DEVELOPING A NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (NIMS) COMPLIANT MULTI-AGENCY COORDINATING (MAC) GROUP IN BENTON COUNTY, WASHINGTON

EXECUTIVE ANALYSIS OF FIRE SERVICE OPERATIONS IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _______________________________
ABSTRACT

The Department of Homeland Security established the National Incident Management System (NIMS) in 2004. Since this occurred, Federal, State, tribal, and local agencies and organizations have been on notice that access to preparedness funding is dependent on adoption and compliance with NIMS. A key element of NIMS calls for a multi-agency coordination mechanism that ensures strategic coordination during major incidents. The MAC Group is horizontally organized to provide collective determination of priorities, recognition of agency policy amendments needed to carry out the priorities, and allocation of resources on the incident. The problem was Benton County, Washington had a Decision Group in the Emergency Operations Center that was not representative of the organizations and agencies with direct incident management responsibility or with significant incident management support or resource responsibilities.

The purpose of this research was to develop a County MAC Group compliant with NIMS. This research utilized an action method of research. The following questions were answered:

1. Which organizations should be represented on the Benton County MAC Group?
2. What decision-making authority for his/her organization is required by MAC Group participants?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities of the MAC Group under NIMS?
4. What experience and training is required to qualify MAC Group participants?

The procedures involved an extensive literature review with careful analysis of NIMS, and a comparison of the requirements of many existing MAC Groups. As a result a revised
section of the Benton County Emergency Management Plan was designed and developed for the MAC Group.

The implementation of the MAC Group is recommended for Benton County, Washington. Further it is recommended that fire service leaders ensure a MAC Group is established in their respective counties. As other counties implement, execute, evaluate, and refine their EOC procedures results could be shared to the betterment of all.
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INTRODUCTION

Each year, communities throughout the United States face the challenge to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from incidents that threaten the lives, property, and environment of their citizens. Catastrophic natural events such as hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, and wildfires can quickly overwhelm a community’s ability to respond. Today the threat is greater than ever as the potential for natural and technological incidents is compounded by the threat of terrorist action directly against citizens or on the critical infrastructure in our communities. The likelihood of the occurrence of concurrent events across a large geographic area or the cascading events within a geographic area makes it critically important to plan for the probability of multi-agency/multidiscipline responses. The National Incident Management System (NIMS) provides a consistent nationwide template to enable Federal, State, tribal and local governments and private-sector and nongovernmental organizations to work together effectively and efficiently to manage domestic incidents regardless of cause, size, or complexity (NIMS, 2004, p. ix). Adoption of NIMS is a requisite condition for states and local organizations to receive federal preparedness assistance beginning FY 2005. In the preface to the NIMS document it is acknowledged that some elements of NIMS will require additional development and refinement before compliance can be attained. These elements are mainly the supporting technologies such as communications interoperability discussed in NIMS Chapter Six. Chapter Seven, Ongoing Management and Maintenance, describes the establishment, structure and responsibilities of a multi-jurisdictional/multidisciplinary NIMS Integration Center (NIMS, 2004, p. 59). Such responsibilities include developing the assessment criteria for
the various components of NIMS, as well as compliance requirements and compliance timelines for Federal, State, local, and tribal entities (NIMS, 2004, p. 60). Individual Federal, State, local, and tribal jurisdictions are responsible for implementing the preparedness cycle in advance of an incident and appropriately including private-sector and nongovernmental organizations in such implementation (NIMS, 2004, p. 34). Preparedness organizations are such multi-jurisdictional/multidiscipline organizations, large and small, that are engaged in preparedness activities in advance of an incident. Preparedness organizations, amongst a number of other responsibilities, should

- Ensure the establishment and maintenance of multi-agency coordination mechanisms, including Emergency Operations Centers (EOC), mutual-aid agreements, incident information systems, nongovernmental organization and private-sector outreach, public awareness and information systems, and mechanisms to deal with information and operations security. (NIMS, 2004, p.35)

Benton County, Washington has a Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (BCCEMP) that includes some concepts of operations (BCCEMP section 4) and responsibilities (BCCEMP section 5). It does not adequately address the requirement of a multi-agency coordination mechanism that ensures strategic coordination during incidents. The Decision Group positions are filled based on position within a few county political organizations, rather than those individuals with direct incident management responsibilities or with significant incident management support or resources responsibilities (NIMS, 2004, p. 27).
The Benton County Decision Group as it is presently established does not comply with NIMS. The problem is continued non-compliance will make organizations in Benton County, Washington ineligible for federal preparedness assistance funding. The purpose of this research is to determine the appropriate configuration of the County MAC Group under NIMS, including defining roles and responsibilities, authorities, qualifications, experience, and training required for the participants. This research utilizes an action method of research.

The research questions are:

1. Which organizations should be represented on the Benton County MAC Group?
2. What decision making authority for his/her organization is required by MAC Group participants?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities of the MAC Group under NIMS?
4. What experience and training is required to qualify MAC Group participants?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Benton County is located in the middle of the Columbia Basin in south-central Washington. It is very much an urban county with 77% of the County’s population of 142,475 located in one of the five incorporated cities; Richland, Kennewick, Prosser, Benton City, and West Richland (Census, 2000). “Of Washington’s 39 counties, Benton County has the tenth largest population” (Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, 2004, p A7-2). In 2003 Benton County and the City of Richland developed Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans largely in recognition of their vulnerability to particular natural hazards but also in order to be eligible to receive federal funding through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program authorized under section 404 of the
Stafford Act U.S.C. 5170c (44CFR Part 201.6). Through the years local jurisdictions have developed, implemented, and practiced sophisticated emergency response plans to address potential technological disaster incidents. The Hanford Nuclear Reservation is located along the Columbia River in the northernmost area of the County. The site has a working nuclear power plant, multiple reactor sites from the Manhattan Project and Cold War years that are being cocooned, millions of gallons of radioactive liquid awaiting treatment, and nuclear waste shipments moving on and off the reservation. Just across the Columbia River on the southern border of the County, the Umatilla Chemical Depot contains 11.6% of the nation’s chemical weapon stockpile (Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, 2004, p A7-15). Since early 1990 Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) funds have been used to accommodate, equip, and staff a sophisticated Emergency Operations Center located in the City of Richland. There are eleven dams in Benton County and the County is downstream from seven large dams on the Columbia River. Inundation maps indicate that a significant portion of the County and vital infrastructure in the incorporated cities would be flooded in the event of a dam failure (Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, 2004, p A7-10). As a result of regular vulnerability analyses, disaster response planning is comprehensive and well practiced. Since the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved the County and the Richland Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans, a greater emphasis has been placed on vulnerability mitigation actions and strategies, but the inevitability of future natural, technological, or manmade incidents is recognized.
When the President issued Homeland Security Directive (HSPD)-5 on February 28, 2003, *Management of Domestic Incidents*, he directed the Secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, to develop and administer a National Incident Management System (NIMS). “The directive also requires Federal departments and agencies to make adoption of the NIMS by State and local organizations a condition for Federal preparedness assistance (through grants, contracts, and other activities) beginning in FY 2005.” (National Incident Management System, 2004, p ix) Local agencies are heavily dependent on the continuation of Federal preparedness assistance such as CSEPP, FIRE Grant, Waste Isolation Program (WIPP), and more. Full adoption and application of NIMS will enable the many agencies that will be involved in a domestic incident to work effectively and efficiently together. Continued access to Federal preparedness funds should also be assured.

NIMS recognizes that while most domestic incidents are handled by a single local agency or jurisdiction, “there are instances in which successful domestic management operations depend on the involvement of multiple jurisdictions, functional agencies, and emergency responder disciplines” (NIMS, 2004, p2). Major incidents will draw in multiple responders within a discipline and a number of diverse functional agencies. NIMS is the key to interoperability and compatibility as a diverse set of public and private organizations bring their resources to bear on (an) incident(s). Many such organizations are very familiar with the principles and concepts of NIMS as they mirror existing practices in their discipline, most typically fire service organizations. For others NIMS will require a very different approach than they have routinely practiced. There are six major components of NIMS that work together to provide a framework for preparing
for, preventing, responding to, and recovering from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity (NIMS, 2004). Within the Command and Management component there are three key organizational systems; the Incident Command System (ICS), Multi-agency Coordination System, and Public Information System (NIMS, 2004). This applied research paper is focused on the second of these key systems; Multi-agency Coordination.

