The Development of a Multi-Jurisdictional Unified Command System for Large-Scale Incidents

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/ to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.
ABSTRACT

This research project resulted in efforts to develop a Unified Command system for large-scale or multi-jurisdictional incidents by the Flossmoor (Illinois) Fire Department. The problem was that the Flossmoor Fire Department did not have a Unified Command system for the organization and management of large-scale incidents. The Flossmoor Fire Department receives mutual aid during large-scale incidents from the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) and specifically from MABAS Division 24. The Village of Flossmoor belongs to the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association that is an intergovernmental association. The purpose of this research project is to determine how to develop a Unified Command system in the Flossmoor Fire Department and the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association. This research project was addressed by surveying other suburban departments in south suburban Chicago, Illinois. This research project used the action research method to initiate the development of a multi-jurisdiction Unified Command system. The research questions were: (1) what is a Unified Command System and what are its benefits at large-scale incidents, (2) what are the key elements of a Unified Command System utilized by other regional or large government agencies (FEMA, U. S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, etc.), and (3) what components do member communities of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association believe should be included in a Unified Command System for the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, (4) what are the key components most necessary for the success at a large-scale incident for the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association? The procedures employed in this research project included reviewing the literature on the Incident Command System as it relates to the Unified Command system,
as well as surveying south suburban Chicago, Illinois fire departments. This survey inquired whether these departments controlled large-scale incidents using a Unified Command Structure. The survey also inquired as to whether the respondent thought that current management at large-scale incidents was adequate. After these steps were completed the information was analyzed and a decision was made as to how the Flossmoor Fire Department and the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association should develop a Unified Command System.

The findings of this research project indicated: (1) the events of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers, New York and the Pentagon, Arlington, Virginia graphically demonstrate the need for adequate emergency preparedness, (2) the Flossmoor Fire Department did not have the internal resources to develop a Unified Command System by itself, (3) working cooperatively with the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association in establishing a Unified Command System as the Flossmoor Fire Department and the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association did is a viable solution.

The recommendations of this report include:

1. It is recommended that all fire departments immediately review their Incident Management System (IMS) to insure their system contains adequate policies and procedures for implementation of a Unified Command System.

2. It is recommended that departments that do not possess the necessary internal resources immediately look to some form of intergovernmental agreement for the establishment of a Unified Command System.
3. It is recommended that fire departments consider working cooperatively with other governmental disciplines when establishing a Unified Command System.
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INTRODUCTION

The Fire Service has been referred to as America’s first line of defense for domestic disasters by H. Eisner (2002). Never has this concept been more apparent to the American public then during the events of September 11, 2001. As noted by Fire Engineering magazine (2001) editor Bill Manning, “At that unspeakable moment … when it seemed all hopes and dreams were vanquished in an impossible collapse of steel and concrete, the fire service had its most devastating yet finest hour.

That morning and afterward, the brilliance of firefighters rose up through the ashes of defeat and despair.”

Those terrorist attacks shook the very fiber of American society. Those attacks strengthened the resolve of the American people to be prepared for the next series of attacks when they occur.

The events of that day caused many political authorities to question the state of emergency preparedness in their communities. These community leaders became acutely aware of the need and the importance of emergency preparedness on all levels, but especially their own local level.

In the southern suburbs of the Chicago metropolitan area the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association (SSMMA) is an intergovernmental organization that represents over 40 communities (See Appendix B). This Association works cooperatively on common issues that affect the member communities. In October 2001 the Public Safety committee of the SSMMA chaired by Mayor Jack Swan of the Village of Thornton called a meeting of all the Police Chiefs, Fire Chiefs, and Public Works Directors to discuss the level of emergency preparedness in the south suburban area.
Although the concern that caused the meeting to be called were the events of September 11, 2001 public safety members of the participating communities reminded the committee members that any plan must include provisions to handle all types of disasters including terrorist attacks, man-made, and natural disasters.

