



# Emergency Management and Response Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC)

**INFOGRAM 18-08**

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***NOTE:** This INFOGRAM will be distributed weekly to provide members of the Emergency Services Sector with information concerning the protection of their critical infrastructures. For further information, contact the Emergency Management and Response- Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) at (301) 447-1325 or by e-mail at [emr-isac@dhs.gov](mailto:emr-isac@dhs.gov).*

## Escalating Metal Thefts Affect ESS

Metal thefts have reached epidemic proportions nationwide as prices skyrocket for aluminum, copper, brass, etc. Considering this development, the Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) has monitored daily reports of these widespread thefts to analyze the potential threat to Emergency Services Sector (ESS) critical infrastructures (i.e., personnel, physical assets, and communication/cyber systems).

In communities across the country, hydrants, hose connections (including entire assemblies with pipes), backflow-prevention devices, valves, and water meters are being stolen. Thieves also create extensive and expensive damage in the process of removing, or trying to remove, the equipment. Without working connections, responders cannot connect hose to operate sprinklers and standpipe systems. Most assessments conclude that lives and property (particularly those of first responders) are endangered at locations where water must be shut off until repairs are made.

To mitigate metal-theft crimes affecting mission-essential tasks, the EMR-ISAC offers the following practices in use by ESS departments across the United States:

- Circulate bulletins that advise drilling holes in assemblies and inserting screws, pins, or other hardware (if locally acceptable). Increasing the time it takes to disassemble and remove fire protection equipment can either deter the theft or improve the odds that passers-by will observe the crime and alert police.
- Paint devices a distinguishing color. Record backflow registration numbers and provide them to police as soon as possible after the theft to assist the identification of backflow units at scrapyards. If there are no registration numbers, stamp, label, or identify the equipment with recognizable codes.
- Review the practice of bypassing missing or damaged exterior connections when necessary.
- Stress the importance of checking fire department equipment as part of code enforcement or preplanning inspections. Develop valuable relationships with building engineers or supervisors where this equipment is in place and urge them to include it in their routine inspections.
- Visit scrapyards within the jurisdiction, explain the impact of metal thefts on citizens and emergency organizations, and leave photocopies of equipment items typically stolen. Pictures can be downloaded and printed from manufacturers' web sites.
- Assign detectives to investigate metal thefts. They can frequently visit recycling sites and scrapyards looking for stolen material.
- Establish a hotline and provide a reward for information leading to arrests and convictions.
- Educate the community to call 9-1-1 if utility crews cannot produce valid company identification. Thieves often pose as utility crews, complete with hard hats, company coats or jackets, and cloned vehicles.

The Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc. (ISRI) represents more than 1,350 private, for-profit companies that process, broker, and industrially consume scrap commodities. Those companies employ more than 50,000 individuals and operate more than 3,000 facilities, 80 percent of which are in the U.S. ISRI is working aggressively and collaboratively with ESS departments to thwart metal thefts. Among its resources is the ISRI Theft Alert system, a tool for law enforcement agencies to alert scrap facilities about stolen materials. Other resources and training materials are available at:

[http://www.isri.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Materials\\_Theft&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=153&ContentID=14163](http://www.isri.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Materials_Theft&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=153&ContentID=14163).

## 2008 Wildfire Season Preparations

Wildfires have been and continue to be a major threat to numerous local, state, and national critical infrastructures. Additionally, the dangers, destruction, and expense of these fires are becoming nearly year-round challenges for Emergency Services Sector (ESS) departments and agencies. With more than 1 million acres burned by wildfires across the nation already this year, which is more than double the amount of this time last year, National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) officials are preparing for another devastating wildfire season.

Considering the probability for the number of 2008 wildfires to exceed those of 2007, the Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) offers the preparations ongoing in the State of California behind the leadership of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection:

- Increasing firefighting crews, apparatus, helitack crews, bulldozers, and equipment.
- Mobilizing aviation resources with immediate availability of supertanker aircraft.
- Coordinating with the Office of Emergency Services and the State National Guard.
- Helping local governments to obtain federal contracts and grants.
- Boosting public awareness and preparedness.
- Enforcing fire prevention laws with aggressive interdiction plans.
- Directing inter-governmental coordination and actions.

