



BDF Engine 57 Support Mission

Lessons Learned from CIIMT-1 and the San Bernardino National Forest

**Prepared for:
California Interagency Incident Management Team-1**

31 May 2007



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Executive Summary

On 26 October 2007, five crewmembers from Engine 57 from the San Jacinto Ranger District (SJRD) of the San Bernardino National Forest (BDF) were burned over while defending a home near Cabazon, southeast of San Bernardino, California. Three crewmembers died at the scene; one died later that day; one died five days later.

Early on, Forest Service leaders made a decision to respond to the tragedy in a new way, assigning a Type 1 Incident Management Team (IMT) to a mission that focused on showing respect for the firefighters who died and support and compassion for the countless people—family members, acquaintances, friends, and colleagues—affected by the loss.

The focus of this mission represented a significant shift from an old rules-based cultural norm in which accidents were inevitably seen as evidence of defects in people's actions and decisions.

On past tragedies, this norm resulted in more rules and greater oversight from both within and outside the Forest Service; efforts to honor and grieve for fallen firefighters were overshadowed by investigations that seemed intent on assigning blame. The atmosphere generated fear and mistrust at the field level as well as unhealed wounds for families, employees, and the organization. People involved at every level of the BDF Engine 57 Support Mission stated that they understood the ramifications and shortcomings of previous support efforts and resolved to take a different approach guided by the values and principles of the agency.

The numerous efforts of the Support Mission included supporting five funerals, conducting a memorial with more than 10,000 people in attendance, hosting family visits to the fatality site, assuming fire suppression duties for the BDF, and providing critical incident stress support to Forest Service survivors.

Based on feedback from families, Forest Service employees, and others, the Forest Service was overwhelmingly successful in its mission. Its efforts to chart a new course—essentially a high-visibility, high-stakes experiment—produced the intended effects: due honor to those who died and compassion for survivors rendered in decisive, constructive, and comprehensive actions.

Although the IMT used ICS/NIMS to organize the mission, the way that the operation had to be understood and conceptualized and then planned and executed was entirely different from operations normally undertaken by IMTs. The nature of the mission required delegating unusual levels of authority to division and group supervisors, empowering them to act more like branch directors.

The mission involved identifying intent and focus areas for abstract concepts such as honor and compassion. Adapting to such a mission required the careful judgment of over 275 people from 25 different agencies in an exceptionally stressful situation. With few applicable rules in place, people had to rely on their judgment; they had to apply principles and leader's intent to make effective and timely decisions. In the end, however, people demonstrated good judgment, employed leader's intent, applied the principles of the Forest Service, and adapted their tools, including ICS, to a significant and consequential mission.

This mission created broad and complex responsibilities for the Information function. The IMT organized the Information function into a branch as an acknowledgement of the complexity of this function for this mission; however, simply creating the branch came short of solving all the problems that evolved and uncovered inherent weaknesses in ICS regarding organization of information officers. As the USFS assumes other new and varied missions, making conceptual adaptations of ICS to non-fire missions will become more common, be they for responding to tragedy, managing all-hazards incidents, or taking on some other as yet unanticipated task.

In the Forest Service's history, tragedies like the BDF Engine 57 burnover occur often enough to warrant a prepared response. The importance of responding to such event decisively and comprehensively justifies a significant and coherent organizational system to support these efforts. The basis for such a system is the set of foundational principles that explicitly acknowledge the inherent dangers of fighting fire. Such principles allow and encourage the Agency to develop protocols for memorializing firefighters who die in the line of duty and to establish mechanisms for providing needed financial and moral support to the families and the survivors.

Beyond meeting immediate altruistic needs, such foundational principles allow for the building of legal frameworks to protect firefighters while simultaneously holding them appropriately accountable for their judgment and decisions without over-reacting and giving way to a zero-defect mentality, where a mistake is automatically assumed to mean failure. Current ambiguity around liability, employee rights, mandatory OIG investigations required by Public Law 107-203—many factors overshadowed this effort and the people who responded, creating an undercurrent of anxiety that affected every aspect of their work.

As a lessons learned report, this document's purpose and focus is to further the learning and thinking about future responses and challenges. To that end, this report is not a definitive accounting of all that happened; instead it attempts to place the events and decisions of those involved with the BDF Engine 57 Support Mission into a context from which others can derive value from the experience. It provides illustrations of principles-based leadership and incident management in a culture that is shifting from being rules-based to one that is principles-based. The report also is an attempt to add transparency and accountability to this effort to better prepare other IMTs, home units, and agency leaders for future responses to multiple-fatality tragedies and other unprecedented assignments.

Introduction

The Esperanza Fire started in the early morning hours of 26 October 2006 below an isolated hillside west of Cabazon, California, southeast of San Bernardino. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) was responsible for initial attack. CDF changed its acronym to CAL FIRE in January 2007. This report will use the CDF acronym used at the time of these events.

By 0400, Engine 57 of the San Jacinto Ranger District (SJR) of the San Bernardino National Forest (BDF) was at the fire command post in Cabazon, ready to be assigned. Santa Ana winds created treacherous conditions, pushing the flames up mountains and endangering homes. Six engines, including BDF Engine 57, were assigned to help with evacuations and to protect homes in a subdivision called Twin Pines.

At roughly 0625, the Branch II Chief met with the crewmembers of BDF Engine 57 at a home on a 3-acre hillside property to discuss conditions and strategy. The home and a garage were situated on a ridge adjacent to a drainage that split below the house. After the branch chief left, the crewmembers readied their portable pump and hose lays, preparing to protect the home from the oncoming fire.

Approximately a half hour later, the factors of steep terrain, high winds, and dry brush aligned to produce a firestorm with an area ignition event and a column of smoke that reached 3-½ miles into the sky. At approximately 0710, the fire was channeled through the drainages on both sides of the house, enveloping BDF Engine 57's crew. By approximately 0715, the five crewmembers from BDF Engine 57 had been burned over.

Three men, Engineer Jason McKay, Engineer Jess McLean, and Firefighter Daniel Hoover-Najera, were killed during the burnover. Captain Mark Loutzenhiser died shortly after arriving at the hospital, and Firefighter Pablo Cerda survived five days before he died of his injuries. Two additional engine crewmembers were not on duty that day and were not involved in the burnover.

The Esperanza Fire was local to BDF Engine 57's home District. All the people involved—the crew and their families, first responders, interagency partners—lived and worked in the same area and had strong, standing relationships with one other. Additionally, as early suspicions proved true, the cause of the fire was arson. The event took place in an area that is one of the largest media markets in the world. All these factors combined to compound the complexity of the response and recovery effort and magnitude of the loss.

The Response

In the first hours after the burnover, key BDF line and staff leaders from the Supervisor's Office and the SJRD took action to meet the pressing needs of the tragedy: sending out Forest employees to notify next of kin (called hereafter *notifiers*), standing down the remaining four BDF engines assigned to the fire, calling in peer support, and initiating critical incident stress interventions.

Early on, these key leaders decided to call in a Type 1 Incident Management Team (IMT)—either to enter into unified command on the Esperanza Fire or to stage for anticipated wind events. By the end of the day, however, decision makers realized that responding to the aftermath of the fatalities would need to be the focus of the requested Type 1 IMT. CDF Team 8 retained control of the Esperanza Fire.

As a result, the California Interagency Incident Management Team-1 (CIIMT-1) was called to an exceptional mission: *BDF Engine 57 Support*. Assigning a Type 1 IMT to this mission represented a significant shift toward a new philosophy of the Forest Service responding to tragedy decisively and comprehensively. It was the first time that an IMT had been brought in to manage such a wide range of critical activities associated with a fatality tragedy: ensuring fire suppression coverage on the Forest; providing critical incident stress support for hundreds of people; supporting bereaved families by planning and managing funerals; hosting fatality site visits; conducting a collective memorial service; and assisting the Forest in short-term and long-term planning for response and recovery.

The assignment brought an expanded meaning to the concept of an all-hazard mission and resulted in a high-stakes challenge to the fledgling doctrinal effort in the Forest Service and the applicability of the Incident Command System (ICS) in responding to tragic loss.

The Nature of the Mission

From an operational standpoint, the BDF E-57 Support Mission was fundamentally different than other missions previously conducted by the CIIMT-1. Although the team used ICS/NIMS as a foundational basis for the operation, the way that the operation had to be understood and conceptualized, then planned and executed, was entirely different.

For example, the boundaries constituting the *landscape* of the incident were not geographically based, as are ridgelines in fire suppression, but were defined by more abstract concepts of human relationships and the grief process. These fundamental shifts required responders to re-conceptualize not only the mission but also the structure, processes, and techniques they used in their response.

A number of factors immensely compounded the difficulty of the operation: the high values of the mission and the people involved, the emotional challenges the situation presented to responders, the high levels of stress. The overwhelming majority of the people involved in the response indicated that this assignment was one of the most difficult they had faced. At all levels people described how the lines of professional detachment, professional compassion, and personal grief blurred and were intermixed causing conditions in which the raw emotions and intensity of the stress magnified the effects of tension or uncertainties.

The Cultural Backdrop

Everyone had the intent of wearing a Forest Service uniform. Everyone wanted the Forest Service to come out in the best light possible. People were aware of the organizational mistakes of the past and wanted to make it right.