There are many examples of natural disasters that have taxed the abilities of emergency services personnel and resources. Examples of these types of natural disasters include the Plainfield, Illinois tornado of 1990, Hurricane Andrew that struck southern Florida in the mid-nineties, and the Oklahoma City tornado of 1999.

All of these types of incidents are examples of large-scale emergencies that require the establishment of an appropriate emergency management organizational structure to control. The Fire Service has worked hard over the last quarter of the last century to prepare itself for whatever large-scale incident the future might present.

The purpose of this research project was to determine how to develop a Unified Command system for managing large-scale incidents in the Flossmoor Fire Department in cooperation with the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association. The research project was conducted by surveying other suburban fire departments in the south suburban Chicago, Illinois area. The research project looked into how the Village of Flossmoor and the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association could cooperatively develop a Unified Command System to manage large-scale incidents.

Action research methods were employed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is a Unified Command System and what are its benefits at large-scale incidents?
2. What are the key elements of a Unified Command System utilized by other regional or large government agencies. (FEMA, U. S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, etc.)?

3. What components do member communities of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association believe should be included in a Unified Command System for the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association?

4. What are the key components most necessary for the success at a large-scale incident for the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association?

**BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

This research project was related to the leadership section of the Executive Leadership class offered at the National Fire Academy in February 2002.

The Flossmoor Volunteer Fire Department is a combination department. The organization of the Flossmoor Volunteer Fire Department includes three administrative personnel. These three positions include a Fire Chief, an Assistant Fire Chief who also serves as the Director of Inspectional Services, and a Lieutenant who is the department Training Officer. In addition to the administrative staff, there are six full time firefighter/paramedics, 12 part-time firefighter/paramedics, and 25 volunteers. Included in the 25 volunteers are two Captains, three Lieutenants, and the department Photographer. The Village of Flossmoor is located approximately 25 miles south of the City of Chicago along the Metra Commuter Train line and the main line of the Canadian National/Illinois Central Railroad. The population of the Village of Flossmoor is approximately 9,300. The Fire Department also serves an unincorporated area adjacent to
the Village. The residents of the unincorporated area raise the population served by the department to approximately 12,000 people.

The Village of Flossmoor (founded in 1924) has developed over the years as a “bedroom” community. The majority of the building stock is residential. Many of the residents commute into Chicago daily for their employment.

In 1928, a volunteer fire department was formed to address the fire safety needs of this fledging suburban community. By late 1976, the community had grown to the point that the fire department’s first full-time employee was hired. Since that time more full-time employees have been added to keep up with the growth of the community.

The growth of the full-time staff on the fire department has been carefully controlled and has kept in line with the controlled growth of the community. The purpose of the full-time staff is to insure that the administrative tasks are addressed and that the first vehicle is properly staffed and can respond to any emergency in a timely manner. The remaining volunteers provide the needed staffing in order to complete the appropriate response to an incident. This staffing level is adequate to handle most emergencies but falls short of the manpower needed to address the large-scale incidents.

In order to insure adequate personnel and apparatus to control those large-scale incidents the Village of Flossmoor signed a mutual aid agreement with the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) on July 22, 1999 (See Appendix C). MABAS is an intergovernmental organization that was originally established under the Statutes of the State of Illinois to coordinate mutual aid within the State of Illinois. At this time over 400 fire departments belong to the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System in both Illinois and southern Wisconsin. These 400 fire departments are divided into Divisions based upon
geography. The Mutual Aid Box Alarm System covers northern Illinois and parts of southern Wisconsin on the north, and well south into the depths of the State of Illinois. The System also extends from the Indiana border on the east and as far west as the Illinois – Iowa state line.

Prior to activating the MABAS system a Division must first work within its own area to obtain mutual aid. Although the make up of any one Box Card is at the discretion of that community’s Fire Chief and the Division’s Mutual Aid Committee, the average intra-divisional Box Card when fully mobilized would provide the stricken fire department with approximately 24 companies and over 100 firefighters. If additional assistance were required after utilizing the intra-divisional response then the department would request the MABAS inter-divisional task force response to their incident.

