



NEWS



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Fire Officials Offer Advice for Fighting COVID-19 Pandemic

Danny Ramey, RadioResource International Media Group

Posted: March 27, 2020

Good education and training, meticulous equipment management and as much advanced planning as is practical are critical for public-safety agencies to effectively serve their communities during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, said fire officials whose agencies have been on the frontlines of the battle against the virus.

Five fire officials from around the country, including the states of Washington, California and Florida, shared their experiences fighting the pandemic so far and offered best practice suggestions during a webinar sponsored by the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) and FirstNet, built with AT&T.

One of the keys for effectively combatting the virus is examining an agency's particular needs and determining the essential elements to support operations, said Communications Chief Greg Rubin of Miami-Dade Fire Rescue. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to the questions facing organizations during this unprecedented time, he said.

"Once you know how one dispatch center works, you really only know how one dispatch center works," Rubin said.

For example, it's critical to be constantly assessing the needs of a radio system and developing contingency plans should the system go down. Because of supply chain disruptions, agencies may not be able to get key replacement parts as quickly as they normally do. Agencies should inventory what replacement parts they have in stock and make backup plans, such as using broadband push-to-talk (PTT) communications or using a neighboring organization's radio network, if they can't repair a system immediately, Rubin said.

Officials also must be cognizant of the health and availability of radio technicians, be they third party or in house, he said. Because technicians will come into contact with first responders, it is essential that they are screened for any virus symptoms before coming to work, so they do not spread it to essential personnel. Additionally, agencies should plan ahead for a potential shortage of radio technicians should their regular technicians come down with the virus and be unavailable for two weeks while quarantined.

It is also important to keep devices properly cleaned and decontaminated because personnel on different shifts generally use the same radios. Motorola Solutions, L3Harris Technologies, JVCENWOOD, BK Technologies and Sonim Technologies have all offered cleaning guidelines for their devices.

The key is doing this planning before something happens to the network so that agencies can maintain as consistent operations as possible, Rubin said.

There is a variety of technology already in use by fire departments and other public-safety agencies that can assist agencies in fighting the pandemic, said Chief Dan Munsey of **San Bernardino County Fire** in California.

"One thing I've noticed during all of this is how little paper we're using," Munsey said. Applications such as Esri, Google Docs, Dropbox and more can aid agencies in documenting key information such as the spread of cases and personnel affected by the virus and quickly disseminating it among staff to keep everyone informed.

All of the fire officials emphasized the importance of constantly sharing information among all staff in an agency. Because of the newness of the virus, there is a lot of fear and uncertainty among staff, and it's important to provide the most up-to-date information to help with those fears and allow staff to effectively serve the community, the officials said.

Battalion Chief Jim Whitney of the Redmond Fire Department in Washington noted that each day they come to work, his firefighters have to leave their families and drive through what has essentially become a ghost town because of shelter-in-place orders, which greatly impacts morale. To help combat this, the fire department has maintained essential operations while creating a loose environment that encourages staff members to have fun to keep morale high, Whitney said.

At the start of the pandemic, the Redmond Fire Department began doing Skype video calls with all staff at the start of every shift to keep all staff updated on the most current and accurate information. While the calls are now shorter than initially, the department has continued the practice, and it greatly helps morale, Whitney said.

Fire and medical personnel in Redmond and nearby Kirkland were the first first responders in the nation to face the brunt of the coronavirus when the virus began running through a nursing home in Kirkland in early February.

Because fire and medical personnel are regularly called to the center, many first responders in the area were exposed to it before it was determined patients in the center had the coronavirus, said Whitney. Because of this, nearly a quarter of firefighters and EMS workers in the area were quarantined at the start of the outbreak.

The agencies began having conversations about what would need to be done if a majority of their personnel was quarantined, but after the initial surge among staff, the agencies were able to slow the spread among staff and those last-resort plans were not needed, Whitney said.

The Seattle Fire Department, in King County, Washington, along with Kirkland and Redmond, initially struggled with testing exposed firefighters because of the length of time it took to turn around tests, Chief Harold Scoggins said. However, once the agency trained several of its own employees to perform the tests and partnered with local health testing entities to quickly process the tests, it was able to manage potentially exposed staff much more effectively.