This paper is prepared to meet the National Fire Academy (NFA) Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management (EAFSOEM) course goal to prepare senior staff officers in the administrative functions necessary to manage the operational component of a fire and rescue department effectively (EAFSOEM Student Manual, FEMA, 2001, p SM 1-3). Unit Nine, Emergency Operations Center is applicable to this paper. The terminal objective states that students will be able to assume an emergency management role in an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to better understand the role of the EOC as it relates to the decision making structure of a local government during a disaster (EAFSOEM, FEMA, 2001, p SM 9-1). The Multi-agency Coordination System is a key component of NIMS. The EOC and multi-agency coordinating entities are the elements of this system (NIMS, 2004, p 26).

The significance of this research paper for the United States Fire Administration (USFA) is twofold. Fire service leaders will have an effective model from which to lead their community in the development and implementation of a NIMS compliant multi-agency coordination system in order to remain eligible to receive federal funds. Secondly, the fire service, which has a long history in the many elements of Incident Command
Systems (ICS), will need to be engaged in the implementation of NIMS and the broader impacts it will have on the delivery of life protecting services in our communities (Operational Objectives one and two, USFA, 2001). Fire service leaders will make a direct contribution to the comprehensive risk reduction plan in our community (Operational Objective four, USFA, 2001).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The fire service pioneered the creation of an organized group to facilitate communication, cooperation, and collaboration between assisting and supporting agencies on fires, typically wildfires. In 1971 a group of seven federal, state, and local fire agencies entered into a unique partnership to produce what has become the model for governmental cooperation throughout the United States (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001, Introduction). A single agency, within a local jurisdiction, will handle over 90% of the emergency incidents that occur each day in the United States (Monesmith, Newell, Whitson, and Montague, 1985). When an agency faces the 3 to 7 percent of incidents that require the response of two or more agencies, it is critical that a unified command approach be utilized. Unified command provides the framework for agencies with different legal, geographic, and functional responsibilities to work together effectively on an incident (Monesmith, Newell, Whitson, and Montague, 1985, p. 3). By 1988 California had established three Multi-agency Coordination Groups (personal communication, Don Perry, Fire Chief, June 20, 2004) to handle the complexities of multi-agency and/or multi-jurisdictional incidents to improve interagency coordination at the top management levels (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, National Advanced Resource Technology Center
(NARTC), 1990, Unit 1-A p. 3). The concept and application of the Multi-agency Coordination System (MACS) has continued to be refined and adopted throughout the nation’s fire agencies. The application is also being utilized by other disciplines. Most disciplines, public and private, have very well-defined vertical structures of the hierarchy of authority that determines decision-making at each level (Burkle and Hayden, 2001). The organizational chart depicts who does what, when, how, and where (Ostroff, 1999).

Vertically organized agencies tend to operate efficiently to maintain standards of response during a domestic incident (Burkle and Hayden, 2001). This is most evident within organizations that have established very strict lines of authority and tasks, particularly during emergency responses (Ostroff, 1999). The challenge in today’s all risk environment is to bring a number of dissimilar vertical agencies together in an effort to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity is compounded across disciplinary lines. Organizational relationships are often marked by competition for resources and attention, poor communications, cultural and management differences, and conflicting priorities (Burkle and Hayden, 2001, Dynes, 1994). The catastrophic or potentially catastrophic consequence of vertical organizations’ failure, or inability, to share intelligence information has been evidenced in our own federal security agencies responsible for monitoring terrorist activity. Legal and organizational barriers have hampered coordinated information sharing among federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and US Customs. In the past decade there has been a growing trend for even the most vertically structured organizations, such as the military, to collaborate with
multi-agency civilian organizations engaged in international disasters, aid missions, and war (Burkle and Hayden, 2001). Horizontal organizational structures are needed in order to optimize coordination, communication, and collaboration of functional components between organizations (Burkle and Hayden, 2001, p. 88).

The Multi Agency Coordinating Group is an example of a horizontal organization structured to lateralize decision making across agency and discipline lines. NIMS recognizes that the horizontal organization described above may be referenced by many names including, crisis action teams, policy committees, incident management groups, executive teams (NIMS, 2004, p.28), regional all hazards emergency management coordination group (Colorado), Civil-Military Operations Center (Joint Task Force Commander’s Handbook for Peace Operations diagram, in Burkle and Hayden, 2001), and other similar terms. This paper will use the term most commonly used by the fire service, Multi-agency Coordination Group. The MAC Group is an element of a multi-agency coordination system (MACS). A MACS is a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications integrated into a common system with responsibility for coordination of assisting agency resources and support to agency emergency operations (Spokane County Incident Command System Field Operations Guide, 2004, p.2-2). There are a number of variations on the definition of a MACS, but the differences are minor. For example, NIMS (2004, p. 26) begins the same but concludes “…responsibility for coordinating and supporting domestic incident management activities.” Likewise the functions the MACS perform follow a very similar vein amongst agency’s and discipline’s field operations guides (FOG) such as the US Coast Guards FOG for Oil Spills (ICS-OS-420-1) and the Southwest Fire Management
Board’s Southwest Coordinating Group Handbook, 2003, Appendix 3. Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, identifies twelve MACS functions. They are:

1. Evaluate new incidents.

2. Prioritize incidents
   a. Life threatening situation
   b. Real property threatened
   c. High damage potential
   d. Incident complexity

3. Ensure agency resource situation status is current.

4. Determine specific agency resource requirements.

5. Determine agency resource availability (available for out-of-jurisdiction assignment at this time).

6. Determine need and designate regional mobilization centers.

7. Allocate resources to incidents based on priorities.

8. Anticipate future agency/regional resource needs.

9. Communicate MACS “decisions” back to agency/incidents.


11. Review need for other agencies involvement in MACS.

12. Provide necessary liaison with out-of-region facilities and agencies as appropriate.

Direct tactical and operational responsibility for conducting incident management activities rest with the Incident Command/Unified Command (NIMS, 2004, p.26).

Utilization of a MAC Group is not an expansion of the Incident Command System (ICS) but rather an expansion of the coordination and management system that support the on-
the-ground incident management organizations (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 1). The level of the MAC will be determined by the level at which decisions need to be made (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 2). National level MAC Groups will determine and set national priorities, acquire and allocate resources between geographic areas, execute and modify national policies, and coordinate information and assessments nationally. A MAC Group may be established within a single political subdivision. The size and complexity should be determined by its mission (Personal communication, Perry, July 12, 2004). The purpose of the MAC is to get decisions made by the right people in a timely manner and to get the needed actions implemented. If the MAC Group cannot do this or doesn’t need to, then it should be disbanded (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 2). NIMS (2004, p.28) states the functions of the MAC Group as follows, regardless of form or structure:

- Ensuring that each agency involved in incident management activities is providing appropriate situational awareness and resource status information;
- Establishing priorities between incidents and/or Area Commands in concert with the IC or UC(s) involved;
- Acquiring and allocating resources required by incident management personnel in concert with the priorities established by the IC or UC;
- Anticipating and identifying future resource requirements;
- Coordinating and resolving policy issues arising from the incident(s); and
- Providing strategic coordination as required.
The MAC Group is used to improve the timeliness and quality of the execution of these functions. Decisions and direction from the MAC Group must be well coordinated and directed back through the affected agencies with sufficient time for effective implementation (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 3).