**Los Angeles County Fire Captain
CIIMT-1**

The turnover of BDF Engine 57 occurred at the same time the Forest Service has reached a crossroads in how it perceives and manages the high-risk operational environment of its firefighters.

As a result of the South Canyon tragedy fire of 1994, the agency pursued efforts to increase awareness of the human factors and environmental conditions that lead to accidents in high-risk environments. This journey has continued over the last decade and has subsequently resulted in a reevaluation of leader preparedness and the development of operational philosophies that are considered to be more in alignment with the modern mission needs and challenges.

As part of this effort, leaders in the wildland fire community increasingly have begun to accept that the risk of death and injury is inherent to fighting wildland fires and that this risk is aggravated by such factors as increasing fuel loads, urban interfaces, climate change, and mutual aid agreements. It has been increasingly accepted that responders working in chaotic response environments can never have perfect situation awareness or make perfect decisions. Even in the best of circumstances when people make sound decisions based on good information, the energy unleashed by a perfect storm of nature's fury can have disastrous consequences.

As the thinking of leaders has been evolving, the organizational processes of the agency have lagged behind, many still reflecting a zero-defect philosophy. This mentality resulted in compliance-based solutions in response to fatality events in the past—with ever more proscriptive rules, external oversight, multiple and overlapping investigation processes, measures to increase accountability, and increasing focus of personal liability. While most of these actions were earnestly meant to prevent future fatalities, they were built on the erroneous assumption that rules and systems could eliminate the risks inherent in the wildland environment.

This rules-based approach exacerbated an old cultural norm in which accidents were inevitably seen as evidence of defects in people's actions and decisions, and error implied culpability of the people involved. Perceived failures in the Thirtymile accident in 2001 and later in Cramer accident in 2003 generated an increasingly impossible set of compliance standards. These new rules, in turn, created spiraling confusion, frustration, anxiety, and risk aversion within wildland fire agencies as well as skepticism and mistrust in those to whom the agencies, and particularly the Forest Service, are accountable.

The fear and mistrust generated at the field level from organizational responses to these events bred a mindset that inhibited an open and appropriate response to tragedy, clouding the entire process and leaving unhealed wounds for families, employees, and the organization. These impacts had dramatic effects on the Forest Service that are felt to this day.

These factors were front and center after the BDF Engine 57 burnover. The people involved at every level of the incident stated that they understood the ramifications and failures of past actions as well as what was now at stake. As a result, the leadership of the CIIMT-1 and San Bernardino National Forest resolved to take a forthcoming and open approach, which was guided primarily by the values and principles of the agency.

The greatest success of the BDF Engine 57 Support Mission from an organizational standpoint was in how leaders, at all levels and from many agencies, chose to respond to this event in a new way and with a new philosophy—in their determination to depart from the patterns of the past.

This Report

Given the nature of this effort, the IMT leadership decided to bring in a small team from Mission-Centered Solutions (MCS) to capture the important lessons from CIIMT-1's efforts. Compiled by MCS, this report describes the initial response—spanning a time period from the burnover through 9 November 2006. The BDF Engine 57 Support Mission continues to this day and will continue well into the future; it represents a substantial and sustained effort on the part of the Forest Service and supporting organizations. This report, however, is limited in scope to the period involving CIIMT-1.

This report describes the efforts of roughly 275 people who worked on the IMT and their interactions with numerous others from other neighboring cooperators as well as many in the Forest, the Region, and the Washington Office.

The MCS team spent a week with CIIMT-1 during the response and conducted interviews with approximately 60 people from the Forest and CIIMT-1 who were involved in the BDF Engine 57 Support Mission. Representing an outside perspective, the team collected observations and lessons learned. In writing this report, the team integrated information from the interviews with observation, making connections and analyzing implications. MCS has been working extensively with the Forest Service as it charts a new direction toward a principle-based philosophy and has an intimate understanding of the intent and objectives of this new direction.

The report is not intended to be historical documentation but to capture historic lessons. This report reflects the judgments of the people involved. Because it is an imperfect synthesis of the whole, based on limited facts and analysis, it is not intended to meet evidentiary standards of a formal official agency report.

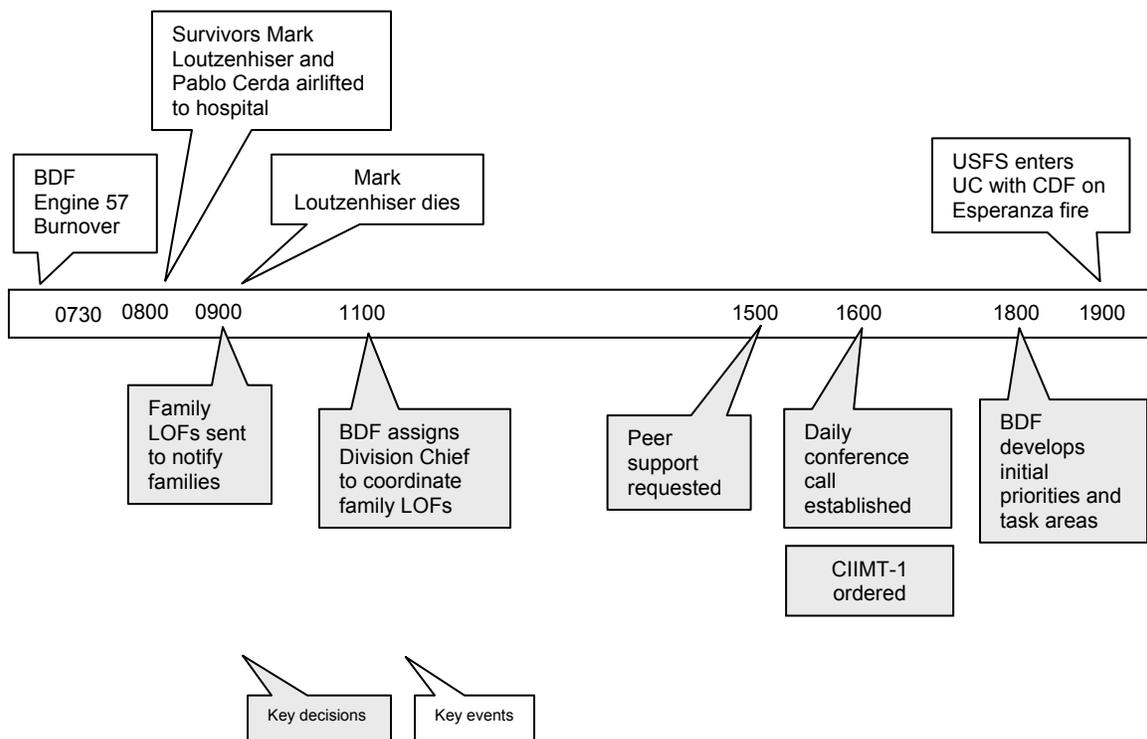
As an organizational learning tool, this report intends to place the events and decisions of those involved in the initial phases of the BDF Engine 57 Support Mission into a context from which others can derive value from the experience. It provides illustrations of principles-based leadership and incident management in an environment that is shifting from being rules-based to one that is principles-based. This report also is an attempt to add transparency and accountability to this effort to better prepare other IMTs, home units, and agency leaders for future responses to multiple-fatality tragedies and other unprecedented assignments.

Timeline of Events

The following timeline highlights key events and decisions that were made over the first 19 days of the BDF Engine 57 Support Mission.

Note: The narrative accompanying the timeline briefly describes events without great detail. A more complete description of each event follows in subsequent sections.

Day 1, Thursday, 26 October: Burnover; Initial BDF Response

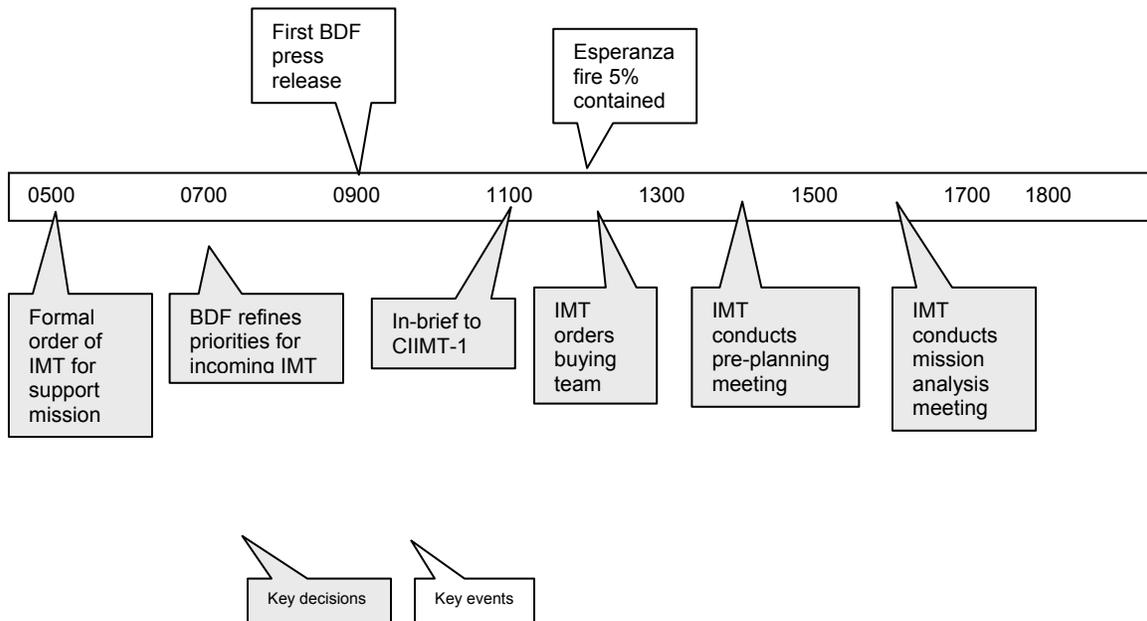


During the morning of 26 October 2006, the Esperanza fire entrapped five firefighters from BDF Engine 57 of the San Jacinto Ranger District (SJRD). Three firefighters died at the scene; one died shortly after arriving at the hospital; one survived with burns to over 90 percent of his body.