In the event of a large-scale incident each MABAS Division is committed to providing the stricken area with one Task Force. A MABAS Task Force is made up of two engine companies, one truck company, one heavy rescue company, three ambulances, and one chief officer. Initially this may seem like an insignificant commitment, however, there are approximately 40 MABAS Divisions at this time. Therefore, any stricken area could receive over 80 engine companies, 40 truck companies, 40 heavy rescue companies, 120 ambulances, and an additional 40 chief officers.

Efforts are currently underway to bring the entire State of Illinois under the MABAS umbrella.

The concern arises that should a situation occur that is a large-scale incident, how would this incident be managed? As a result of participating in the Executive Leadership
class held in February 2002 at the National Fire Academy the energy was expended in working with the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association to coordinate disaster preparedness in the southern suburbs of Chicago. After the events of September 11, 2001 this concept of Unified Command was introduced to the MABAS Division 24 Mutual Aid Committee. The first thought was to request a copy of the MABAS Executive Board’s policy regarding these types of incidents. Upon investigation with the MABAS Executive Board, it was found that no formal policy exists. The MABAS Executive Board would currently handle these types of incidents by activating the necessary Task Forces. The activation of these Task Forces does not activate any additional management organization to manage these resources. Therefore, the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association Public Safety Committee agreed to discuss the possibility of creating a policy within their jurisdiction. This policy would address the management of any large-scale incident. We felt that we needed to do something for the member towns, said Karen Hoffschmidt, the association’s (SSMMA) deputy director. But the reality is, if something bad happens, everybody will be working together. All we are trying to do is do a little pre-planning to head off the chaos that might be present if a major event occurred (Phillips, 2002).

The SSMMA Public Safety Committee charged the area public safety directors to review two questions. The first question was: What is the legal authority to act during an emergency? Jeff Chudwin, Police Chief of Olympia Fields was named chair of this sub-committee.

The second concern was to create a flowchart to manage any large-scale incident that might occur within the southern suburbs. Gregory Berk, Fire Chief of Flossmoor was
named chair of this sub-committee. Following meetings of the SSMMA Public Safety Committee it was decided to use a form of the Unified Command System. Part of the research was to identify the various forms of the Unified Command System in use and which would best suit the SSMMA.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The events of September 11, 2001 have raised the level of consciousness of the Fire Service in the United States for the need to have in place appropriate disaster planning. The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Arlington Virginia have forced many emergency preparedness agencies to revisit their plans. As pointed out by Eisner (2002) “The terrorist attacks partially crippled a resilient nation.” These attacks were a wake up call.

The need to effectively manage emergency scenes has been recognized for some time. Ertel and Berk (1998) expressed this need when they stated: All emergency service providers operating at an incident (whether that incident is large or small) must follow the same set of rules.

The success of any incident command system depends upon the full acceptance by all team members of a command structure with a recognized leader, a common language, and agreed-upon responsibilities. In the later half of the twentieth century significant efforts were put forth to address these concerns.

Smith (1995) points out that a successful command structure requires delegation of authority and responsibility. Orders and decision-making must be performed at the lowest level that has the ability to make those decisions. The Fire Service has grown to understand these concepts.
Ted Goldfarb (1997) reports that the incident command system (ICS) has become the routine word in the fire service circles. It is rare to read an article or watch a fire service video about a major fire without ICS being mentioned.

Whether the system in use is referred to as an Incident Management System or an Incident Command System does not matter. What matters is that a management organization exists and is used regularly.