The King County public-safety organizations are now working to set up more public-safety-specific testing centers in different parts of the county to better facilitate testing of potentially exposed responders.

The five fire officials also emphasized the importance of screening staff for potential symptoms every day to prevent the spread of the virus through staff and keep critical facilities free of the virus.

To help provide a snapshot of the spread to agencies around the country, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) launched a dashboard that tracks the number of cases among firefighters around the country. The IAFC also launched another dashboard that tracks the different types of personal protective equipment (PPE) agencies are using and how much of that equipment agencies around the nation have in stock.

The dashboards are fueled by data from daily surveys, and Munsey encouraged every fire agency to take the surveys each day. The daily surveys each take just a few seconds to complete and allow the dashboards to

provide agencies around the country a clear view of the impact of the virus, as well nearby agencies that may need assistance or areas where specific PPE may need to be routed to because of shortages, he said.

Find the IAFC's coronavirus resources here.

The availability of PPE and the rate at which agencies are using that equipment, known as burn rate, were key concerns of all the fire officials. Many fire agencies are well stocked because of pandemic planning, but because it's unclear how long the pandemic will last, agencies are closely watching burn rate and preparing for potential shortages.

"We walked in the door feeling pretty good about our cache, but we immediately began advocating for new supplies because we knew this would be a long run," said Scoggins.

In Orange County, California, dispatchers are now asking callers if they can provide the caller's phone number to the responding crew. This allows fire crews to potentially coordinate treatment outdoors or in a more open area to help conserve some PPE equipment and make transmission of the virus to responders less likely, said Orange County Fire Authority Chief Brian Fennessy.

Orange County dispatchers are also now working off a larger set of questions during the initial phone call to determine if a patient may have the virus and alert responders of that information prior to their arrival on scene, Fennessy said. Agencies have also adopted protocols that govern the use of PPE and limit the number of responders who have had contact with patients to use as little PPE as possible and limit the spread of the virus.

The fire officials said staying flexible and using the available data to keep updating an agency's strategy and preparing staff to deal with the changing situation as effectively as possible are key.

"We're at eight weeks of paying attention to it, four weeks of being in the middle of it, and things are changing all the time," said Scoggins.

<https://www.rmediagroup.com/News/NewsDetails/NewsID/19472>

Fire agencies in San Bernardino County unite to ensure uninterrupted service during COVID-19

Staff Writer, Victor Valley News

Posted: March 27, 2020



SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. — In their ongoing effort to best serve the public during the COVID-19 crisis, San Bernardino County fire agencies have joined forces. Strategies most commonly seen when battling large wildfires are being used to tackle this new threat.

On Friday, March 6, **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District activated its Incident Management Team (BDC-IMT-1) to identify a plan to manage exposed and/or sick members of its agency, to ensure

responders have necessary personal protective equipment (PPE), and to maintain consistent communication with its cooperators.

“After seeing the impact that COVID-19 has had on communities affected in previous weeks, multiple fire agencies throughout San Bernardino County united with the goal of maintaining uninterrupted service to the citizens of our county. BDC-IMT-1 has now expanded its mission to incorporate 18 cooperating agencies making the BDC-IMT a regional incident management Team,” stated a County Fire news release.

COVID-19 has the possibility of affecting a significant portion of the fire and EMS workforce.

In response, eighteen separate fire agencies are now united to ensure consistent service regardless of jurisdiction.

As the virus establishes itself within our county, citizens may see fire apparatus from other departments responding in their communities and even firefighters from different agencies on the same engine company. This will be an example of this partnership most visible to the public, stated officials.

“This is a collaborative effort that we have used effectively in numerous natural disasters,” says Kathleen Opliger, San Bernardino County Fire Deputy Chief of Operations, and Incident Commander for XBO-IMT-1. “COVID-19 is different from fires or floods in that it is a hazard that simultaneously threatens both the public and our first responders.”