The Forest responded by sending notifiers to the families, securing the private vehicles and personal effects of BDF Engine 57 crewmembers, addressing the media, initiating support for the families, and standing down the strike team of which BDF Engine 57 belonged. Later in the day, the Forest Leadership requested a forest supervisor, three fire staff, a district ranger, and district FMO to assist their counterparts in peer support roles. The Forest also sought to provide support to and coordinate the efforts of the family liaisons.

The Forest also ordered a Type-1 IMT—in anticipation of either entering into unified command on the Esperanza Fire or staging for anticipated wind events. Throughout the afternoon and into the evening, leaders from BDF and the incoming peer support people began analyzing and developing an initial set of priorities and task areas. This analysis eventually resulted in assigning the incoming IMT to the support mission of BDF Engine 57.

Day 2, Friday, 27 October: Transition to CIIMT-1



On Friday, leaders from BDF and those providing peer support refined the priorities and tasks outlined the previous day to develop the foundation of the clear leader's intent that would guide the entire support mission. The Forest also formally assigned CIIMT-1 to the emerging support mission.

At 0900, the BDF Public Information Office sent out its first press release about BDF Engine 57 and the response.

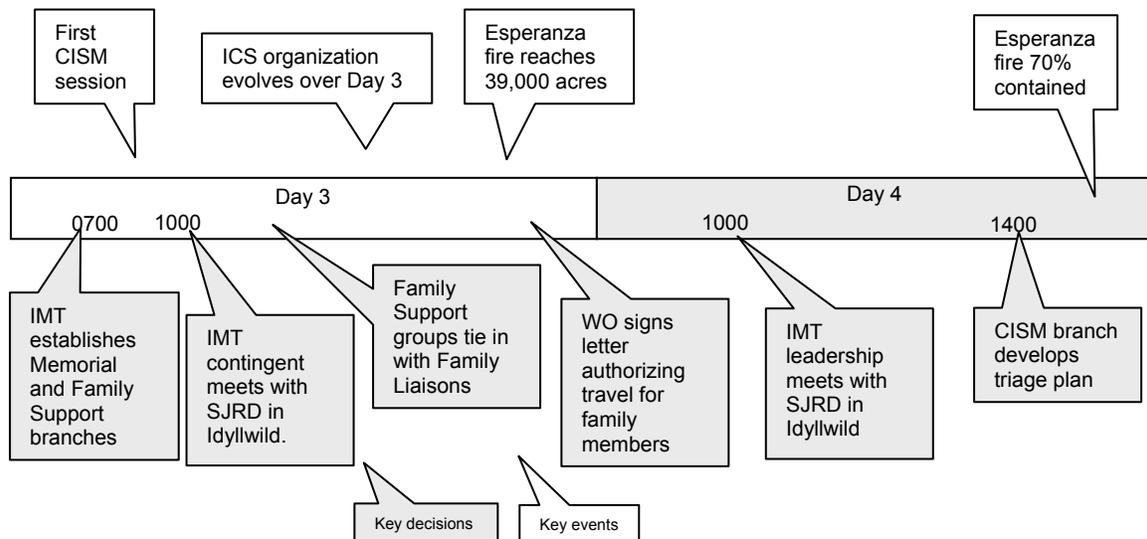
At 1100, the incoming members of the CIIMT-1 received their in-brief. The incident commander of the CIIMT-1 had provided peer support in the first hours after the burnover and had participated in developing tasks and priorities. His initial involvement enhanced the continuity of the transition to CIIMT-1.

In the afternoon, the CIIMT-1 ordered a buying team to manage the complicated financial issues involved with the funerals, the memorial, and donations. With two buying teams positioned in California, one was able to be on site relatively quickly.

At 1400, the IMT (CIIMT-1) held a preplanning meeting to, first and foremost, gather situation awareness among team members. They posted tasks and objectives and briefly discussed them to gain a better grasp on the scope of the mission. At 1600, the IMT held a more formal mission analysis meeting to further clarify the scope of the mission and to identify and refine major focus areas.

Day 3, Saturday, 28 October: ICS Overlaid on Support Mission

Day 4, Sunday, 29 October: Coordination with SJRD

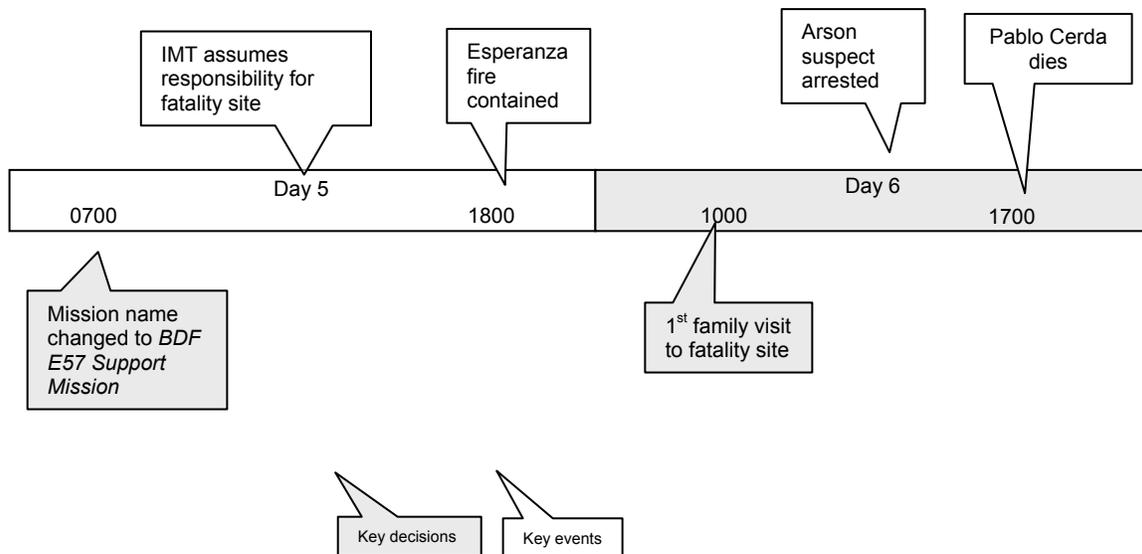


On Day 3, Saturday, 28 October, the IMT began to refine and clarify how to adapt ICS to the support mission. Among the first tasks was establishing branches and groups to support the families of the BDF Engine 57 crewmembers and to organize the memorial service. As people arrived, they were assigned to positions within the branches and groups. The leader's intent provided by the IC guided the groups and branches to operate with more autonomy than was typical, more like that of a Type-3 IMT.

Also on Saturday morning, the first Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) session was conducted under the Forest Employee Assistance Program (EAP). More than 50 people attended, overwhelming the lone contract professional conducting the effort. In the afternoon, the CIIMT-1 CISM Branch began developing its approach to getting CISM support to the hundreds of people affected by the tragedy.

District response efforts were not well-coordinated with the Forest or the IMT, and people at the District reported feeling isolated and increasingly overwhelmed by the requirements of the situation. The IMT realized that the communication among the District, Forest, and the IMT needed strengthening to improve situation awareness and coordination. On the morning of Day 3, Saturday, 28 October, a contingent from the IMT traveled to the District to begin coordination efforts. The next day, Day 4, Sunday, 29 October, IMT leadership also traveled to the District to meet with members of the SJRD.

Because the District Leadership wanted to retain coordination responsibility for the support mission, the IMT decided to assign the deputy operations section chief and a deputy planning section chief to coordinate and conduct regular meetings with the District instead of assigning a permanent presence at the District. In addition, the IMT started to gradually reinforce resources at the District, such as Public Information Officers.

Day 5, Monday, 30 October: BDF E57 Support Mission Name**Day 6, Tuesday, 31 October: First Fatality Site Visit**

On Day 5, Monday, 30 October, after being called the *BDF E57 Incident* almost by default since its inception, the mission formally took on the name *BDF E57 Support Mission* to show sensitivity toward the families.