The make up of the MAC Group will depend on the mission. There is the complex National MAC Group that crosses discipline lines across the country, through to a single political subdivision MAC Group. MAC Group members are typically the principals (or their designees) from organizations and agencies with direct incident management responsibility or with significant incident management support or resource responsibilities (NIMS, 2004, p.27). Key qualities of a MAC Group member are the ability to listen, comprehend, and decide (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 4). He/she must have credibility with those above and below them in their own organization and must be fully authorized to represent their agency (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001, p. 2-3). They must have the authority to order the deployment of personnel and equipment from their agency or organization, commit funds, and modify agency policies and procedures agreed upon through MAC Group deliberations (Southwest Fire Management Board’s Southwest Coordinating Group Handbook, 2003, Appendix 3). If the representative assigned to the MAC Group is not the “top dog” bearing the required authority by virtue of position or rank, then there should be a letter of delegation of authority on-hand (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 4). Replacement and rotation
of MAC Group representatives does not work well. The continuity of function is lost each time a substitute is put in (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 4). At the county level, the MAC Group is staffed by representatives from the local government’s departments and agencies with direct incident management responsibility or with significant incident management support or resource responsibilities on a local incident. Representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGO) such as volunteer agencies, special districts, and private organizations may be routinely included in the MAC Group or added at the direction of the MAC Group for a specific incident (Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) Guidelines, Part 1. System Description C. Local Government Level, 1994, p.12).

The MAC Group Coordinator serves as the facilitator in organizing and accomplishing the mission, goals, and direction of the MAC Group (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001, p. 2-3). The coordinator must keep the MAC group focused on their primary mission and conscious of the need to make timely decisions (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-B p. 1). The position provides expertise in obtaining and summarizing multi-agency information to affect collective decisions at the MAC Group level and implementing agencies’ priorities (National Inter-agency Mobilization Guide, March 2004, p.110.). The coordinator will:

- Facilitate the MAC Group decision process by obtaining, developing, and displaying the situation information.
- Fill and supervise necessary unit and support positions within the MAC Group.
• Acquire and manage facilities and equipment necessary to carry out the MAC Group functions.

• Implement the decisions made by the MAC Group.

( Spokane County Incident Command System Field Operations Guide, 2004, p.2-2)

Though NIMS does not speak to the need, the MAC Group may include a Situation Assessment Unit, Resources Unit, and Information Unit (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001, p. 2- 4-6). Each Unit, if activated, is part of the MACS and provides specific service within the MACS. The Situation Assessment Unit collects and organizes incident status and situation information. They evaluate, analyze, and display information such as incident location, size, damage assessments, environmental and cultural issues, and weather. Information is summarized and displayed, including any accidents, injuries, deaths, or other significant events. The Situation Assessment Unit should also develop projections of future incident activity (US Coast Guards FOG for Oil Spills (ICS-OS-420-1), 1996, p. 7). The Resources Unit maintains a summary of all critical personnel and equipment, by agency, assigned or available within the MACS responsibility. The Resources Unit tracks numbers rather than individual resources (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001, p. 2-4). The Information Unit is designed to satisfy the need for regional information gathering. It provides summary information from agency/incident information officers (Spokane County Incident Command System Field Operations Guide, 2004, p.2-4).

Pre-established guidelines should be in place that recommend or require the establishment of the MAC Group (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 2). The specifics of the
guidelines will vary, but should be expressed in preparedness plans at the appropriate level, national, geographic area, state, county or single political subdivision (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 2). When the MAC Group is to be activated, the MAC Group Coordinator should arrange contact with the pre-designated agency and organization MAC Group representatives (Southwest Fire Management Board’s Southwest Coordinating Group Handbook, 2003, Appendix 3). Based on the situation and issues, the MAC Group should set their meeting schedule and determine the components needed to support their activities (Southwest Fire Management Board’s Southwest Coordinating Group Handbook, 2003, Appendix 3).

MAC Group meetings are led by the MAC Group Coordinator and should follow a standard outline. The MAC Group coordinator must ensure he/she has all the necessary information at hand, is prepared to facilitate the meeting, has arranged for documentation of attendees and their decisions from the meeting, and finally prepared to make sure decisions are disseminated appropriately and implemented (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 3-A p. 2). The meeting has two functions: to brief the MAC Group members and other interested parties (as reason and space allows) and on identified opportunities, threats and issues (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 3-A p. 2). After the briefing portion of the meeting the MAC Group must move their focus to decision making. This portion of the meeting should only include the MAC Group members. A suggested agenda is as follows:

- Review identified and new issues.
- Review existing criteria for establishing priorities.
- Present recommendations.
- Allocate critical resources.
- Discuss and decide on who and how will any media concerns be resolved.
- Discuss and decide on who and how will any identified VIP issues be resolved.
- Discuss and decide on who and how will decisions made in the meeting be implemented.

(Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 3-A p. 3)

Decisions made or deferred should be documented, signed by the MAC Group members, and filed by the MAC Group Coordinator (Southwest Fire Management Board’s Southwest Coordinating Group Handbook, 2003, Appendix 3).

NIMS (2004, p. 37) states that incident management organizations and personnel at all levels of government, and within the private-sector and non-governmental organizations, must be appropriately trained to improve all-hazards incident management capability nationwide. While the key qualities and authority of MAC Group members have been well described in the reviewed literature there is little that specifically addresses suggested or required training. The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) describes the required training and experience elements of each of the positions within the Incident Command System (ICS) in the publication Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide PMS 310-1, 2000. The training approach developed in the wildfire community is to be considered a model for other components of NIMS
On June 3, 2004 the NIMS Integration Center stood up under the USFA at FEMA. One of the nineteen responsibilities that are assigned to the Center is:

- Facilitating the definition of general training requirements and the development of national level training standards and course curricula associated with NIMS.

The I 100 through I 400 level classes are the basis for ICS training. These courses are being redrafted and revised to ensure that they are consistent with NIMS (Acting Director Bourne interviewed in Fire Chief, June 10, 2004). There are two Incident Command System Courses (I) that are directly applicable to MAC Group members. Multi-agency Coordination, I-401, describes the major elements associated with developing and implementing an effective Multi-agency Coordination System compatible with the Incident Command System (Incident Command System, National Training Curriculum, Module 16, Multi-agency Coordination, Instructor’s guide, 1994, p.16-1). The second course is ICS for Executives, I 402, which serves as an orientation for executives, administrators, and policy makers. It provides a basic understanding of ICS, Unified and Area Command, and multi-agency coordination to those persons responsible for establishing or implementing policy, but who are not normally part of the on-scene ICS organization. It also discusses responsibilities and information transfer between executives and Incident Commanders (Incident Command System, National Training Curriculum, Module 17, ICS for Executives, Instructor’s guide, 1994, p.17-1). At this time, at least until the NIMS Integration Center develops national standards, guidelines, and protocols for incident management training, it appears that the above courses should provide the training component of qualification to serve as a MAC Group member (NIMS, 2004, p. 60).
There are a number of other related courses available that may be considered to provide additional depth to the knowledge and understanding of MAC Group members. The National Fire Academy two day course, Introduction to Unified Command for Multi-Agency and Catastrophic Incidents, F315, provides insight into the Command and General staff positions during a multi-agency operation (USFA Training Course Catalog-Course Detail, 2004). IS 700 – National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Introduction, is an on-line course designed to take approximately three hours to complete, that will introduce the student to key principles and concepts underlying NIMS including Multi-agency Coordination (Emergency Management Institute (EMI), Independent Study Program, 2004). In the initial phases of establishing a national credentialing system, it may be possible for an individual to have credentials issued based on evidence and testimony to performance level rather than certification through testing and evaluation (National Fire Service Responder Credentialing System, 2004, p.5.).

The role of MAC Group Coordinator is critical to the success of the MAC Group but little specific training is available. MAC Group Coordinator training has been offered at the National Advanced Resource Technology Center in Marana, Arizona but no information on this course or its scheduling is available at this time (NARTC website, August, 2004). Though not directly related to the MAC Group Coordinator role the EMI Professional Development Series includes three classes that may help prepare the coordinator for the facilitator role. They are; IS 242 – Effective Communication, IS 241 - Decision Making and Problem Solving, and IS 240 – Leadership and Influence (Emergency Management Institute (EMI), Professional Development Series, 2004).
The National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS) is adopted in the state of Washington in Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 38.52.070 and 38.52.400 and the Washington Statewide Homeland Security Strategic Plan (WSHSSP) states that NIMS will be adopted (Washington Statewide Homeland Security Strategic Plan, 2004, p.45.). It is unclear whether the state has established, or is planning to establish a state MAC. The WSHSSP describes an organizational structure that includes the Domestic Security Executive Group and the Emergency Management Council but the description of their responsibilities does not meet those typically assigned a MAC Group (Washington Statewide Homeland Security Strategic Plan, 2004, p.30.).

The Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan is presently under revision and will include a section on MACS. The Benton County Emergency Operations Center is configured with three groups; the Decision Group, the Operations Group, and the Support Group (Benton County Fixed Nuclear Facility Emergency Response Plan, 2003, pp. 12 -14.). The role of the Decision Group is to provide the authority to commit local budget, capital resources, and personnel in response to an emergency. Members of the Decision Group are:

- An Emergency Chairman, selected from the Board of County Commissioners from Benton County or the Benton County Sheriff in their absence.
- The Benton County Sheriff or designated representative.
- An Emergency Manager who is one of the following Benton County Emergency Services officials: Director, Benton County Emergency Services; Manager, Benton County Emergency Management; or SE-COMM Communications Manager.
- Emergency Operations Center Public Information Officer as appointed by the Emergency Manager.
The Operations Group is to carry out the directives and to implement the protective action decisions made by the Decision Group. The public officials and other personnel within the Operations Group include:

- Operations Coordinator appointed by the Emergency Manager.
- Fire Coordinator staffed according to the operating procedures and schedules established in the Tri-County Fire Mutual Aid Plan.
- One or more Communications Coordinators appointed by the Emergency Manager.
- Public Works Coordinator from the Benton County Public Works Department.
- Washington State Patrol representative from the Kennewick Detachment Office.
- Representatives from the following law enforcement agencies as appropriate:
  - West Richland Police Department
  - Richland Police Department
  - Benton County Sheriff's Office
- Assistant Operations Coordinator (Optional)

The role of the Support Group is to carry out the directives and to implement the protective action decisions made by the Decision Group. The Support Group primarily provides services to the public and the agencies of the Operations Group and technical advice to the Decision Group. This Group also includes liaisons of the other emergency response organizations. The public officials and other personnel within the Operations Group include:

- Support Coordinator appointed by the Emergency Manager.
• Transportation Coordinator from the Richland School District No. 400 or Ben Franklin Transit.
• Benton Franklin Chapter, American Red Cross Representative.
• Washington State Department of Agriculture Liaison.
• Washington State Emergency Management Liaison.
• Energy Northwest Liaison.
• Washington State National Guard Liaison.
• Washington State Department of Ecology Liaison.
• Federal Emergency Management Agency
• One or more Amateur Radio Operators

(Benton County Fixed Nuclear Facility Emergency Response Plan, 2003, pp. 12 -14.)

“In accordance with the Benton County Emergency Operations Plan, an Emergency Chairman is designated as the primary decision-maker in the EOC. The Emergency Chairman is usually the first county commissioner contacted. The Emergency Chairman will, with the advise (sic) and assistance of staff, determine appropriate protective actions for the citizens of the county. Ultimately, these protective actions are predetermined and pre-recorded, and the response will be automatic, instead of involving a decision process at the time of notification. The Emergency Chairman will, as necessary, declare a state of emergency, warn and inform the public, and assume control over emergency operations. The Emergency Chairman will direct the implementation of emergency response and recovery plans, and preserve the continuity of the executive branch of government. As needed, the Emergency Chairman will request state or federal assistance through the Washington State Division of Emergency Management. He/She will issue, amend and rescind the necessary orders, rules and regulations to carry out emergency management operations”
This Plan states that an Advice Group is to be located at the EOC to advise the
Emergency Chairman. This group consists of any available Benton County
Commissioners, City Mayors and/or Managers, and Legal Advisors (Benton County
Emergency Management Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program
(CSEPP) Response Plan for Chemical Accidents involving the Umatilla Chemical Depot, June 2000, pp.37.). “The EOC staff (The three Groups described above plus support staff), under the direction of the Emergency Chairman, is responsible for making
decisions which affect the safety and welfare of the citizens of Benton County. They will
be constantly in contact with UMCD, and Washington EMD, and the surrounding
counties. The EOC staff is responsible for making notifications to the institutions which
may be in danger or who may supply a needed resource. Utilization of all the resources in
the county is the basic responsibility of the staff, working through the Emergency
Chairman and BCEM Director. The decision to call for outside assistance must be made
in a timely manner if the situation exceeds (or is obviously going to exceed) the
capabilities of the community and its resources.” (Benton County Emergency
Management Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) Response
Plan for Chemical Accidents involving the Umatilla Chemical Depot, June 2000, pp.21.).
The Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan is currently under
revision but currently reflects the organization described in the two emergency plans
described above. There is no reference to a MAC Group. The Tri-County Fire Mutual
Aid Plan establishes Area Fire Coordination principally to be implemented when an incident(s) resource demands exceed the pre-established agreements established in the mutual aid plan. Area Fire Coordination is staffed by three chief officers of the involved jurisdictions and is responsible to:

- Set overall agency resource-related priorities
- Allocate critical resources based on priorities
- Ensure that resources are properly managed
- Ensure that resource objectives are met and do not conflict with each other or agency policy.

(Tri-County Fire Mutual Aid Plan, 1998, p.18.)

PROCEDURES

In early 2004 a group of Benton County, Washington Fire Chiefs and Emergency Management personnel met to review and update the Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Plan in order to determine needed updates and what, if any, changes were necessary to bring the Plan into compliance with NIMS. Before beginning the review and change process on the MAC Group portion of the Plan I interviewed Chief Robert Gear at Benton County Fire District #1. Chief Gear is a Deputy Incident Commander on National Incident Management Team 2. He has completed S 520, Advanced Incident Management at the NARTC in Marana, Arizona. I did not follow a formal interview process with set questions. We discussed the core mission for the MAC Group and the role it should have in our county. He provided insight into the concepts of operation and the likely key political subdivisions. I also informally interviewed Chief Don Perry about the MAC Group process, meeting format, and key training elements. Chief Perry
provided me with the student manual he used when he attended MAC Group Coordinator training at the NARTC in April, 1990. While this paper only references a few direct insights from these interviews they are the basis for much of the research for the literature review. The research results and recommendations were reviewed with Chief Perry and Chief Gear during the development of the NIMS compliant MAC Group section of the Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Plan.

The NIMS document is the central element of the literature review. It was downloaded from the Department of Homeland Security website during EAFSOEM training at the NFA in March, 2004. The review process continued at the NFA Learning Resource Center in March, 2004 with a search of books, journals, and past Executive Fire Officer Program student’s applied research projects. Library resources, Existing Emergency Response Plans and electronic searches were utilized to complete the review in Richland, Washington.

The literature was evaluated to determine what, if any, changes are needed to the Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan in order to develop a NIMS compliant MACS component. The roots of NIMS were examined through research of the fire service systems to facilitate communication, cooperation, and collaboration between assisting and supporting agencies on fires that were established in California in the 1970s (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001, Introduction). Papers that examined the issues present when a number of vertically organized agencies are required to work together on a multidiscipline and/or multi-agency incident were reviewed in order to determine the features of a horizontal organizational structure to overcome such issues (Burkle and Hayden, 2001, Dynes,
Material that describes the elements of a Multi-agency Coordination System were reviewed along with the policies and procedures of agencies of various disciplines from national to local level that utilize MACS and specifically a MAC Group. A number of Field Operations Guides were reviewed to learn the roles and responsibilities of both the MAC Group Coordinator and the MAC Group. Plans and instructional material were examined to determine what pre-established trigger points should be in place for the MACS activation. A search of training material and curricula was undertaken to determine the availability of relevant knowledge and skills courses for MAC Group members that will likely become the basis of credentials to participate under NIMS through the NIMS Integration Center. Finally local plans were examined to determine the existing organizational structure employed in the Emergency Operations Center in Benton County, Washington.