The history of this system began in the 1970’s when an incident command system was developed and implemented in California to combat large wildland fires. Due to the large-scale effort (personnel, resources, apparatus and equipment) required to control and extinguish these types of incidents, FIRESCOPE was generated. FIRESCOPE stands for “Fire Resources of Southern California Organized for Potential Emergencies” (Kipp and Loflin, 1996). The State of California had experienced many years of major brush fires. In addition to organizing fire combat forces, a major support organization needed to be developed to feed and rest firefighters, provide fuel, repairs, and other equipment etc. To deal with this need, the Incident Command System (ICS) was developed. Kipp and Loflin (1996) emphasizes the importance of each organization that participates in the incident must know the organizational structure, which allows the incident to be effectively managed and controlled.

About the same time that FIRESCOPE was being created the Phoenix Arizona Fire Department developed a system called Fireground Command that targeted organizing fire forces for structural fire combat and other urban related emergencies, such
as hazardous materials, mass casualties, etc. The system rapidly became popular throughout the fire service in America.

Both systems had very similar elements; both were popular throughout the U.S. and each had its advantages and disadvantages. Recently, the two systems were merged into a single, common national system called the Incident Management System (IMS).

Morris (1995) in his article points out the IMS recognizes the need for a single incident commander at all incidents, the establishment of command very early in the incident and the need to divide the incident into manageable components. The system provides a method of processing information for decision-making, as well as a means to control, supervise, and co-ordinate crews.

Although the use of the Incident Management System is now routine for the Fire Service it is not routine for other agencies or disciplines that have authority at these incidents.

This need to be prepared for any eventuality has awakened many emergency preparedness leaders outside the fire service as well. In the last several years, police agencies are beginning to express interest in the Incident Management (Command) System. William Wolf (2002) questions the police when he asks: “Have you thought about how you would manage an airliner crash, a dam failure, a major hazardous materials release, a large urban fire, or a major explosion? How would you organize? How would you develop a plan of attack? How would you coordinate all of the incoming agencies and organizations?” According to Wolf (2002) ICS is a proven management tool. The other agencies and emergency response disciplines need to embrace it.
According to Rubin (2002) the use of a system is no longer optional. He states “NIOSH, NFPA and all regulatory groups are very clear in their message: the use of the ICS is not an option”.

During large-scale or multi-jurisdictional incidents the Incident Management System can be taken one step further with the development of the Unified Command System. Rohen (2001) indicated that in 1999, members of the state and local emergency response community wrote to the U.S. Attorney General, identifying the potential command and control conflict posed by trying to integrate the various crisis management structures. He further stated that the National Domestic Preparedness Office (NDPO) was tasked to coordinate a solution to this problem.

Rohen (2001) pointed out that command and control of a terrorist threat or incident is a critical emergency management function that demands an integrated and unified framework for the preparation and execution of plans and orders.

When the magnitude of a crisis becomes multifunctional or multijurisdictional, the incident command system command function can evolve into a unified command. Under the unified command structure, a multiagency command post is established incorporating officials from agencies with jurisdictional or mutual aid responsibility at the incident scene (Rohen, 2001). The incident commander may be a police officer, a fire chief, or a school official, depending on the nature of the event as Roskind (2002) points out. Bailer (2002) notes that we all must realize that no one city, state, or county agency or department can respond to and mitigate a catastrophic event. It is exactly this type of interagency cooperation that we must strive to achieve.
The purpose of the implementation of a unified command system is to make decisions that will allocate manpower and resources to the area of most need regardless of jurisdiction or political boundaries. In multijurisdictional settings this becomes more difficult. Roskind (2002) highlights that most police and fire agencies already have difficulty working with each other because they have little or no ability to talk to outside agencies in a large crisis. A lack of proper communications creates very predictable failures.

Once we have identified and outlined the problem the next step is to determine what options are available that might help to solve the problem.

Several agencies were contacted to determine what type of unified command system they used. The first agency contacted was the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service. During a telephone conversation in June 2002 with Mr. Will Nidecker he indicated that he would forward a copy of the USDA Forest Service Incident Organization chart. Shortly after the telephone conversation concluded a fax of Chapter 3 Large Fires Type I and Type II Incidents of the USDA Forest Service Fireline Handbook was received. That information revealed the organization chart that is used by the Forest Service and is shown in Appendix D.