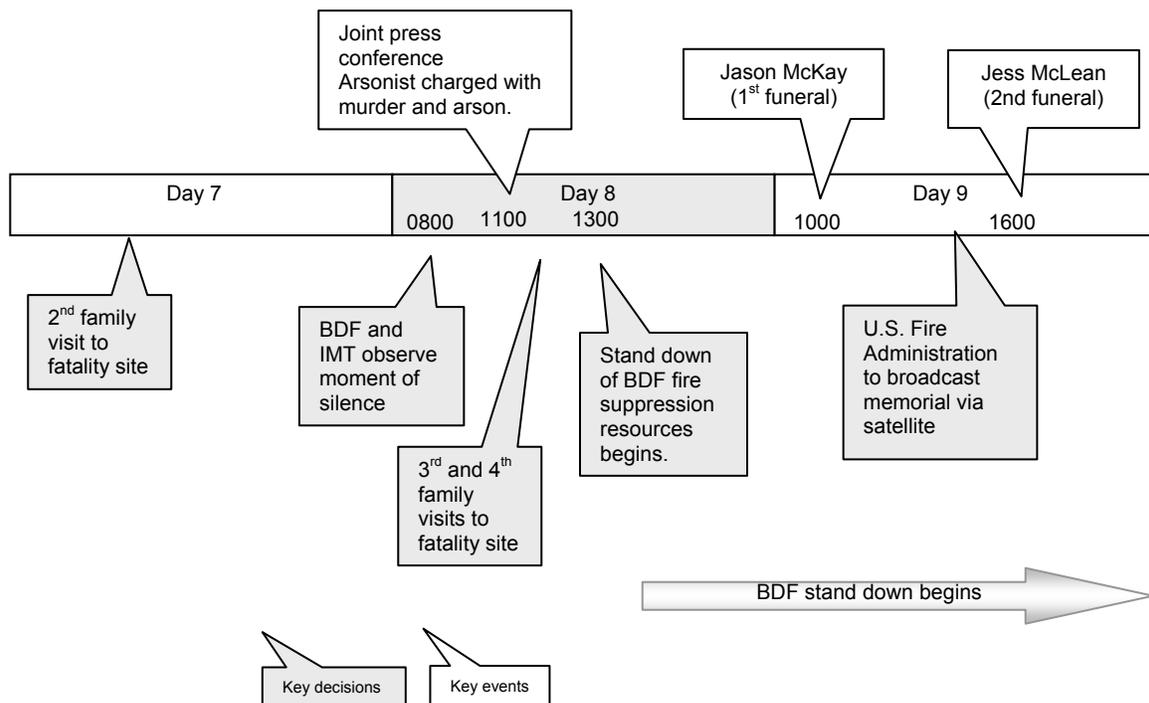
After the investigation teams completed their tasks at the fatality site, the IMT took over management of the fatality site. Once responsible for it, the IMT cleaned up the site, preparing personal effects and the engine, and readied the site for visits from family members and employees.

By the end of 30 October, CDF had contained the Esperanza Fire.

On Day 6, Tuesday, 31 October, the Site Visit Group conducted its first family visit to the fatality site. Safety officers were assigned to the Group to support the visits.

Accomplished on 31 October, the arrest of the arson suspect became, in effect, a psychological milestone, suggesting for many the possibility of resolution and that justice would be served.

At 1700 on this Tuesday, BDF E-57 Firefighter Pablo Cerda died at the hospital from his injuries.

Day 7, Wednesday, 1 November: Fatality Site Visit**Day 8, Thursday, 2 November: Fatality Site Visits; BDF Stand Down****Day 9, Friday, 3 November: Jason McKay and Jess McLean Funerals**

On Day 7, Wednesday, 1 November, the second family visit to the fatality site was conducted.

The many events and activities of Day 8, Thursday, 2 November, created a peak in the operational tempo. The Fire Operations Branch Director had initiated the stand down of the BDF resources from fire suppression activities to enable BDF Forest employees to be able to attend funerals; the Site Visit Group was conducting site visits; Family Support Groups were finalizing plans for funerals; the Memorial Branch was finalizing the Memorial.

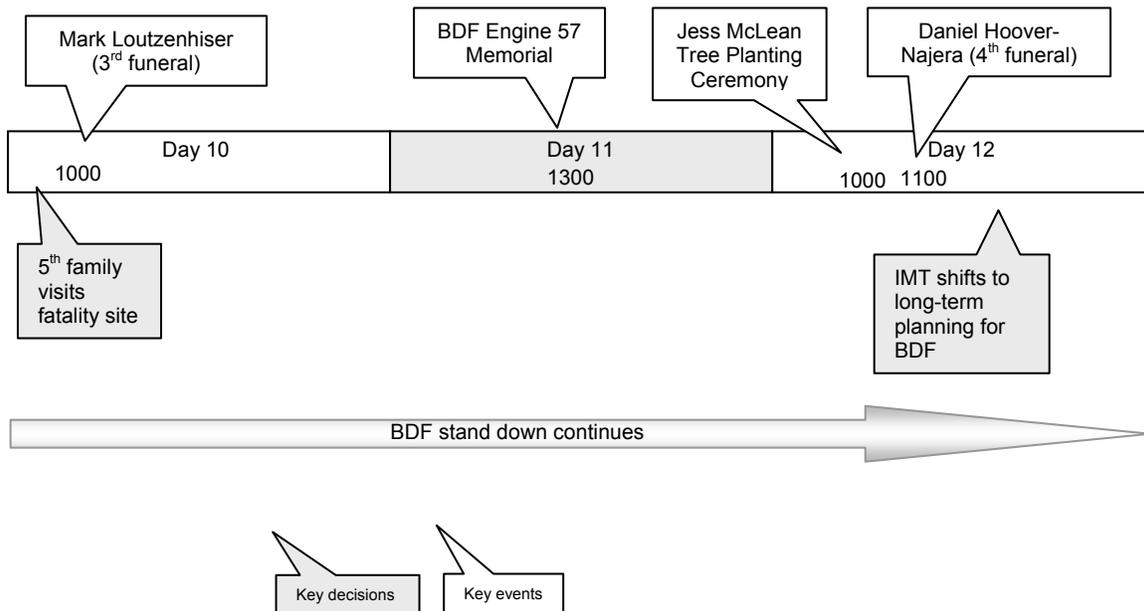
After applying an approach untested in responding to tragedy, the IMT began receiving positive feedback from families, BDF employees, and cooperators after the family fatality site visits and first funerals. The feedback provided validation that the IMT was taking the right approach. Many respondents from the IMT indicated that the feedback also escalated the emotional impact, intensifying their emotional attachment to success.

On Day 9, Friday, 3 November, the BDF stand down continued for its second day. Jason McKay's and Jess McLean's funerals (first and second funerals) took place.

Day 10, Saturday, 4 November: Final Site Visit; Mark Loutzenhiser Funeral

Day 11, Sunday, 5 November: BDF Engine 57 Memorial

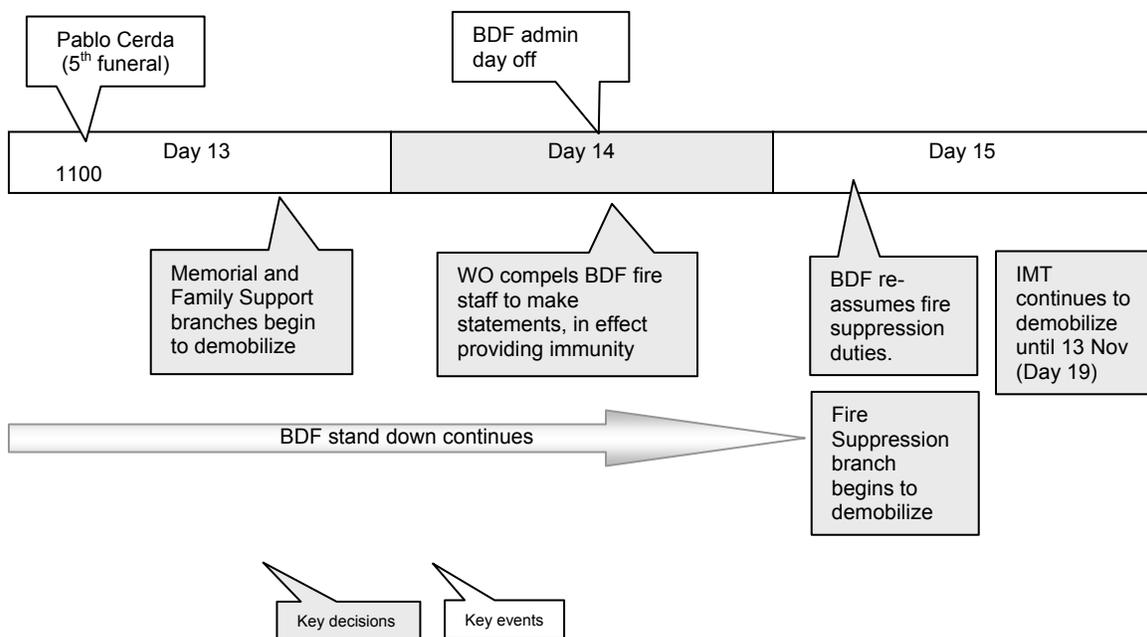
Day 12, Monday, 6 November: Daniel Hoover-Najera Funeral



On Day 10, Saturday, 4 November, the fifth and final family visit to the fatality site was conducted. Mark Loutzenhiser's funeral (the third funeral) was held. It was especially significant because Mark was the Engine Captain and had lived in the community for many years. Being the last day before the Memorial service, planning activities reached a fevered pitch throughout the IMT.