In addition to considering the above actions, the EMR-ISAC encourages ESS organizations located in areas susceptible to wildfires to ensure firefighters have information regarding current initiatives, this year's wildfire season, and any policy and guidance changes. To support this effort, the 2008 Wildland Fire Safety Training Annual Refresher (WFSTAR) web site identifies topics for refresher training and lists a wide variety of reference materials and videos that support refresher training. See the following NIFC web site for more information: [http://www.nifc.gov/2008\\_Updates\\_Refresher\\_Training.doc](http://www.nifc.gov/2008_Updates_Refresher_Training.doc).

The National Database of State and Local Wildfire Hazard Mitigation Programs serves as a clearinghouse of information about nonfederal policies and programs that seek to reduce the risk of loss of life and property by reducing hazardous fuels. The database currently has information on 232 programs, with content added regularly, that could aid ESS critical infrastructure protection efforts. To access the database, click on the following link: <http://www.wildfireprograms.usda.gov>.

## NPGA Safety Alert

The Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) learned of a National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) Safety Alert that discusses the dangers to Emergency Services Sector (ESS) to personnel from propane cylinders damaged by anhydrous ammonia.

According to the NPGA, methamphetamine manufacturers are using propane cylinders to store anhydrous ammonia. If the brass valve in a propane cylinder comes into contact with anhydrous ammonia, the resulting deterioration leads to cracking of the valve body or its components and can ultimately result in a violent, unexpected expulsion of the valve from the cylinder, "causing personal injury or death." Cylinders damaged by anhydrous ammonia have been found in many states at cylinder exchange and refilling locations, and in hotel rooms and mobile laboratories where illegal substances are often manufactured.

The presence of blue-green stains on any brass portion of a propane cylinder's service valve is evidence that it may have been in contact with anhydrous ammonia. A strong odor of ammonia on or near the cylinder is also an indicator. If a suspect cylinder is found, the association recommends exercising extreme caution and restricting access to the location. It strongly cautions first responders that it can be dangerous to move a cylinder if the integrity of its service valve is in question. If a damaged cylinder must be moved, NPGA advises pointing the valve end of the cylinder away from personnel and towards a safe direction.

The NPGA safety alert with photos of damaged valves can be examined at:  
<http://www.npga.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=529>.

## Non-Priority Medical Calls

According to EMSResponder.com, a large northeastern city recently unveiled an initiative to manage increasing numbers of non-priority medical calls that challenge responder organizations and Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) or 9-1-1 call centers.

City officials learned that 23 percent of medical calls to 9-1-1 in the previous year were for non-medical emergencies. The department identified 91 people who requested ambulances more than 2,100 times. One of the individuals personally requested ambulance service on 107 occasions during the same timeframe. According to the city's fire chief, "The people who call a lot tax the system because we've only got a limited number of resources." Ultimately, by trying to treat all calls with equal urgency, the city faced a daily reality of running out of ambulances and being forced to dispatch fire trucks to the scenes.

While this situation does not represent a magnitude of threat to Emergency Services Sector (ESS) critical infrastructures equal to a devastating man-made or natural disaster, the Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) views it as the type of diminishment to response capabilities that organizations can ill afford in the present economy.

City fire officials, in conjunction with the health department and a non-profit health care organization, developed a plan whereby caseworkers will assess the circumstances of each of the identified frequent callers and help provide alternatives to ambulance transport to emergency rooms. They will verify that the callers have a primary care physician and also link them to other multiple community resources, such as food and housing. The investigation of the frequent callers revealed that some have health insurance, but no transportation; some use Medicaid and may not understand the system, and others are homeless.

To read about the initiative, visit <http://www.emsresponder.com/article/article.jsp?siteSection=1&id=7508>.

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The National Infrastructure Coordinating Center (NICC) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Infrastructure Protection is the central point for notifications regarding infrastructure threats, disruptions, intrusions, and suspicious activities. Emergency Services Sector personnel are requested to report any incidents or attacks involving their infrastructures using at least the first and second points of contact seen below:

- 1) NICC - Voice: 202-282-9201, Fax: 703-487-3570, E-Mail: [nicc@dhs.gov](mailto:nicc@dhs.gov)
- 2) Your local FBI office - Web: <http://www.fbi.gov/contact/fo/fo.htm>
- 3) EMR-ISAC - Voice: 301-447-1325, E-Mail: [emr-isac@dhs.gov](mailto:emr-isac@dhs.gov), fax: 301-447- 1034,  
Web: [www.usfa.dhs.gov/subjects/emr-isac](http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/subjects/emr-isac), Mail: J-247, 16825 South Seton Avenue,  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727