The next area checked was the United States Government Interagency Domestic terrorism Concept of Operations Plan (CONPLAN). This document represents a concerted effort by a number of federal departments and agencies to work together to achieve a common goal (United States Government, 2001). Presidential Decision Directive/NSC –39, authorized this effort. The letter of agreement to support the concept of operations contained in the CONPLAN was signed by: Department of Defense,
Department of Energy, Department of Health and Human Services, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Attorney General. On page 17 of that document is an organization chart for Incident Command System/ Unified Command. This organization chart is shown in Appendix E of this research project.

The next agency that was contacted was the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA). In a telephone conversation on July 9, 2002 with Mr. Carlson of IEMA he stated that IEMA is Presently using the organization chart from the Federal CONPLAN. He also indicated that the entire concept of incident organization management is under review by the Illinois Terrorism Taskforce. Their review of this information should be complete in late 2002.

It should be noted that part of this literature review was complete in 2001 as part of the applied research project to fulfill the requirements of the Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management class at the National Fire Academy.

PROCEDURES

The primary purpose of this research project was to look at four issues. The first issue the research project addressed was to determine what is a Unified Command System and what are its benefits at large-scale incidents. The second issue that the research project addressed was what are the key elements of a Unified Command System utilized by other regional or large government agencies. (FEMA, U. S. Department of Forestry, etc.) The third issue this research project looked at was what components do member communities of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association believe should be in a Unified Command System for the South Suburban Mayors and Managers
Association. And the fourth issue the research project looked at was what are the key components most necessary for success at a large-scale incident for the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association.

The research project was conducted using the descriptive and action research methods. The descriptive research was conducted through the distribution of a survey to 64 fire departments in the south suburban Chicago metropolitan area. Forty-six surveys (71.9%) were returned and their results are included in this research project. The departments surveyed were chosen due to the geographical proximity to Flossmoor and in some cases because of their communities participation in the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association. The only limitation noted during the research project was the size of the survey population. This limitation was the result of the departments that were in the geographical area around Flossmoor or were within the mutual aid association (MABAS) in which Flossmoor is a member.

The survey contained a total of 13 questions. The survey questions requested information about the population served by the department, the staffing levels of the department. The survey also inquired into information from the responder regarding their mutual aid system, the use of Incident Command, and whether their Incident Command organizations were adequate for large-scale incidents. A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix A.

As a result of having conducted this research project, the Flossmoor Fire Department and the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association have cooperated to begin the process to adopt the policies needed to create a Unified Command structure to be used on a large-scale or multijurisdictional incident in the southern suburbs. The
purpose of this Unified Command System will be to identify an organizational structure, train the SSMMA members in the use of that structure, and develop the cooperation necessary for the system to work during a large-scale incident or disaster. The creation of this Unified Command System will allow the stricken community or communities access to an organizational structure that will prioritize needs and assign resources where they are most needed during a disaster.

The efforts toward the creation of the Unified Command System are the result of the Public Safety Committee of the SSMMA recognizing the need for such an organization. A series of meetings were conducted to discuss this important concern. During these meetings some of the information gathered for this project was shared with the SSMMA Public Safety Committee members. The committee decided that the organizational chart contained in the federal CONPLAN most suited the needs of the SSMMA. The committee also decided to make several changes to the CONPLAN chart. As a result of the work of this committee a Unified Command System Incident Organization Flowchart was created for use by the SSMMA. This flowchart is shown in Appendix F of this document.

During several meetings, the SSMMA committee members then worked to create definitions for the Unified Command System Incident Organization Flowchart. Each of the disciplines (Fire, Police, EMS, Public Works, etc.) that would participate in the Unified Command System wrote the definitions for their section of the flowchart. That flowchart and those definitions closely follow the federal CONPLAN.