On Day 11, Sunday, 5 November, the Memorial Service took place with many members of the IMT in attendance. The command post operated with a skeleton staff of about 20 instead of the 120 normally on-site. More than 10,000 people attend the Memorial Service, including numerous elected officials and other VIPs. The U.S. Fire Administration broadcasted it over its satellite network, and local television stations broadcasted it over the Internet.

On Day 12, Monday, 6 November, Daniel Hoover-Najera's funeral (the fourth funeral) was held. Completing the Memorial Service served as a trigger point for beginning discussions for demobilization and long-range planning. These discussions included but were not limited to the following topics: re-engagement of BDF resources, commemoration of anniversaries, possible staff rides, permanent markers, re-staffing of the engine, disposition of donations, and documentation of the support mission.

Day 13, Tuesday, 7 November: Pablo Cerda Funeral**Day 14, Wednesday, 8 November: Fire Staff Statements****Day 15, Thursday, 9 November: End of Stand Down; Demobilization; Shift to Long-Term Planning**

On Day 13, Tuesday, 7 November, Pablo Cerda's funeral (the fifth and last funeral) was held. The Memorial and Family Support Branches began to demobilize. The IMT continued long-range strategy planning.

The BDF was given Wednesday, 8 November, (Day 14) as an administrative day off.

Also on 8 November, the Washington Office (WO) compelled the BDF employees to make statements regarding the burnover. This action effectively granted legal immunity to the fire staff, even though legal issues and uncertainties about CISM confidentiality remained unresolved.

On Day 15, Thursday, 9 November, the BDF resumed fire suppression responsibilities, and the CIIMT-1 began to demobilize its Fire Suppression Branch. After four more days, the CIIMT-1 completed its demobilization of BDF Engine 57 Support Mission on Day 19.

San Bernardino National Forest (BDF) Initial Response

*In five years we want to be able to answer the question
"Did we do everything we could for families and the Forest?"
and answer "Yes."*

**- Mike Dietrich
BDF Forest FMO**

In the hours immediately following the burnover, the BDF responded by standing down the engine strike team that had included BDF Engine 57, initiating notification to the families, requesting peer support, and launching an effort to outline tasks and priorities.

Throughout initial planning discussions, leaders reported that they deliberately focused on making decisions reflecting the values of the organization. The desire to chart a new and positive direction permeated discussions. Many of the first decisions—requesting peer support, analyzing and developing priorities and task areas reflecting organizational values, turning the support mission over to a Type 1 IMT—set the tone for the entire response.

Notifying Families

Upon learning about the burnover, the BDF acted quickly—within two hours after the initial four fatalities were confirmed—to send Forest employees to notify the families. Interviewees spoke of the criticality of quick action to make sure family members received the news from the Agency first, especially in this media-saturated location.

In some cases, the desire for fast action was compromised because accurate emergency contact information for the firefighters was not available. In these cases, notifiers had to go to old addresses and ask neighbors for family members' new addresses. This delay greatly increased the risk that family members would receive information about the firefighters' deaths from other sources.

The initial notifiers, selected for their maturity and ability to handle the sensitive and compassionate nature of the job, eventually became the Family Liaisons.

Requesting Peer Support

The BDF staff ran for four days on adrenaline. They needed relief, but some were not aware that they needed help.

**- Jeff Whitney
Forest FMO Peer Support**

During the afternoon of the burnover, the BDF Forest FMO asked for people to provide peer support to those in critically-affected positions on the Forest Leadership Team and in the District to help with the enormous scope and significance of the unfolding effort.

Peer support was meant to provide moral support and objectivity and to mitigate the effects of task saturation. Peer support as defined here was separate and distinct from the concept of the peer counseling that was part of the CISM program. Peer counseling is described later in “Critical Incident Stress Management/Initial Intervention” section of this report.

Peers worked with these leaders throughout the incident acting as personal lookouts, keeping watch to make sure that their counterparts were not overwhelmed by the demands of the situation. They also acted as force multipliers, assisting in the coordination of day-to-day activities, investigation support, and IMT liaison support.

Making a deliberate request for peer support early had a positive effect as the response grew in complexity. The assistance provided by peer support proved important, with widespread agreement—among both those receiving support on the Forest and in the District as well as those providing the peer support—that the system of peer support is a strength to sustain.

Handpicking people based on their character and experience was cited as critical to peer support effectiveness. Most of the people providing peer support had established relationships within the BDF; some even had experience with a burnover tragedy. The consensus was that being able to tap a network of trusted people was important to the effectiveness of peer support.

Those involved cited the importance of early discussions regarding the exit strategy for those providing peer support to set the stage for returning to normal staffing and responsibilities. Although the peer support was extremely effective, most acknowledged the potential risks of role confusion and the need for the Forest and District staffs to be fully re-engaged with their duties at the appropriate time. In this case, discussions between peer supporters and the IMT targeted the memorial ceremony as the proper trigger point to begin serious discussion of the exit strategy.

In addition, some BDF employees who were also assigned to the IMT indicated that they had difficulty filling both roles. As a larger IMT assumes control, the role bleed-over among people in the Forest Leadership, the IMT, and Forest employees being absorbed into the IMT has strong potential to disrupt continuity. The high potential for error requires ongoing discussion of roles and responsibilities and a proactive briefing process to make sure that handoffs and transitions are clear, preferably with trigger points tied to times or events.

Developing Initial Priorities

In the first hours after the burnover, people from the Forest Leadership and incoming peer support—an ever-increasing group—gathered at the Forest Supervisor’s office to refine the priorities and capture evolving task areas. They held two strategy meetings: the first to get a sense of the mission, priorities, and objectives; the second to organize and assign responsibilities and resources. Most concurred that these two meetings were the foundation for success.

Their initial priorities centered on notifying and caring for the families, meeting CISM needs, and addressing liability issues. They outlined several areas that needed to be addressed such as continuity of operations, peer support backup, a memorial for the fallen firefighters, investigation coordination, media relations, and financial considerations.

Over the next several days, priorities and areas of concern eventually were fleshed out and documented as objectives. People indicated that going through the planning process step-by-step was important in order to gain a clear picture of the priorities, intent, and objectives.

The following summarizes the end state of the mission that evolved over time; it reflects the intent and focus areas initially discussed by the Forest Leadership Team, the Peer Supporters, and the CIIMT-1:

- Due honor and respect is rendered to the lives of the BDF Engine 57 crewmembers who died on the Esperanza Fire.
- The surviving families’ immediate needs have been met decisively, honestly, and compassionately. As strong a foundation as possible has been laid for the healing process to begin.
- The BDF and its employees are relieved of the burden of fire coverage and other responsibilities to encourage maximum participation in the process as an organization.
- After the initial response phase, the BDF has a plan to reengage and resume full operations to meet the long-term needs they will face during the recovery process.
- The Forest Service has been perceived as responding in the face of adversity with compassion, honor, courage, strength, hope, and credibility. The agency, its people, and their families and the fire service are proud of the result.

In its analysis, the MCS report team noted how, on a wildland incident, much of the process of defining priorities, objectives, and intent is intuitive, and any holes are usually filled by the experience of the team. That is not the case when people don’t have experiences dealing with similar responses and when the level of stress contributes to losing focus, tunnel vision, or mission-creep; therefore, the deliberate and iterative decision making process used for this mission was critical to success.

Ordering and Assigning a Type 1 IMT

The decision to order an IMT was made during a conference call among members of the Forest Leadership Team. The order for the IMT was initially intended for the Esperanza suppression mission, then for staging. As the priorities and task areas were developed, the leadership of the BDF realized that the IMT would be best utilized in conducting the support mission; consequently, the CIIMT-1 was assigned to support the aftermath of the BDF Engine 57 turnover.

Lessons Learned—BDF Initial Response

Notifying Families

- Pre-planning ensures timely, compassionate, and respectful notification of kin in the event of a tragedy. Pre-identifying volunteers willing to act initial notifiers helps these volunteers to mentally prepare for this responsibility.
- Maintaining up-to-date emergency notification records is critical since outdated information can thwart the Agency's desire to be the first on the scene to notify family members.

Requesting Peer Support

- Identifying colleagues who are willing and able to provide peer support and building a personal network in advance helps leaders assemble peer supporters quickly. When peer supporters communicate in advance their willingness to assist others, their help can be tapped quickly during emergencies.
- When peer support is being provided, early and ongoing discussions enable all parties to clarify roles and responsibilities as well as to set trigger points for handoffs and transitions.

Developing Initial Priorities

- Conducting strategy meetings as soon as possible to define the mission and end state and develop initial priorities and objectives sets an important foundation that is key to the success of the mission.
- The IMT validated the approach of a process that uses the end state as the starting point for defining the mission and developing intent, priorities, and objectives. Once the end state is defined, ICS sets the stage for a deliberate decision-making process for refining priorities, intent, and objectives.

Ordering and Assigning a Type 1 IMT

- With their wide range of skills and experience, Type 1 IMTs have proven capable in applying ICS to non-traditional missions.

Managing the Effort

Formally assigned to the support mission the day after the burnover in the early morning hours of Friday, 27 October, the CIIMT-1 had its in-briefing at 1100 that day.