The following fire agencies are coordinating in the countywide response plan:

San Bernardino County Fire Protection District
Apple Valley Fire District
Barstow Fire Department
Big Bear Fire Authority
Cal Fire – San Bernardino Unit
Chino Valley Fire District
Colton Fire Department
Loma Linda Fire Department
Montclair Fire Department
Morongo Valley Fire
Ontario Fire Department
Rancho Cucamonga Fire District
Redlands Fire Department
Rialto Fire Department
Running Springs Fire Department
San Manuel Fire Department

<https://www.vvng.com/fire-agencies-in-san-bernardino-county-unite-to-ensure-uninterrupted-service-during-covid-19/>

County fire agencies form team to fight coronavirus

Staff Writer, Big Bear Grizzly News

Posted: March 26, 2020

Big Bear Fire Department is joining forces with all fire departments in San Bernardino County to form a united front against COVID-19.

Dan Muncey, **San Bernardino County Fire** Chief said this crisis is a lot like any disaster or crisis for fire agencies. An incident command system is in place that works well, Muncey said.

San Bernardino County Fire Department is at full response work force at this time, Muncey said. Delay in response time is due to dispatch asking more questions when someone calls for service via the 9-1-1 system.

The interagency team allows all fire departments to share resources as needed, Muncey said.

San Bernardino County Fire Protection District activated its Incident Management Team on March 6 to identify a plan to manage the exposed and/or sick members of its agency. After seeing the impact COVID-19 has had on communities, multiple fire agencies in the county united. The original goal was to maintain uninterrupted service to residents of the county. The mission has been expanded to incorporate 18 agencies into the team.

“This is a collaborative effort that we have used effectively in numerous natural disasters,” said Kathleen Opliger, deputy chief of operations for San Bernardino County Fire. She is the incident commander for the management team. “COVID-19 is different from fires or floods in that it is a hazard that simultaneously threatens both the public and our first responders,” Opliger said.

Under this joint management team, it’s possible fire department personnel could be shared among different agencies under certain circumstances, not unlike during a major wildland fire when strike teams are deployed.

Jeff Willis, Big Bear Fire Chief, was not available to provide detail on how Big Bear will be involved in the management team. Big Bear Fire Authority joins San Bernardino County Fire, Apple Valley, Barstow, CalFire, Chino, Colton, Loma Linda, Montclair, Morongo Valley, Ontario, Rancho Cucamonga, Redlands, Rialto, Running Springs, San Manuel, Victorville and Yermo fire departments on the team.

Loma Linda Fire Department
Victorville Fire Department
Montclair Fire Department Yermo Fire Department

http://www.bigbeargrizzly.net/news/county-fire-agencies-form-team-to-fight-coronavirus/article_5c4c00b0-6faf-11ea-8a8e-ff13969bb133.html

18 San Bernardino County fire departments join forces during coronavirus outbreak

RICHARD K. DE ATLEY, The Press-Enterprise / San Bernardino Sun

Posted: March 26, 2020, 11:40 a.m.

To ensure uninterrupted service during the coronavirus pandemic, 18 fire departments in San Bernardino County have joined under a regional management team, an action usually reserved for fighting large wildfires.

“COVID-19 has the possibility of affecting a significant portion of the fire and EMS workforce,” the **San Bernardino County Fire** Chiefs Association said Thursday, March 26, in announcing formation of the agencies that will cooperate with the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District Incident Management Team.

The team was formed on March 6 “to manage exposed and/or sick members of its agency, to ensure responders have necessary personal protective equipment, and to maintain consistent communication with its cooperators.” The 18 fire departments united under the incident management team.

Those agencies “are now united to ensure consistent service regardless of jurisdiction. As the virus establishes itself within our county, citizens may see fire apparatus from other departments responding in their communities and even firefighters from different agencies on the same engine company,” the association said.

Cooperating departments:

San Bernardino County Fire Protection District

Morongo Valley Fire

Apple Valley Fire District

Ontario Fire Department

Barstow Fire Department

Rancho Cucamonga Fire District

Big Bear Fire Authority

Redlands Fire Department

Cal Fire – San Bernardino Unit.

Rialto Fire Department

Chino Valley Fire District

Running Springs Fire Department

Colton Fire Department

San Manuel Fire Department

Loma Linda Fire Department

Victorville Fire Department

Montclair Fire Department

Yermo Fire Department

<https://www.sbsun.com/2020/03/26/18-san-bernardino-county-fire-departments-join-forces-during-coronavirus-outbreak/>