

Interagency Dispatch Center Review

Rocky Mountain Area

**Northern Great Plains Interagency Dispatch Center
Ft. Collins Interagency Dispatch Center
Pueblo Interagency Dispatch Center**

January 23, 2008
(Revised 2/12/08)

Conducted by:
Jim Payne, Wildwood Consulting, LLC
Andy Parker, Shandian Wildfire, Inc.
Kathy Elzig, Northern Rockies Interagency Coordination Center

Conducted for the Rocky Mountain Area Coordinating Group

Executive Summary

The Rocky Mountain Area Coordinating Group (RMCG) commissioned a review of the Northern Great Plains, the Ft. Collins, and the Pueblo Interagency Dispatch Centers. This review was initiated to address numerous dispatch related issues and concerns including but not limited to: aviation safety, fire ground safety, dispatch staff personnel health and wellness, the geographic extent of dispatch zones, effective radio communications, the level of interagency support and cooperation, management oversight, standard operating procedures, and the experienced and projected growth in demand for dispatching services by current and future clients.

This dispatch review was conducted November 5 – December 17, 2007 and included site visits, interviews, and an extensive review of numerous dispatch related documents.

Findings

- The RMA interagency executive board charged to provide strategic oversight to the fire and aviation management program has only met once and is perceived by field units to be ineffective.
- The RMCG has not met the expectations of most local agencies. As a result, the RMCG has lost some credibility at the local level.
- The mission at each of the interagency dispatch centers has changed significantly over time. A significant portion of the workload has shifted from supporting wildland fire protection to supporting all-risk incidents. In the absence of direction, dispatch center managers have informally defined the scope of work their centers will provide for cooperating agencies and organizations.
- Protection of private land from wildland fire and the jurisdictional responsibility for all-risk incidents vary between the five states serviced by the interagency dispatch centers. This situation complicates coordination efforts and contributes to the issues associated with workload at each center.
- Dispatch support for incidents on state and private lands in Kansas and Nebraska continue to be a significant issue regarding zone sizes and roles and responsibilities of the GPC and PBC dispatch centers.
- All existing workload analyses conducted for the dispatch centers are out of date, inconsistent, and invalid for determining staffing needs or cost apportionment between the cooperating agencies.
- The state compact between Wyoming, Colorado, and South Dakota (established spring of 2007) provides for state to state mobilization of resources outside of the established interagency dispatch system, when resource shortages exist. Good operating plans are necessary to avoid complications such as the duplication of resource orders, tracking of resources, and documentation to support interagency reimbursements. The review team did not examine the operating plan associated with this compact.

- The dispatch workload associated with wildland fire protection and all-risk incidents is expected to grow by 100 – 200% within the next decade along the front range of eastern Colorado. Other areas within the RMA may experience similar growth.
- Some organizations are receiving, expecting, and/or demanding dispatch related services outside the scope of current cooperative agreements and annual operating plans.
- Some counties are in the process of becoming fire service contractors in addition to their normal role as fire cooperators. This situation has resulted in additional workload for the dispatch centers associated with resource tracking, mobilization, and documentation.
- All dispatch centers are tracking resource status, re-setting passwords, and maintaining the information in ROSS. This workload is growing on an annual basis.
- In many areas, the radio systems are inadequate to fully support safe and efficient tactical fire and aviation missions from the interagency dispatch centers.
- Field personnel are receiving good services from the interagency dispatch centers, and issues related to service are usually easily resolved with center managers.

Recommendations

1. The RMCG should establish a new dispatch zone to include the entire states of Kansas and Nebraska, with an associated oversight board and dispatch center.

RMCG RESPONSE: RMCG strongly rejects this recommendation because of a faulty finding in the analysis.

2. The RMCG should define expectations along with roles and responsibilities for support for non-wildland fire incidents, especially for those of RMA and national significance.

RMCG RESPONSE: RMCG agrees (tasked to incident business specialists).

3. The RMCG should review and revise interagency cooperative agreements to include provisions for support to all-risk incidents, including: authorities, roles and responsibilities, dispatch support, and cost apportionment.

RMCG RESPONSE: RMCG affirms that it is an individual agency responsibility to...ensure cooperative agreements to meet their authorities (scope) and capture in local agreements.

4. The RMCG should develop and implement a strategy for conducting a workload analysis for each dispatch center using FIREORG or another credible organizational modeling program. The strategy should include provisions to ensure consistency in analysis between dispatch centers.

RMCG RESPONSE: RMCG agrees and has tasked to zone level coordination center managers. Center Managers are to include FMO representation in this effort.

5. The RMCG should establish an interagency communications task force to facilitate resolution of radio system issues at the interagency dispatch centers including, but not

limited to: system hardware, shortage of frequencies, frequency management, interagency system interface, and system maintenance.

RMCG RESPONSE: RMCG recognizes that this is an issue throughout the GACC... RMCG will disclose/elevate related issues to appropriate agency reps.

6. RMCG should establish procedures and guidelines to address issues associated with local government agencies with statutory authority for fire protection wanting to be treated as contractors but required to function as government entities.

RMCG RESPONSE: RMCG believes that this issue is being addressed by NWCG through their Incident Business Practices Working Team.

7. Local oversight boards should establish dispatch center specific annual operating plans covering supervision of interagency staff, operating procedures, and cost apportionment between agencies based on the actual workload in support of each agency. These operating plans should also address resources ordered through state to state compacts to avoid duplication of resource orders.

RMCG RESPONSE: Concur.

8. Local oversight boards should develop and implement a strategy to resolve their radio communication issues, especially those associated with flight following aircraft on tactical missions. Formal requests for additional hardware and radio frequencies should be initiated to resolve current firefighter and aviation related safety issues.

RMCG RESPONSE: Concur.

9. Local oversight boards should implement measures to provide interagency staffing and neutral (non-agency owned) facilities at dispatch centers whenever possible.

RMCG RESPONSE: Concur.

Additional Strategic Recommendations:

1. The RMA agencies should re-examine the need for an executive board for strategic oversight to the fire protection program, and re-vitalize the board if appropriate.

RMCG RESPONSE: Exec board has reviewed their charter. Board is in place.

2. The RMCG should conduct an internal review of its mission, charter, and operating procedures with the objective of improving communications, coordination, and support to local agencies and jurisdictions.

RMCG RESPONSE: Concur. This is an on-going process.