In the course of conducting this mission, the IMT grew to a force of 275 people from over 25 different agencies. The interagency composition of the IMT allowed the extended team to reach out over a wide network of professional contacts to make things happen within tight timeframes across jurisdictional boundaries. The interagency connections of the team also resulted in strong peer support for team members and responders from both the agency and the home unit.

The IMT made every effort to maintain integrity, demonstrating that they were acting openly and with transparency. For example, four days after Pablo Cerda died, members of his family visited the command post. Their visit speaks to the challenges of showing sensitivity to a bereaved family while simultaneously managing a complex operation, yet the IMT received the family members graciously and found ways to allow the family members to observe the support effort.

Managing the Effort

- Selecting an IMT from the mission area and of a level that ensures interagency connections facilitates local and interagency relationships across jurisdictional boundaries.

Mission Analysis

In the afternoon of Friday, 27 October, the IMT held an important mission analysis meeting—a brainstorming session with many of the team members present. In discussions during this meeting, team members identified and added clarity to the scope and major focus areas of the mission; they discussed the level of effort required; they analyzed the task list—prioritizing and sequencing important tasks that needed to be addressed immediately and making plans for actions to be taken later.

These discussions laid the solid foundation for the stair-step process of developing the end state, priorities, and objectives as well as the organizational structure. The outcome of the meeting was a simple vision for initial actions. Several Command and General Staff members cited the importance of this meeting because, as one respondent put it, “We never went backwards from what came out of that process.”

Mission Analysis

- Undertaking a formal and deliberate process to analyze the mission at the onset sets the stage for a successful mission by enabling leaders to determine the scope and end state of the mission and to explicitly communicate clear leader’s intent, objectives, and priorities.

Sensitivity to the Mission

Realizing how words can strongly affect the tone of the entire operation, the BDF Forest FMO and the IMT made a deliberate decision to remove the term incident from the titles of ICS documents and command post signs to emphasize the human element of the task.

After being called the *E57 Incident* almost by default since its inception—a reflection of standard ICS terminology, the mission formally took on the name *BDF E57 Support Mission*—a reflection of ICS terminology adapted to the unique needs of the situation.

Sensitivity to the Mission

- Overlaying ICS for a mission that is outside the norm requires a keen eye on default terminology and practices that may not be appropriate.

Applying ICS

After the in-briefing with the Forest Staff, the IC and Deputy IC began overlaying the ICS organization over the mission focus areas.

Adapted to fit the nature of the assignment, ICS proved effective in bringing order to a chaotic situation. ICS became the common frame of reference for organizing and managing all that was unknown and unique to this mission. As the organization progressively expanded, there was little need for corrections or re-organizing. Emerging tasks, needs, and offers were shelved until the appropriate time and then included in the organization or operation.

The IMT made certain adaptations and adjustments to ICS to meet the requirements. The major adjustments included but were not limited to the following: creating an Information Branch to organize the dozens of information officers; creating a Memorial Branch that was not under Operations; pushing the branch planning process to the group level; providing flexibility to logistics personnel assigned to Family Support Groups to enable them to work independently or report back to the logistics section; and providing personnel such as a Planning Section Chief and Resource Unit Leader to the adapted groups and branches to conduct meetings and develop written Action Plans while coordinating with the IMT Planning Section.

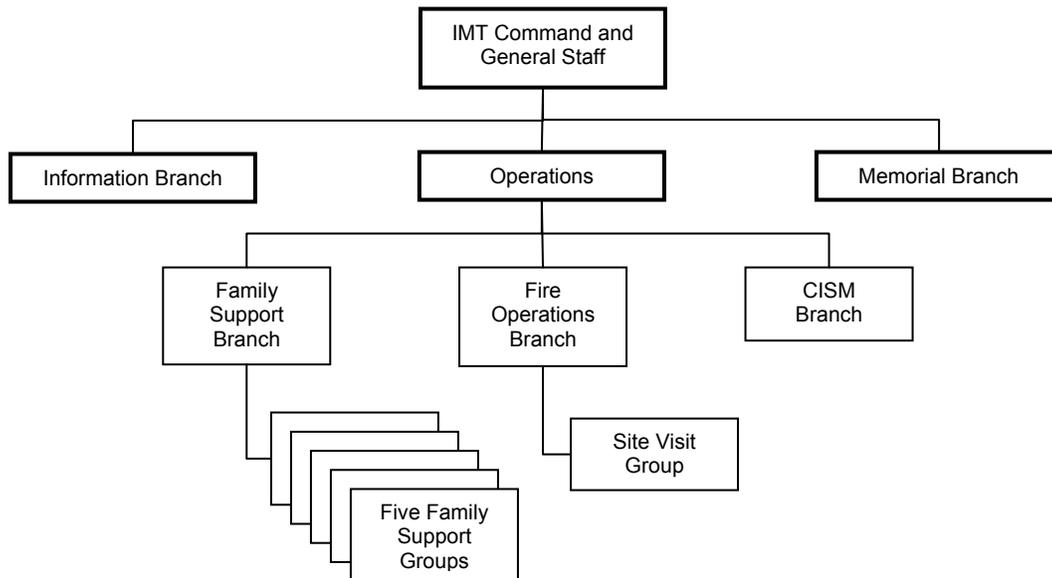
The entire mission demonstrated that the framework of ICS provides an effective structure for even a tragedy response.

Several days into the mission, after the first family visits to the fatality site and funerals, the IMT began getting positive feedback in regards to their efforts, validating the application of ICS to this mission. Ultimately, the success of the mission validates that ICS offers a powerful structure and set of tools that can be adapted to support a wide range of missions.

Applying ICS

- The framework of ICS provides an effective and adaptable structure for non-traditional responses. As the organization expanded, ICS proved flexible enough to accommodate emerging requirements without a need to reorganize. Having this common frame of reference will enable members of IMTs at all levels to respond effectively in the future to unique or emerging missions.

Displaying Situation Awareness



At the start, because the mission brought people on all levels into uncharted territory, many did not have a meaningful way of visualizing the unfolding response. The components of the response were a constantly moving web, a non-linear system continually altered by human elements.

Without tangible boundaries, such as terrain, to define the response, the Plans section had difficulty graphically communicating the status of the response. The organization chart became the *incident map* with boundaries based on human needs and relationships instead of geography. This chart became the means for visualizing the incident and formulating situation awareness and was an essential visual aid in briefing room.

The organization chart, however, did not tell the whole story, and some pointed out how a high-level timeline of funeral dates posted in the briefing room would have contributed to better situation awareness throughout the IMT. Lacking a single point of reference for events sometimes caused confusion and inefficiency.

An early decision to assign the Situation Unit Leader to other pressing responsibilities in the CISM branch produced unanticipated ripple effects including people going to the Information Branch and Planning Section Chief for status and information typically provided by the Situation Unit Leader.

Displaying Situation Awareness

- For out of the ordinary response requirements, the usual means of visualizing the response may not be sufficient. Communicating the organization and current status of an uncommon response requires creative, thinking-outside-of-the-box approaches.

Operational Tempo

High priorities and extremely tight timelines generated a very fast operational tempo almost immediately. The emotional impact of the tragedy brought with it hitherto un-encountered levels of stress as reported by participants.

People noted that their sense of time was altered during the response. These differences resulted in perceptions that calls for urgency went unheeded as well as admonitions to keep asking if the urgency was real or perceived. Some respondents indicated that everything appeared to be given the same level of urgency, which obscured efforts to discriminate what was critical from what was nice-to-have. The level of urgency that was communicated sometimes meant that people were trying to do everything for everyone all the time.

The combination of intense stress and a high-speed operational tempo reflects an inherent danger in this type of a response. Task saturation, impending deadlines, strong emotional attachment to success, difficulty prioritizing—all these factors contribute to the *fog of war* and require mitigations from leaders. Leaders need to be watchful for indications that these factors are causing problems and keep asking questions to help team members and responders keep their efforts focused on the right things.

Operational Tempo

- Persistency in asking questions helps mitigate the dangers of high-tempo and high-stress missions. Most beneficial are questions that keep situation awareness high and help team members sort through priorities to keep their focus on the most critical tasks.

Decentralized Authority

The nature of the operation, with considerable variation in the mission requirements and circumstances for each individual branch and group, required delegating far more authority to division and group supervisors than was typical. Both the IC and the Deputy IC voiced a concern that this event would thrust people into roles far above their experience level and that the leadership would have to be less directing and more guiding and mentoring.

The IC recalled, “The analogy we gave them was to act as a Type 3 IC. This [response] is more like a complex. You have the authority to do and order what resources you need.”

One of the team members made note that this decentralized authority also meant that each branch and group had to define an end state for their assignment. Although the IMT provided an end state for the entire support mission, each team had to apply the intent to individual situations, envisioning and creating an end state specific to their assignment.

It became clear that supporting decentralized authority by providing clear intent and guidance would require more interactivity than usual because people from the Forest Leadership—the very ones to tap for critical input—were also strongly affected by the trauma and loss and often not available as they participated in funerals and other events.