RESULTS

Answers to Survey Questions
Survey Question # 1. This question requested the population of the community that responded to the survey. The average population served by the fire department that responded to the survey was 18,520 citizens. The largest community that responded to the survey was 60,000 citizens. The smallest community population indicated in the survey was 524 citizens. The total number of citizens served by all of the communities that responded to the survey was 888,938.

Survey Question # 2. This question asked how many members were on the department at the time of the survey. The answers of the 48 fire departments that responded to this question indicated that there are 2149 members on these departments. Therefore, the average number of members on these departments was 45 members per department.

Survey Question # 3. This question asked how many of the fire department members were full-time career employees. The responses to the survey show that there were a total of 920 full-time career members out of the total of 2149 members on the responding fire departments. This is an average of 19 paid members on the 48 fire departments. This average indicates that 42.8% of the members of these fire departments were full-time career employees.

Survey Question # 4 asked how many members of the department were either volunteers or paid on call members. The 48 respondents indicated that there were a total of 1229 volunteer or paid on call firefighters out of the total of 2149 members on these fire departments. This indicates that the average number of volunteers or paid on call members in these departments was 26 members per department. This average indicates that 57.2% of the members of these 48 departments were volunteers or paid on call.
Survey Question # 5. This question inquired as to the number of fire stations that the department staffed. The responses to this question indicated that 88 fire stations are staffed by the 48 fire departments that completed a questionnaire. These responses demonstrate that the average number of fire stations staffed by the 48 respondents is 2 stations.

Survey Question # 6. This question asked whether the department received assistance for large-scale incidents from internal or external sources. By far the greatest majority of the responses to this question (47 or 97.9%) indicated that assistance at large-scale incidents was obtained from external sources. The only other response (2.1%) indicated that they obtained their assistance at large-scale incidents from internal sources.

Survey Question # 7. This question asked that if the respondent answered Question # 6 that they received assistance at a large-scale incident from external resources. Forty-seven (47) of the surveys answered this question with a yes. These 47 responses equal 97.9% of the total responses.

Survey Question # 8. The eighth question inquired as to what Mutual Aid Box Alarm Division the department responding to the survey belonged. The Mutual Aid Box Alarm Divisions that were identified were:

Division # 7 1 response which equals 2.1%
Division #19 7 responses which equals 14.6%
Division #21 10 responses which equals 20.8%
Division #22 6 responses which equals 12.5%
Division #24 15 responses that equals 31.3%
Division #27 9 responses which equals 18.7%
Survey Question # 9. Question # 9 stated: “In the event of a large-scale incident that crossed multiple community boundaries or multi mutual aid divisions do you believe that your mutual aid organization can provide your department with all the resources to address your needs?” The respondents were then asked to choose a yes answer or a no answer. Of the 48 surveys that were returned 40 (83.3%) answered yes to this question. The remaining 8 (16.7%) responses to this question were no.

Survey Question # 10. Question # 10 asked the respondents if their department uses an Incident Command (Management) System. All 48 (100%) responses to this question indicated that their department uses an Incident Command System to manage emergency incidents.

Survey Question # 11. Question # 11 asked “In the event of a large-scale incident that required your department calling for assistance from multiple agencies is your current Incident Command (Management) System capable of handling this large of an incident?” Forty-five of the surveys that were returned responded in the affirmative to this question. These 45 responses equal 93.8% of the surveys. The remaining three (3) responses were in the negative. These three (3) responses equal 6.2% of the surveys that were returned.

Survey Question # 12. Question # 12 asked the respondents if their department or mutual aid organization have written policies or procedures to handle a large-scale incident. Of the total of 48 surveys that were returned 44 surveys (91.7%) indicated that there are written policies or procedures in place with either their department or mutual aid organization. The remaining four responses (8.3%) indicated that there were no written
procedures in place with either their department or mutual aid organization to handle a
large-scale incident.