Situational Analysis

Due to the presence of significant technological hazards within or near to Benton County, Washington there is a number of sophisticated emergency response plans already developed. These plans often call for emergency responses that are multidisciplinary, multi-jurisdictional and/or multi-agency. The CSEPP Plan is the most complex, involving all three response types listed above Benton County Emergency Management Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) Response Plan for Chemical Accidents involving the Umatilla Chemical Depot, June 2000). The Tri-County Fire Mutual Aid Plan is primarily a multi-agency response plan (Tri-County Fire Mutual Aid Plan, 1998). While adoption of NIMS is voluntary at the local government level in effect it is essential if local government agencies are to have access to federal preparedness
assistance (NIMS, 2004, p ix). Emergency Management and Fire Service leaders have recognized the need to proactively initiate efforts to ensure that the organizational structure and planning processes in Benton County, Washington are compliant with NIMS. While there is some evidence of a fragmented understanding of the importance and direction of NIMS it appears that this group is well positioned to design the organizational structure and participant credentials for positions in the County EOC. Full acceptance of the necessary changes within some disciplines and among some political subdivisions will remain a challenge, even to the implementation of the proposed section on the MAC Group as a result of this research. Presently decision making authority is vested in the Emergency Chairman. The Emergency Chairman position is filled on a first in basis from the three County Commissioners (Benton County Emergency Management Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) Response Plan for Chemical Accidents involving the Umatilla Chemical Depot, June 2000,). The Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Response Plan states that the Emergency Chairman is to determine appropriate protective actions for the citizens of the county. He/she is to be advised by a group comprised of the other two County Commissioners, City Mayors and/or City Managers, and Legal Advisors (Benton County Emergency Management Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) Response Plan for Chemical Accidents involving the Umatilla Chemical Depot, June 2000). There are three groups within the EOC, one of which is the Decision Group with the authority to commit local budget, capital resources, and personnel in response to an emergency (Benton County Fixed Nuclear Facility Emergency Response Plan, 2003). Review of the make-up of this group indicates that it lacks the appropriate members to fulfill the described role.
With the exception of the Sheriff and to a lesser degree the Commissioner and the Health District Director the others lack the authority to commit local budget, resources, or personnel of the most critical response agencies to an incident. Members of the Decision Group are able to delegate their authority to a designee (Benton County Fixed Nuclear Facility Emergency Response Plan, 2003).

**Benton County MAC Group**

Establishing a Benton County MAC Group will involve a significant restructuring of the existing procedures and protocols in the EOC. The MAC Group is not an expansion of the Incident Command System but rather a coordination and management system to support the field incident management organizations (Multi-agency Coordination Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A, p. 1). Tactical and operational responsibility is to be handled at the Incident Command level (NIMS, 2004). Among the key functions of the MAC Group are the establishment of priorities, the allocation of resources, and the coordinating and resolving of policy issues arising from the incident(s) (NIMS, 2004). The existing EOC structure described above, in the Situational Analysis, reveals that it is in serious conflict with the intent of NIMS and the established functions of a MAC Group. The Benton County MAC Group policy will be established in the revised Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan along with a complete revision of the structure and make-up of the EOC. Only the portion of the Plan that covers the MAC Group will be included in this applied research paper. The prerequisites for membership in the MAC Group will be redefined, including both authorities and credentials (Southwest Fire Management Board’s Southwest Coordinating Group Handbook, 2003, Appendix 3) and (Multi-
agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 4). Possibly the greatest challenge to be faced, functionally and politically, will be the change from an Emergency Chairman as defined in the Benton County Emergency Management Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) Response Plan for Chemical Accidents involving the Umatilla Chemical Depot (June 2000) to a MAC Group Coordinator as described in the Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, (2001). The final challenge after the changes are accepted will be to ensure that the members of the MAC Group commit to full participation. The continuity of function is lost each time a substitute is put in (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 4). There will be training courses and exercises to undertake to ensure that the member’s knowledge and skills are established and maintained. Establishing national standards for position credentials is tasked to the NIMS Integration Center (Acting Director Bourne interviewed in Fire Chief, June 10, 2004). Credentials are typically issued as a result of certification through testing or evaluation though they may also be based on evidence or testimonials to the individual’s competencies (National Fire Service Responder Credentialing System, 2004).

The pre-established MAC Group activation trigger points will be defined in the Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan within the Concepts of Operations section describing Activation Levels. This section will include guidelines for the MAC Group Coordinator, including a standard outline for the agenda for MAC Group meetings (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 3-A p. 3).
Limitations

Two limitations affected this research project. The time allowed to complete this research project for the National Fire Academy; Executive Fire Officer Program is six months. This is not sufficient time to develop all of the elements required to establish the MAC Group, see to its functional and political acceptance and implementation, and evaluate it. Some of the procedures are necessarily described in the future tense. Benton County leaders are still in the process of revising the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan at the end of the six-month timeframe for this project.

NIMS has been established but the specifics of what assessment criteria and evaluation processes that are to be used to determine compliance, including timelines for federal, state, tribal, and local entities is yet to come from the NIMS Integration Center. Some aspects of training standards and course curricula is speculative.

Definitions

Agency: A division of government with a specific function offering a particular kind of assistance (NIMS, 2004, p.127.)

Area Command: An expansion of the incident command function primarily designed to manage a very large incident that has multiple incident management teams assigned (Fire Service FOG, ICS 420-1, 2001, p.3-2.)

the context of NIMS it is used to distinguish a particular group by profession rather than jurisdiction, for example, Law Enforcement or Fire Service.

Emergency Operations Center: The physical location at which the coordination of information and resources to support incident management activities normally take place (NIMS, 2004, p.26.)

Federal Preparedness Assistance: Federal department and agency grants, cooperative agreements, loans, loan guarantees, training, and/or technical assistance provided to State and local governments and the private sector to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies (Homeland Security Presidential Directive-8, December 18, 2003, Definitions)

Incident Command System: The operating characteristics, interactive management components, and structure of incident management and emergency response organizations engaged throughout the life cycle of an incident (NIMS, 2004, p.3.)
Jurisdiction: A range or sphere of authority. Jurisdictional authority may be political, geographical, or functional (NIMS, 2004, p.131.)

Mutual Aid: A pre-signed agreement between agencies to render assistance of apparatus and/or personnel without reimbursement, on a reciprocal basis (Tri-County Mutual Aid Plan, 1997, p.3.)

Unified Command: A method for agencies that have either geographical or functional jurisdiction at an incident to come together in a common organization, determine overall objectives, and select the strategy and action to achieve the objectives (Monesmith, Newell, Whitson, and Montague, 1985, p.8.)

RESULTS

1. Which organizations should be represented on the Benton County MAC Group?

   The size and complexity of the MAC Group should be determined by its mission (Personal communication, Perry, July 12, 2004). A National MAC Group will cross many discipline and jurisdictional lines. A MAC Group may also be established for a single political subdivision, such as a city with a number of departments within a jurisdiction. MAC Group members at the county level are from the local government’s departments and agencies with direct incident management responsibility or with significant incident management support or resource responsibilities on a county incident. Representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGO) such as volunteer agencies, special districts, and
private organizations may be routinely included in the MAC Group or added at the
direction of the MAC Group for a specific incident (Standardized Emergency
Government Level, 1994, p.12). MAC Group members are typically the director (or
designee) from organizations and agencies with direct incident management
responsibility or with significant incident management support or resource
responsibilities (NIMS, 2004, p.27). Each MAC Group member must have credibility
within their own organization in order to ensure that MAC Group decisions affecting
their organization are accepted and acted upon effectively. An extension of this
credibility comes back to participation in the MAC Group. The representative must
possess the credentials to pass muster with other MAC Group members. This point is
discussed further in 4 below. Key personal traits include the ability to listen, comprehend,
and decide (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual,

The MAC Group Coordinator serves as the facilitator in organizing and
accomplishing the mission, goals, and direction of the MAC Group (Fire Service Field
in obtaining and summarizing multi-agency information to affect collective decisions at
the MAC Group level and implementing agencies’ priorities (National Inter-agency
or support positions within the MAC Group (Spokane County Incident Command System
Field Operations Guide, 2004, p.2-2). This may include a Situation Assessment Unit,
The primary MAC Group positions are to be filled by either the Mayor or the City Manager of each of the five incorporated cities in Benton County, Washington, the Benton County Sheriff, the Chief or a Commissioner for each of the six Fire Protection Districts, and a County Commissioner. One of the above is to take the role of MAC Group Coordinator. The position should be filled by the most qualified person for the position. An alternate should be named who also meets all of the knowledge, skill, and quality requirements of the position from the pool described above.