Empowering branch directors and group supervisors to act more like Type 3 ICs and adding appropriate staff to branches and groups was considered imperative to mission execution. Because of the tight timelines and decision cycles, there was no way a centralized decision making process could work. “There were a million things that we’d never encountered before,” said one team member.

Where centralized authority and decision making was attempted, it caused delays and friction. In nearly all cases, each branch director, and in some cases each group supervisor, generated an action plan for their function and related critical events. As one person put it, “No one person was in command of everything.” Respondents universally reported that the decentralized authority and decision making was key to their success.

Decentralized Authority

- For missions requiring leaders and team members at every level to improvise, adapt, and overcome obstacles within tight schedules, decentralizing authority provides the most effective approach.
- In a tragedy response that brings with it high levels of stress, intense emotional involvement, and an expectation for leaders to participate in events, considerable interactivity—much greater than is typical—becomes essential for effectively communicating leader’s intent and objectives, which is particularly critical in missions with a high degree of decentralized authority.

Name Requesting

The IMT primarily requested people by name for assignments. As stated by a Family Support Branch Director, “We weren’t ordering positions; we were ordering people.”

The practice of ordering people by name rather than according to red card qualifications exposes an inherent mismatch between the established fire resource ordering systems and the requirements of emerging all-hazards missions. The request-by-name practice was used widely during the 2004 and 2005 hurricane response efforts, and again for this mission as commanders struggled to fill critical positions requiring unique skills using the standard ordering systems.

The qualification system for ordering resources may be inappropriate to the mission, particularly for positions below the command staff. As the only alternative system for ordering resources using criteria beyond fire qualifications, the name request practice will be increasingly needed and can be expected to be used in all-hazards assignments.

However, failing to address supply and demand differences between emerging all-hazard and traditional response requirements may serve to eventually undermine the premise of the qualifications system. When asked about this trend, respondent made suggestions that ranged from updating the qualification system to better support the increasing diversity of missions to broadening qualifications to include more of the skills and characteristics required to better enable qualified people to be ordered for special mission needs.

Name Requesting

- Reliance on requesting people by name uncovers a weakness in the qualification system that does not quantify or measure the special qualities required for special missions, which leads people to bypass the system.

Establishing a Presence at the District

Projecting the IMT's presence at the home District while also respecting the authority of the leadership of the District presented a challenge intrinsic to this mission. The SJRD indicated a desire to fulfill their leadership responsibilities even though dramatically affected by the situation. The intent of the IMT was to communicate that they were not attempting to replace the local leadership's presence with outsiders and that members of the IMT were there to provide support in fulfilling leadership and management duties.

During the first few days, communication between the Forest and the District was problematic. Poor cell phone coverage, loss of power and phones brought about by the Esperanza Fire and causing a move in operations, general shock, and chaotic conditions—many factors combined to produce poor communication among the different groups.

The situation was made worse because two of the BDF Forest FMO's deputies—the most likely candidates to act as liaisons with the SJRD—were unavailable off-site during the first hours of the response. Per request from the Forest Leadership, a division chief was assigned to coordinate and support the activities of the family liaisons. The division chief happened to be the Forest Chaplain, which made him appear to be an ideal choice, but the immediate impact of unfolding events and needs on the District demanded that he assume more of the chaplain-counseling role instead of the division supervisor-coordinating role.

A contingent from the IMT went to SJRD in Idyllwild at 1000 on Saturday, 28 October, to gather and exchange information as well as to meet with Family Liaisons. The needs of the Family Liaisons quickly consumed the focus of the contingent. Also on Saturday, the IMT contingent learned that the CISM effort under the existing Employee Assistance Program (EAP) was failing. Senior leaders from the IMT traveled to the SJRD the following day, Sunday, 29 October. All worked to address the immediate needs that were overwhelming the SJRD. Respondents from SJRD reported that people were becoming overloaded and under intense stress. In the immediate aftermath of burnover, actions were being taken, but not supported within a framework of cohesion and focus.

As a result, individuals were assigned to the SJRD to provide support and to facilitate meetings and coordination with the IMT. Recognizing the risks to communications and showing respect to the leadership of the District, the IMT chose not to assign a full-time presence at the SJRD. Instead, they assigned the Deputy OSC and Deputy PSC to facilitate a daily briefing at the SJRD office. Interviews from the district, the BDF and the IMT indicated that this level of engagement was not adequate to meet the information and coordination needs of all the activities occurring on the district in such a short time frame.

In retrospect, respondents indicated that they should have sent a DIVS and an assistant to the District as soon as possible because of the initial difficulties in establishing a presence at the SJRD. The intent of this assignment would have been to conduct an assessment, provide immediate assistance, and report to the command post with requests for additional staffing for maintaining the important liaison duties between the District and the IMT.

Establishing a Presence at the District

- The difficulties of establishing a presence at the district and the related communication and coordination issues reveal an inherent dilemma requiring careful judgment. An IMT cannot step in and simply take over, nor can the IMT simply ignore the many needs of an affected district. The situation requires early discussions and ongoing communications to ensure that a reasonable balance that meets the district's needs is achieved.

Communications

The unique parameters of the mission produced out-of-the-ordinary communications requirements. In addition to the usual requirement of communicating with leaders and other team members, people at all levels had to communicate with outside entities—fire and police departments, family members, businesses, and so on. Moreover, the sensitivity of much of the communications, whether among responders or outside of the IMT, required privacy. As a result, communication was primarily by cell phone, except when radios were used by the Suppression Branch resources and for large events such as the memorial.

The cell phone system was implemented quickly because incoming resources did not need to be issued any special equipment and the action plan contained a reasonably accurate phone roster. Because the action plan becomes a public document, however, it may not be appropriate for posting some phone numbers.

While the cell phone plan provided flexibility, it also caused communication issues in mountain top areas where lack of cell coverage impacted the larger team's ability to communicate in a timely and effective manner. Because such a multitude of agencies responded to the support effort, using only radio communications would have caused significant inter-operability problems.

Communications

- When communicating sensitive information with family members, the public, and outside entities dictates cell phones as the primary means of communication, a system using radios as a backup in case of spotty cell phone coverage ensures a means for paging people and asking them to get to a landline phone.

Supporting the Families

This [the family support objective] is an objective on paper, but our people are out there living it.

**Deputy Operations Section Chief
CIIMT-1**

Supporting the families of the BDF Engine 57 crewmembers and the single surviving firefighter was the top priority at the onset of the BDF Engine 57 Support Mission. The mission of the Family Support Branch was to communicate each family's priorities to the IMT and to support the needs each of family.

The Branch was comprised of five Family Support Groups. The people from the BDF tasked with next of kin notification became the Family Liaisons. To maintain personal bonds and preserve a sense of continuity, the IMT built the Family Support Groups around the Family Liaisons, appointing a Group Supervisor and staff to provide support, as needed. A member of the IMT noted the importance of using the Family Liaison as the center of support then building the Family Support Groups around them, adding staff members as soon as possible instead of waiting for requests.

Family Support Groups

In their initial briefing with the IMT, the Family Support Groups received this intent to guide their actions:

- Families come first.
- Group Supervisor has resources, authority, and priority to meet family needs.
- Family Support Groups need to keep team members as originally assigned—no swapping out for non-essential needs.

As families vary in their structure and dynamics, different challenges surfaced with each family, including communication barriers caused by situations in which English was not the family's first language. The Family Support Groups tried to be flexible in adapting to the various structures, relationships, requests, and beliefs of each family. In most cases family liaisons were able to build personal relationships with these families. In some cases, because of family dynamics, a more business-like relationship evolved and was more appropriate.

Staffing

To respond to emerging needs quickly and improvise according to the situation, Family Support Groups were given the authority to act in the role of a Type 3 IC (or a branch director). After the IMT established the Family Support Branch and the five Family Support Groups, the group supervisors were able to take command, debrief the liaisons who had been embedded with families from the beginning, and communicate information back to the IMT to avoid duplication of effort or unnecessary changes in planning or direction.

The intent was to push the branch decision-making process down to the group level, decentralizing authority to promote more independent decision making and quick action. One of the MCS observers noted that leader's intent needs to emphasize the amount of authority given to the groups because group supervisors are not usually given that degree of authority and some were reluctant to order additional staff.

At the onset, each Family Support Group needed four or five people responsible for varied support actions and tasks. As the structure evolved, positions were added around this core structure to create a Family Support Group suitable to each individual situation. Most family support groups evolved to include people in several roles: group supervisor, family liaison, plans (PSC and RESL), logistics, information, behavioral health professional, and chaplain.

Staffing

- When the mission requires an unusual degree of decentralized authority that places subordinate leaders in unfamiliar territory, clarifying requirements and clearly stipulating the amount of authority given ensures that subordinate leaders fully appreciate the greater responsibilities demanded of the mission and can act with flexibility and responsiveness at all levels.

Family Involvement in Decision Making

People in the groups stressed the importance of keeping the families involved and responsible for the important decisions. Because every family was dealing with traumatic loss and many were feeling that they were out of control, Family Liaisons tried to create an environment in which family members could exert control over the important decisions. They cautioned about the potential problems of making the family's decisions for them or creating co-dependency situations.

Family Involvement in Decision Making

- Keeping families involved and responsible for the important decisions prevents responders' assistance from crossing a line from supporting the family to unacceptably taking charge of the situation.