Survey Question # 13. This item on the survey asked if their department or mutual
aid organization had adopted the Unified Command System as shown in the United
States Government Interagency Domestic Terrorism Concept of Operations Plan. A total
of 29 of the surveys (60.4%) returned answered this question in the affirmative. The
remaining 19 communities (39.6%) responded that they had not adopted the Unified
Command System.

After reviewing the survey results and the information gathered in the literature
review, the Flossmoor Volunteer Fire Department working with the other 42
communities that make up the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association
identified the use of the Unified Command System as contained in the federal
CONPLAN as being the best way to prepare for a large-scale or multi-jurisdictional
incident in the southern suburbs of the Chicagoland area. The information gathered
showed that the best way to create this Unified Command System for Flossmoor was to
participate in it’s formation with the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association.
The formation of this multi-jurisdictional organization allowed the Flossmoor Volunteer
Fire Department to overcome the limitations of trying to create a Unified Command
organization on a local level.

A series of organizational meetings were held beginning in October 2001. The
South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association Public Safety Committee under the
leadership of Mayor Jack Swan of Thornton, Illinois called all the public safety leaders
together. The representatives of all forty-three communities fire, police, public works,
and emergency services and disaster agencies were invited to attend. That organizational meeting was held on Tuesday October 9, 2001 at 2:00 pm at the offices of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association. Besides the representatives of the 43 communities also in attendance were representatives of the Cook County Sheriffs Department, Cook County Emergency Management Agency, the Illinois State Police, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The sign in sheets for that meeting are contained in Appendix I.

The outcome of that meeting was that two subcommittees were established. The first subcommittee was charged with determining the legal authority that the communities have to act in the event of an emergency. Chief Jeff Chudwin of the Olympia Fields, Illinois Police Department chaired this subcommittee. The second subcommittee was charged with creating an organizational flowchart to be utilized in the southern suburbs during a large-scale disaster. Chief Greg Berk of the Flossmoor Volunteer Fire Department chaired this subcommittee.

Four research questions were created during this research project. The first question was:

What is a Unified Command System and what are its benefits at large-scale incidents?

The literature shows that the benefits of a Unified Command System at a large-scale incident are in organizational command and control of the incident. The survey results show that 60.4% of the surveys that were returned indicated that the respondents have adopted the use of a Unified Command System. During the meetings the other
benefit that became apparent was the cooperation of the various public safety officials working together to address this issue.

The second research question was:

What are the key elements of a Unified Command System utilized by other regional or large government agencies. (FEMA, U. S. Department of Forestry, etc.)

The key elements of the Unified Command System identified for use by the SSMMA (see Appendix F) include:

A. The Command structure will include fire, police, EMS and Public Works.

B. Assisting the Command structure will be a:
   1. Safety Officer
   2. Public Information Officer
   3. Liaison Officer
   4. Command Scribe

C. The four sections of the Unified Command System will be:
   1. Operations Section
   2. Planning/Intelligence Section
   3. Logistics Section
   4. Finance/Administration Section

The third research question was:

What components do member communities of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association believe should be included in a Unified Command System for the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association?
The committee of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association recommended several changes to the CONPLAN organization chart. The most significant change included adding Public Works to the Command structure. The remainder of the changes were less significant. A copy of the Unified Command Incident Organization Flowchart adopted by the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association is included in this document in Appendix F.

The fourth research question was:

What are the key components most necessary for success at a large-scale incident for the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association?

The committee of the SSMMA identified that some of the key components for the successful handling of this type of large-scale incident include:

A. Training all of the communities in the Unified Command System.

The SSMMA held several trainings in the Unified Command System Incident Operation Flowchart during the spring of 2002. Over 250 public safety department heads, assistant department heads, and supervisors attended these training sessions. The committee also held a table top Unified Command exercise on July 31, 2002. This exercise was intended to test the ability of multiple communities to work together to solve the incident problems. The description of that exercise is contained in Appendix H of this document. The exercise was conducted using the supervisory personnel of the communities of East Hazel Crest, Hazel Crest, and Homewood. Approximately 40 supervisory personnel from these three communities participated in this exercise.