2. What decision making authority for his/her organization is required by MAC Group participants?

The representative assigned to the MAC Group should be the “top dog” bearing the required authority, by virtue of position, from the local government entity or agency with direct incident management responsibility or with significant incident management support or resource responsibilities within the county (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001). They must have the authority to order the deployment of personnel and equipment from their agency or organization, commit funds, and modify agency policies and procedures agreed upon through MAC Group deliberations (Southwest Fire Management Board’s Southwest Coordinating Group Handbook, 2003, Appendix 3). Should a MAC Group member opt to assign a designee then there must be a letter of delegation of authority on file with the MAC Group (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 4). Substitution and rotation of MAC Group representatives does not work well.
The continuity is lost each time a replacement joins the MAC Group and time is wasted whenever it is necessary to update a new member on process and past decisions (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990, Unit 1-A p. 4).

3. What are the roles and responsibilities of the MAC Group under NIMS?

Most organizations, particularly emergency response organizations, have very well defined vertical structures that define hierarchical position and degree of decision making authority within the structure (Burkle and Hayden, 2001). Emergency response organizations lines of authority and task levels are very strictly defined in order to ensure standardization of response and practices (Ostroff, 1999). NIMS recognizes that today’s challenge, in the all-risk environment, is to bring a number of dissimilar vertical organizations, from a range of public and private-sector disciplines, to bear on an incident effectively and efficiently. Multidiscipline incidents are often marked by poor communications, competition for resources, conflicting priorities, and a cultural reluctance to work collaboratively (Burkle and Hayden, 2001). A horizontal organizational structure is needed to overcome these potentially debilitating shortcomings on multidiscipline/multi-agency incidents (Burkle and Hayden, 2001).

The Multi Agency Coordinating Group is a horizontal organization structured to lateralize communications, policy and priority needs, and resource use and needs across agency and discipline lines. NIMS recognizes that the horizontal organization of the MAC Group maybe referred to as crisis action teams, policy committees, incident management groups, or executive teams (NIMS, 2004). The functions of the MAC Group are consistent regardless of the form or structure it may take based on its mission. The
MAC Group must ensure that each of the responsible jurisdictions/agencies involved, or those heavily supporting the effort, provide appropriate situational awareness and resource status information (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001). The MAC Group must establish priorities between incidents in collaboration with established Unified Command(s) or Area Command (NIMS, 2004). Resources are acquired and allocated to the incident(s) based on these priorities along with anticipated future needs (Spokane County Incident Command System Field Operations Guide, 2004). It is critical that the MAC Group is prepared to review and coordinate policies, procedures, and agreements as necessary to resolve conflicts or to improve the efficacy of the combined effort on the incident(s) (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001). The MAC Group must review its own operation, and that of the MACS, to ensure all key players are involved and that their objectives are being met (Spokane County Incident Command System Field Operations Guide, 2004). Under the facilitation of a skilled MAC Group Coordinator the MAC Group will improve the quality and timeliness of execution of these functions. The MAC Group Coordinator should have set of pre-established guidelines for activation of the MAC Group. He/she leads the MAC Group meetings and is responsible for ensuring all necessary inputs are in place and Group outputs are recorded, disseminated, and implemented (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990). The meetings are to brief the MAC Group and other interested parties, and then, without others present, to review existing decision criteria, identify and to act on opportunities, threats, and issues arising or anticipated (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990). The MAC Group Coordinator must document and have
MAC Group members sign decisions made or deferred (Southwest Fire Management Board’s Southwest Coordinating Group Handbook, 2003).

4. What experience and training is required to qualify MAC Group participants?

Incident management organizations and personnel at all levels of government and within the private-sector and non-governmental organizations, must be appropriately trained to improve all-hazards incident management capability nationwide (NIMS, 2004). The NIMS Integration Center will eventually define the general training requirements, the national level training standards, and course curricula associated with NIMS (NIMS, 2004). The required training and experience elements of each of the positions within the Incident Command System (ICS) is described in the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) publication Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide PMS 310-1, 2000. The training approach developed in the wildfire community is also to be considered a model for other components of NIMS (NIMS, 2004). The Incident Command System (I) courses 100 through 400 series are being redrafted and revised to be consistent with NIMS (Acting Director Bourne interviewed in Fire Chief, June 10, 2004). I-401, Multi-agency Coordination, course material covers the development and implementation of an effective Multi-agency Coordination System (Incident Command System, National Training Curriculum, Module 16, Multi-agency Coordination, Instructor’s guide, 1994). I-402, ICS for Executives should be considered as it provides a basic overview of all of the elements of ICS including multi-agency coordination (Incident Command System, National Training Curriculum, Module 17, Multi-agency Coordination, Instructor’s guide, 1994). Absent clearer direction from the NIMS Integration Center these courses may be considered the core training elements for MAC
Group members (NIMS, 2004). The National Fire Academy and the Emergency Management Institute offer on-line courses, self-study courses, and direct training courses that may add to the core knowledge base of MAC Group participants. As the NIMS Integration Center works to establish a national credentialing system credentials may be issues based on testimony and evidence of performance in a position rather than certification through testing and evaluation (Incident Command System, National Training Curriculum, Module 16, Multi-agency Coordination, Instructor’s guide, 1994). The key to a successful and effective MAC Group will be dependent on the skills and standing of the MAC Group Coordinator, particularly in the initial training and activation activities of the MAC Group, if the participants are inexperienced. The Coordinator’s ability to facilitate a true horizontal structure, from the diverse disciplines, in the MAC Group will determine the Group’s success and ultimately the outcome of the incident(s) (National Inter-agency Mobilization Guide, March 2004).

The only training found specifically directed at the position of MAC Group Coordinator has been offered at the National Advanced Resource Technology Center in Marana, Arizona but no information on this course or its scheduling is available at this time (NARTC website, August, 2004).

The new section of the Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan for the establishment and function of the MAC Group is found in Appendix A.

DISCUSSION

The result of this research paper is a new section of the Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (BCCEMP) establishing a MAC Group. In order for agencies and jurisdictions in Benton County to remain eligible for federal
preparedness assistance from through grants, cooperative agreements, training, and technical assistance beginning FY 2005 (Homeland Security Presidential Directive-8, December 18, 2003, Definitions) they must be compliant with NIMS (NIMS, 2004). While the full details of the federal compliance assessment criteria to be used for the various components of NIMS are yet to be established, there is a clear burden on local jurisdictions to implement the preparedness cycle in advance of an incident and to include the appropriate private-sector and NGOs in such implementation (NIMS, 2004). This includes the establishment and maintenance of multi-agency coordination mechanisms, including EOCs, mutual-aid agreements, incident information systems, NGO and private-sector outreach, public awareness and information systems, and mechanisms to deal with information and operations security (NIMS, 2004).

