existing OES fire/rescue radio system. Replace the older equipment to improve reliability. Add an alerting system, so that the dispatchers do not have to monitor the net(s) constantly.

UPDATE: OES is close to completing agreements to eliminate cross-banding in the State. OES will request the OES Fire and Rescue Services Committee/FIRESCOPE Board of Directors to establish a working group to recommend improvements in the Fire and Rescue Division radio communications system.

6 THE EFFECTIVE USE OF AIRTANKERS, AIR ATTACK AND HELICOPTERS.

Local government personnel don't have the opportunity to utilize fire fighting aircraft very often. The use and limitations of aircraft are not well understood. Fire department personnel need information on how to use and deploy aircraft.

6a. Develop a brochure that describes the fire fighting aircraft in California. Outline their use and how to deploy them effectively. Describe their limitations; stress safety. Distribute to the local government fire services in the state. ACTION: CDF and FS.

UPDATE: A pamphlet has been developed (attached) that describes the wildland fire fighting aircraft program in California. This will be reviewed by the FIRESCOPE Ops committee and then published.

7 MODEL AUTOMATIC AND MUTUAL AID AGREEMENTS.

The use of automatic and/or mutual aid agreements is becoming commonplace in the California fire service. But, there are still areas in the state that agreements are not used, or the agreement is nothing more than a handshake between fire chiefs. Before an agreement can be considered lasting, it must be written. There is a need for model agreements that can be used by departments that do not have any idea where to start, or do not have legal counsel readily available.

7a. Develop model automatic and mutual aid agreements. They should be approved by the Attorney General and included as an appendix to the Master Mutual Aid Agreement. ACTION: OES.

UPDATE: OES will request the Attorney General's Office to review draft copies of an automatic aid and mutual aid agreements. The goal is to have a set of generic agreements for the California Fire Service.

8 UNDERSTANDING THE CALIFORNIA FIRE SERVICE MUTUAL AID SYSTEM.

The Master Mutual Aid Agreement and the fire service's mutual aid system is used regularly, but in truth, is not well understood by most of the users. There is a need to "get the word out" as to how the system actually works. This will also help sell the concept to others in the emergency response community.

Scripted is being developed

8a. Develop a written briefing document and a video tape that explains how the fire service mutual aid system works. ACTION: OES and CDF.

UPDATE: Until recently, the workings of the mutual aid system was passed by word-of-mouth or experience. A book has been published that explains the system. The SFM's office will use federal funds to develop the script for this video. OES and CDF will assist.

9 NEED FOR PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT FIRE PERSONNEL.

The best way to get a feel for how to perform most support positions in the Incident Command System, is to watch someone who knows what he/she is doing. Local government fire personnel have very little opportunity to get practical experience. There is a need to provide practical experience to selected fire service personnel. Candidates for this experience must have completed selected Command II classes and must be nominated by their area coordinator for placement on the candidates list.

9a. Develop a list of chief officers that have a need to gain experience in various support functions (plans or logistics). Use the OES Fire and Rescue Region organization.
ACTION: OES

9b. Develop a procedure when CDF or the FS are involved with a major fire, individuals that are on this list are notified. ACTION: CDF and FS.