B. In order to be successful the efforts must have the support of the corporate authorities of each community.
In order to secure the approval and support of the corporate authorities of each community the SSMMA held shorter one-hour training sessions for the mayors and managers of each community. These shortened sessions gave an overview of the Unified Command System to the mayors and managers. They were then asked to send their supervisory personnel to the longer and more detailed training sessions.

C. The third key component identified was the need for the communities to work cooperatively to address this issue. This cooperation became apparent when over 250 supervisory personnel participated in the Unified Command trainings. It was also apparent when the three communities volunteered to be the first to participate in a tabletop exercise.

D. The fourth key component was identified as the need for each community to formally adopt the use of the Unified Command System during large-scale incidents in the south suburbs. The SSMMA asked that each community pass a resolution agreeing to use the Unified Command System during disasters. The resolution passed by the Village of Flossmoor is included in this document as Appendix G.

**DISCUSSION**

There has been a nation-wide rush by the Fire Service to embrace the Incident Management System. This rush has resulted in the Fire Service being comfortable handling routine incidents. The use of the IMS during routine emergencies has become commonplace in the Fire Service.

It appears, however, that outside the metropolitan areas of this country there may be a lack of experience in the Fire Service in handling large-scale incidents.
The events of September 11, 2001 and the anthrax incidents in October 2001 graphically demonstrate the need and justification for being adequately prepared for large-scale incidents. The literature review also indicated that the Incident Commander is ultimately responsible for the life safety of each and every firefighter as well as all civilians at the incident. The literature also points out that the use of an ICS is now required by regulatory agencies.

A cultural change must take place in the Public Safety sector. This change must begin at the top of each organization in order to be successful. The need to create and properly staff a Unified Command System in the southern suburbs was clearly stated by the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association. The other message that revealed itself was the lack of a formally adopted Unified Command System that will provide the community that is stricken by a large-scale incident with the necessary management tools to control the incident. If a formal Unified Command System does not exist the lack of preparedness will manifest itself when firefighters and emergency crews begin to freelance. The literature showed that it is the responsibility of the Incident Commander to insure that an organization is in place to prevent freelancing and provide for safe operations.

The responses to the survey demonstrated that the creation of a Unified Command System could be achieved through a multi-jurisdictional cooperative effort. To be successful, however, with a multi-jurisdictional approach, a communities’ administration must be willing to look beyond its own “kingdom”. They must be willing to understand that during a large-scale disaster their need for resources may be placed as a lower priority. This may need to be done in order to direct the available resources to the area of
most need so as to accomplish the “best for the most”. Kramer and Bahme (1992) point out that the effective control of disasters depends upon the mobilization and deployment of adequate resources. It should also be noted that once those resources are mobilized they must also be managed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations offered in this research project have been formulated as a result of ideas obtained from the literature reviewed, as a result of reviewing the answers received from the Special Response Surveys that were distributed to fire departments in the south suburbs of Chicago, and as a result of the work of the Public Safety Committee of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association.

It is recommended that any community that does not participate in a mutual aid organization or does not have the internal resources to handle a large-scale incident immediately secure those resources.

It is recommended that all fire departments immediately review their Incident Management System (IMS) to insure that the system contains adequate policies and procedures to manage incidents large enough for a Unified Command System to be implemented.

Although Flossmoor’s experience in participating in a multi-jurisdictional mutual aid organization (MABAS) has been positive, it is recommended that all mutual aid organizations revisit their policies to insure that they are adequate to address a large-scale
incident. According to the MABAS Executive Board they have not adopted a formal Unified Command System.

All public safety practitioners must work to secure the adoption of a Unified Command System by their corporate authorities so that in the event of a large-scale incident they have the legal authority to act.
REFERENCE LIST