The Benton County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (2003) presently includes Concepts of Operations (BCCEMP, Section 4) and Responsibilities (BCCEMP, Section 5) but it does not adequately provide a mechanism for multi-agency coordination. Strategic coordination between multiple agencies and disciplines cannot be assured during an incident(s). Positions in the EOC, particularly the Decision Group are filled based on a handful of organization positions in the county rather than those people with direct incident management responsibilities or with significant incident management support or resources responsibilities as required in NIMS (NIMS, 2004). This research utilized an extensive literature review in order to determine the appropriate configuration of the Benton County MAC Group under NIMS, including defining roles and responsibilities, authorities, qualifications, experience, and training required for the participants.
The MAC Group is the horizontal organization that ties the many vertically structured agencies and jurisdictions engaged in emergency operations on an incident together. The MAC Group is the coordination mechanism to be put in place to overcome poor communications, policy and procedural clashes, and wasteful competition for resources (Burkle and Hayden, 2001). Review of the positions staffed at the Decision Group table indicates that many key agencies that have direct incident management responsibilities or which have significant incident management support or resources responsibilities are missing. The MAC Group must have the authority to order the deployment of personnel and equipment from their agency or organization, commit funds, and modify agency policies and procedures agreed upon through MAC Group deliberations (Southwest Fire Management Board’s Southwest Coordinating Group Handbook, 2003). Though the BCCEMP (2003) states that the role of the Decision Group is to provide the authority to commit local budget, capital resources, and personnel in response to an emergency, few of the members have such authority. More significantly many who do have such authority over most of the resources and personnel likely to be used on a major incident are not included. As such there is not a true horizontal structure pulling the many vertically organized agencies and jurisdictions together (Burkle and Hayden, 2001).

Secondly, the most critical position at this level is the MAC Group Coordinator. The, somewhat, equivalent role in the existing organizational structure is that of Emergency Chairman. “In accordance with the Benton County Emergency Operations Plan (sic), an Emergency Chairman is designated as the primary decision-maker in the EOC” (Benton County Emergency Management Chemical Stockpile Emergency
Preparedness Program (CSEPP) Response Plan for Chemical Accidents involving the Umatilla Chemical Depot, June 2000). The Emergency Chairman is usually the first county commissioner contacted. This means that the most critical role at this level is filled by chance by one of three County Commissioners. Sole decision making authority rests with the Emergency Chairman yet the individual filling the role does not have the necessary authority described above, by position or delegation of authority, over most of the needed resources and personnel. In contrast, the MAC Group Coordinator serves as the facilitator in organizing and accomplishing the mission, goals, and direction of the MAC Group (Fire Service Field Operations Guide, ICS 420-1, 10th edition, 2001). The position provides expertise in obtaining and summarizing multi-agency information to affect collective decisions at the MAC Group level and implementing agencies’ priorities (National Inter-agency Mobilization Guide, March 2004).

The Emergency Chairman has an Advice Group at the EOC. This group consists of any available Benton County Commissioners, City Mayors and/or Managers, and Legal Advisors (Benton County Emergency Management Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) Response Plan for Chemical Accidents involving the Umatilla Chemical Depot, June 2000). The City Mayor/City Managers certainly have the needed authority to commit local budget, capital resources, and personnel but in this context are reduced to an advisory capacity. There are two significant concerns with this organizational structure. It is unlikely that the needed decisions and prioritization can be affected in a complete or timely manner. Without all the needed participants, decisions will have to be deferred while those with authority are consulted, brought up to speed, and then ready to act. Secondly, there is no visible horizontal structure that brings all of
the key agencies under one plan. Again the contrast with the MAC Group structure is stark. The purpose of the MAC is to get decisions made by the right people in a timely manner and to get the needed actions implemented. Decisions and direction from the MAC Group is well coordinated and directed back through the affected agencies with sufficient time for effective implementation (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990). All agencies, governmental, NGO, and private-sector, along with key political figures are kept up to date with situation reports and resource status through the MAC Group meeting briefing. The second portion of the meeting is conducted in seclusion and focuses on the needed decision making at hand (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990). Members review identified and new issues weighing them against existing criteria for prioritization. Members are able to make recommendations for priorities and resource allocation based on their knowledge of their own agencies policies and needs in the context of the totality of situational awareness and resource status. The MAC Group collectively determines the priorities, recognizes any agency policy amendments needed to carry out the priorities, and allocates resources (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990). They also decide who and how the Group’s decisions will be disseminated and implemented through the affected agencies, to affected or interested political entities, and the media, as appropriate. All actions are signed off by each member of the Group and memorialized by the Coordinator (Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group Coordinators Student Manual, NARTC, 1990). A separate room should be set up to accommodate the MAC Group to effectively conduct
their meetings. The EOC can be reorganized and reconfigured to accommodate such a change (Appendix A).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizations and agencies in Benton County, Washington are very dependent a range of federal grants and funding streams. In order to retain access to the federal preparedness assistance funds they must adopt and attain compliance with NIMS. County jurisdictions, agencies, and organizations are well positioned to make many of the adjustments to existing procedures and policies necessary for NIMS compliance. The existing EOC structure is dramatically out of step with NIMS, particularly the Decision Group structure. Therefore it is recommended that implementation of the MAC Group as described in this paper be adopted and established in early 2005. There are significant political impacts in this change and early meetings should be conducted to explain the role and responsibilities of the MAC Group. Those with political power but little direct authority to order the deployment of personnel and equipment from their agency or organization, commit funds, and modify agency policies and procedures will have to accept a lesser role. Each individual hierarchical organization will have to recognize and accept the umbrella coordinating role of the MAC Group. The interests and concerns of their agency are represented by their member on the MAC Group. The MAC Group should be made of representatives from the local government’s departments and agencies with direct incident management responsibility or with significant incident management support or resource responsibilities on a local incident. The primary members of the MAC Group should be the Mayor or City Manager of each of the five incorporated cities, the Benton County Sheriff, the Fire Chief or a Commissioner from each of the six fire
protection districts, and a County Commissioner. These people have the authority to order the deployment of personnel and equipment from their agency or organization, commit funds, and modify policies and procedures. Representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGO) such as volunteer agencies, special districts, and private organizations may be routinely included in the MAC Group or added at the direction of the MAC Group for a specific incident.

The role of MAC Group Coordinator should be assigned to the member with the highest level of training and experience in this area of incident management coordination. He or she must also be a skilled facilitator to ensure that MAC Group meetings have all the necessary information and are prepared to make quality, timely decisions. The MAC Group Coordinator must facilitate a process that enhances the working relationships between agencies, organizations, and disciplines, gives direction to each in concert with all, improves the joint understanding of each agency’s needs, capabilities and functions, and unifies the response plan to coordinate effort on the incident(s).

Over the winter of 2004/2005 prospective MAC Group participants should be briefed on the changes in the EOC and familiarized with the new approach taken with a MAC Group established. Until explicit requirements are promulgated by the NIMS Integration Center the minimum training requirements should be I-401, Multi-agency Coordination, I-402, ICS for Executives, and the on-line course, IS 700 – National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Introduction. The full MAC Group should participate in exercises with the Tri-County Interagency Incident Management Team during their spring training.
Executive Fire Officers need to consider their role in their community as the nation moves toward the adoption of NIMS. The Department of Homeland Security is providing the blueprint and economic incentive for local governments to continue the process of coordination between jurisdictions, disciplines, and agencies to prepare for and respond to major disasters, whatever their origin. The fire service is already well versed in the concepts and application of the principles of NIMS. It is time to take a leadership role in the implementation of procedures and programs to integrate NIMS into our communities. The literature review demonstrated that fire service organizations throughout the nation developed and has refined the MAC Group process more than any other discipline. Every year our country experiences major natural disasters with many lives lost and massive damage to property and the environment. Technological disasters strike with devastating consequences for surrounding communities. The threat of further terrorist action, directly against citizens or on the critical infrastructure in our communities, is all too real today. The probability of concurrent events across a large geographic area, or the cascading events within a geographic area, makes it critically important to plan for multi-agency/multidiscipline responses. The National Incident Management System provides a consistent nationwide template to enable Federal, State, tribal and local governments and private-sector and nongovernmental organizations to work together effectively and efficiently to manage domestic incidents regardless of cause, size, or complexity. We are all challenged to do all we can in our communities to make it a reality.
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Benton County Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) Group

To be integrated into the Benton County Emergency Management Plan (2004 revision)
Introduction

The purpose of the MAC Group is to enhance the operational effort of agencies deployed on an incident, or multiple incidents, in Benton County, Washington. The purpose is not to assume command responsibilities from the Incident Commander(s) or Unified Commanders, but to assist them through providing coordination of assisting agency resources and support to agency emergency operations. The MAC Group does this by:

- Evaluating new incidents
- Prioritizing incidents
- Ensuring agency resource situation status is correct
- Determining specific agency resource requirements
- Determining agency resource availability
- Determining the need for designation of county mobilization centers
- Allocation of resources to incidents based on priorities
- Anticipation of future agency/county resource needs
- Communicating MAC Group decisions back to agencies and incidents
- Reviewing policies and agreements for county resource allocations
- Reviewing the need for other agencies involvement in the MAC Group
- Providing necessary liaison with out-of-county facilities and agencies as appropriate

MAC Group Members

MAC Group members must be the principals (or their designee) from organizations and agencies with direct incident management responsibility or with significant incident management support or resource responsibilities. They must have the authority to order the deployment of personnel and equipment from their agency or organization, commit funds, and modify agency policies and procedures agreed upon through MAC Group deliberations. They must also be respected in their organization, have the ability to listen, comprehend, and make decisions. The MAC Group is used to improve the timeliness and quality of the execution of decisions and directions back to the incident(s). This must be well coordinated and directed back through the affected agencies with sufficient time for effective implementation.

One of the twelve MAC Group members is to assume the role of MAC Group Coordinator. This position should be filled by the most qualified individual for the role based on experience, training, and facilitation skills.

Primary Positions:

1. A County Commissioner
2. Mayor/City Manager Benton City
3. Mayor/City Manager Kennewick
4. Mayor/City Manager Prosser
5. Mayor/City Manager Richland
6. Mayor/City Manager West Richland
7. Benton County Sheriff
8. Commissioner/Chief of Benton County Fire Protection District #1
9. Commissioner/Chief of Benton County Fire Protection District #2
10. Commissioner/Chief of Benton County Fire Protection District #3
11. Commissioner/Chief of Benton County Fire Protection District #4
12. Commissioner/Chief of Benton County Fire Protection District #5
13. Commissioner/Chief of Benton County Fire Protection District #6

Secondary Positions (As needed):

1. Principals (or their designees) of other governmental, non-governmental, and/or private-sector organizations
2. Situation Assessment Unit
3. Resources Unit
4. Information Unit

Roles and Responsibilities

MAC Group Members

- Ensure current situation and resource status is provided for their agency
- Prioritize incidents by a prescribed set of criteria
- Determine specific resource requirements by agency
- Determine resource availability for out-of-county assignment
- As needed, designate county mobilization and demobilization centers
- Collectively allocate scarce, limited resources to incidents based on priorities
- Anticipate and identify future resource needs
- Review and coordinate policies, procedures, and agreements
- Consider legal and fiscal implications
- Review the need for participation by other agencies
- Provide liaison with out-of-county facilities and agencies, as appropriate
- Critique and recommend improvements to MACS and MAC Group operations
- Be prepared to personnel to transition to emergency/disaster recovery as necessary

MAC Group Coordinator

- Facilitate the MAC Group decision process by obtaining, developing, and displaying situation information
- Fill and supervise necessary unit and support positions within the MAC Group
• Acquire and manage facilities and equipment necessary to carry out the MAC Group functions
• Implement the decisions made by the MAC Group

Situation Assessment Unit (As needed):

• Maintain incident situation status including location, type, and size, potential for damage, control problems, and any other significant information
• Maintain information on environmental issues, cultural and historical resources or sensitive populations and areas
• Maintain information on meteorological conditions and forecast conditions that may have an effect on incident operations
• Request/obtain resource status information from the Resources Unit(s) or agency dispatch sources
• Combine, summarize, and display data for all appropriate incidents according to established criteria
• Collect information on injuries, accidents, deaths, or any other significant occurrences
• Develop projections of future incident activity

Resources Unit (As needed):

• Maintain current information on the numbers of personnel and major items of equipment committed and/or available for assignment
• Identify essential and excess resources
• Provide resource summary information to the Situation Assessment Unit as requested

Information Unit (As needed):

• Prepare and release summary information to the news media and participating agencies
• Assist media visiting the MACS facility and provide information on its function. Stress joint agency involvement
• Assist in scheduling media conferences and briefings. Assist in preparing information materials when requested by the MAC Group Coordinator
• Coordinate all matters related to public affairs (VIP tours etc.)
• Act as escort for facility agency tours of incident areas, as appropriate

See Attachment 1 for layout of tables and positions in the EOC.
The MAC Group Meeting

The MAC Group Coordinator must:

- Prepare information pertinent to the MAC Group and other interested parties. Decide how it will be displayed and presented at the meeting
- Facilitate the meeting, so that the right information is given out, all known opportunities, threats, and issues are discussed, and that all decisions on priorities and allocations are made.
- Document all decisions and include MAC Group member’s signatures
- Ensure decisions are implemented by passing those decisions back to the affected agencies

Meeting Outline:

1. Briefing:
   - Attended by all MAC Group members and other parties with valid interests in the overall situation
   - Arrange for a note taker
   - Agenda:
     - Introduce yourself
     - Self introductions by MAC Group members and interested parties
     - Introduce staff and other EOC attendees
     - Give situation status summary:
       - Incidents by location and agencies involved
       - Current incident status e.g. acres burned, evacuations completed etc.
       - Number and type of management teams assigned
       - Resources assigned by incident
       - Shortages of critical resources
       - Outstanding orders for resources
       - Resources threatened by incident(s)
       - Maps of incidents (keep general)
       - Latest local weather forecast
     - Ask interested parties to identify any new issues and concerns they have
     - Call for questions
     - Adjourn the meeting

2. Decision making (separate from Briefing and MAC Group only):
   - Review identified and new issues
   - Review existing criteria for establishing priorities
   - Present recommendations
   - Prioritize the incidents based on the above criteria
   - Allocate critical resources
   - Discuss and decide on who will and how will any media concerns be resolved
• Discuss and decide on who will and how will any identified VIP interfacing be resolved
• Discuss and decide on who will and how will decisions made in this meeting be implemented

Outputs from the meeting:

1. New issues, opportunities and threats are identified
2. Individuals and/or groups with special interests or concerns are identified
3. Incidents are prioritized
4. Critical resources are allocated
5. There is a plan for media interfacing
6. There is a plan for implementing the MAC Group decisions

All outputs should be recorded. Important decisions should be written on the Decision Form (see Attachment 2), signed and dated by the MAC Group members, and filed with the documentation package for the MAC Group.

Activation of the MAC Group

County EOC Levels of Activation

EOC activation levels are described elsewhere in the Plan. The following guidelines may be adjusted at anytime by the Benton County Emergency Manager, or at the request of a MAC Group member from an affected jurisdiction. The number, size, potential, or complexity of an incident(s) may require deviation from these guidelines. If the MAC Group is not needed to make timely decisions and to get the needed actions implemented for the incident(s) then it should not be activated.

Level 1: MAC Group Coordinator notified of event(s)/incident(s) occurring. At least one discipline requires extensive mutual aid to handle incident(s). Need for coordinated resource tracking, logistical support, and situational analysis.

Level 2: MAC Group Coordinator at the EOC, MAC Group members notified, Support staff assigned as needed. Two or more disciplines requires the use of extensive mutual aid to handle a serious incident(s).
Level 3: MAC Group activated. Two or more disciplines in an “all-out” County effort where the allocation and use of emergency response resources require a concerted multi-agency coordination effort.

MAC Group Training

All members and alternates:

**Required Courses**
- NWCG, I 401 – Multi-agency Coordination
- NWCG, I 402 – ICS for Executives
- EMI, IS 700 – National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Introduction
  - This course is available on-line for self study and is tested

**Recommended Courses**
- NWCG, I 100 through 400 – Incident Command System
- USFA, F 315 – Introduction to Unified Command for Multi-agency and Catastrophic Incidents
- EMI, IS 242 – Effective Communication
- EMI, IS 241 – Decision making and Problem Solving

**Required Exercises**
- Two exercises with the Tri-County Interagency Incident Management Teams – spring 2005.
- Activation during two planned exercises when the full EOC is activated for CSEPP or Columbia Generating Station drills in 2005.
- Two exercises each year thereafter.
Attachment 1.

Layout of EOC (proposed)

BENTON COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES
MAC Group Decision Form

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