Family Liaisons

Everyone interviewed indicated that having family liaisons from the Forest Service was important and helped to project an appropriate *face of the agency* to the families and the public during key events.

Family liaisons came to have special requirements based on the unique needs of their roles. Unlike most team member, family liaisons needed to have work spaces (with a land line and voicemail) near where the family was staying. They were also traveling more often than most other team members. It was typical to have family liaisons driving, eating, and talking on a cell phone with call waiting beeping—all while deeply affected by the emotional impact of the assignment. A number of interviewees recommended assigning drivers, perhaps in some sort of a pool, to enable the Family Liaisons to focus safely on their responsibilities. An IMT member brought up the possibility of having two people as Family Liaisons for one family to promote support continuity while enabling each liaison to have some rest time.

For the future, some respondents suggested that having a pool of trained USFS people to fill Family Liaison positions would help. They noted that the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation offers training for people to be assigned as family liaisons and suggested that such training could be helpful for the Forest Service.

Family Liaisons

- Having family liaisons from the Forest Service is important in projecting an appropriate *face of the agency* to the families and the public throughout a tragedy response. Creating a pool of trained USFS people willing to act as family liaisons would aid in assigning employees to these roles during emergencies. The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation has possible templates for training that define roles and responsibilities, challenges, and special requirements.

Hospital and Survivors

The IMT's medical unit leader, an Engineer/Paramedic who had experience with serious burn victims, arrived at the command post and heard that one of the BDF Engine 57 crewmembers survived the initial burnover. He volunteered to work with the Cerda family at the hospital, realizing the difficulty survivors have in understanding medical terminology and recommendations. The paramedic eventually became the Group Supervisor for the Cerda Family Support Group.

Translation of Medical Information

Part of this Family Support Group's task was to help provide meaningful information to the family to help them make the difficult choices and to have a plan in place if death occurs. Having a group supervisor who was a paramedic greatly facilitated this process. As a paramedic, he was able to interpret the signals indicating that the patient's status was significantly changing; he knew hospital routines and processes and could anticipate medical issues.

The family was deluged by information, including medical situation awareness from doctors, nurses, specialists, and so on. To facilitate information being presented in a unified and coherent manner, the Group Supervisor set up two information meetings a day between the family and the medical staff. During these meetings, the Group Supervisor would translate and clarify confusing medical terms into something a layperson could understand and use as a basis for decisions.

Survivor Support

- The Forest Service can provide an invaluable service to the family members of a survivor by offering the assistance of a person with a strong medical background to help them interpret medical information and make informed decisions.
- Identifying Forest Service people with strong medical backgrounds who would be willing to volunteer to assist family members of survivors would facilitate filling urgent requests for such services during emergencies.

Organization of a Survivor's Family Support Group

Initially, many agency members were at the hospital—the family liaison, a liaison from the Esperanza Fire, the division chief sent to coordinate the family liaisons' efforts, and so on. People from overlapping jurisdictions were trying to make decisions; but no one was formally in charge at first. The initial assistance was characterized by duplicated efforts, lots of questions, and few answers. Once the Group Supervisor had the action plan in hand showing the IMT had taken over the support mission, people were able to understand how to support or assist and began to work out the issues.

The Group Supervisor indicated that having a family liaison, a group supervisor, and a very small support staff was appropriate for a survivor's support group. The bond and trust established between the family and this first support group is important, and in the event that the survivor dies, those originally assigned should remain assigned to the family while adding staff to the group as needed to deal with new needs and events.

The Group Supervisor reported that, at the beginning, it was difficult to participate in Branch meetings because the differences in the mindsets between the groups dealing with the fatalities and the group working with the survivor. Once Pablo Cerda died, however, the support effort for his family became consistent with that of the other Family Support Groups.

Organization of Survivor's Family Support Group

- In this response, the confusion of the initial onslaught of well-meaning agency people speaks to the need for quick action to designate a person in charge and put a plan. A lack of clear parameters creates a vacuum in leadership that brings with it duplicated efforts and general frustration.

Working at the Hospital

Supporting the family of a survivor was complicated by restrictions intrinsic to working at a hospital. To establish communications within a hospital, support groups needed to coordinate with the hospital to acquire the necessary workspace, phone lines, and Internet access. They also needed to work around the limitations on cell phone or radio use around medical equipment. Also, because hospitals are increasingly sensitive to cost and financial issues, not having clear initial guidance placed the Family Liaison and Support Group in the role of being a *host* at the hospital without the needed tools and authority.

Because of the inevitable influx of people at the hospital, the Group needed to set up security. To support the visitors and respect the privacy of the surviving firefighter, it was also recommended that Groups assign an Information Officer to the hospital to keep a visitor log and perform other support tasks. During this incident, hospital security called the Group Supervisor to coordinate visitor access, including the filtering of the many well-wishers. The Family Support Group set up a journal for well-wishers, which was effective in reducing the number of visitors while enabling people to express their sentiments.

Working at the Hospital

- Working at hospitals brings requirements and limitations that need to be addressed early with the hospital staff: acquiring necessary workspace, phone lines, and Internet access; clarifying limitations on cell phone or radio use.
- Coordinating hospital visitors and respecting the privacy of the surviving firefighter in a way that reflects the wishes of the families requires assigning a security function.

Funerals

Helping families coordinate funerals became the central focus for Family Support Groups.

Service Planning

Each Family Support Group had to structure security and information functions appropriately, recognizing that family structures, needs, and desires for public involvement create unique requirements for each funeral, service, or memorial. Supporting the funerals also involved establishing contacts with local fire departments and law enforcement to coordinate support and participation.

With funeral and memorial events potentially attracting so many people, setting up a command post for each event enabled leaders to respond to unexpected disruptions or changes without disturbing the ceremony. Also, ensuring that the venues for these events had overflow parking, seating capacity, professional service staff, and other services helped to ensure a respectful event.

Organizers worked with graphic and audio departments to produce high-quality recordings, posters, and programs. To ensure enough lead time to produce high-quality products for the services, the organizers needed to establish contact with the graphics support people as early as possible. Feedback from funerals indicated that these efforts had a significant positive effect on family members and employees at the events.

Service Planning

- Family structures, needs, and desires for public involvement create unique requirements for each funeral, service, or memorial. Planning a service needs to center on the needs and desires of the family members.
- Setting up a command post for each event enables quick response to unexpected disruptions or changes without disturbing the ceremony.

Security

Organizers needed to be prepared to coordinate significant security arrangements at ceremonies to manage both external effects to the family and potential issues resulting from internal family dynamics. In addition, funeral processions required coordination with law enforcement and other agencies. It was also helpful to provide local agencies with maps, routes, and estimates of numbers in order to place escorts and vehicles appropriately.

Ensuring the dignity of the families often requires extra security resources. Property incursions or disputes, family tensions, and media presence are all potential security issues and may result in the need for law enforcement at family residences or at funerals or both.

Security

- Disruptions from outsiders as well as potential issues resulting from internal family dynamics warrant the coordination of significant security arrangements at ceremonies.

Legal Requirements

Family Liaisons found themselves filling out forms to transfer the remains of the firefighters from the coroner's office to the funeral home and other paperwork in order to assist the families in the immediate aftermath of the deaths. These forms were very specific to each county jurisdiction, and Family Liaisons reported they would have been better prepared if there had been a briefing packet or checklist of critical tasks with examples to access.

Access to dental records was also very important. Experience from previous incidents shows that a lack of dental records can lead to delays in getting important documents such as death certificates if remains have to be identified by DNA.

Legal Requirements

- Providing Family Liaisons with a briefing packet or checklist of critical tasks for fulfilling legal requirements helps them be better prepared.

Fatality Site Visits

As the engine was recovered from the site, dispatch rendered the appropriate honor by announcing that BDF Engine 57 was released from the incident. Site Visit Group members reported strongly positive feedback regarding this simple act of respect.

**Suppression Branch Director
CIIMT-1**

Although the option was difficult and carried certain risks, the IMT made a decision to allow family members and SJRD employees to visit the fatality site. The objective of the Site Visit Group was to facilitate the grieving process, enabling each family to visit the fatality site before each respective funeral. Strong coordination was required with the investigation team to build the trust needed for site visits to occur.

According to the current body of research by mental health professionals, after a tragic loss, the grieving process cannot move forward until loved ones can understand and come to terms with the events that caused the loss. The IMT made a decision to fully support the families by putting in place the mechanisms to help them understand what happened. Family Support Groups reported that site visits positively affected families, who were struggling to comprehend the nature of the events that killed their loved ones.

The Site Visit Group was comprised of the Family Liaison, a Safety Officer, a guide knowledgeable about firefighting, a professional knowledgeable about CISM, an Information Officer, and enough staging area managers and law enforcement to handle different start and stop locations. Group members reported that it was helpful to have one group member be the sole source for determining who should be authorized to visit the site.

In this case, the team had the ability to conduct site visits because the site was so close to the affected home unit. In cases in which distance makes such visits difficult, some alternatives to a site visit include presentations to the families using video clips or photos of the site, sand tables, letters to families from other survivors, and maps.

Fatality Site Visits

- Facilitating a full understanding of circumstances surrounding a loved one's death—including allowing family visits to a fatality site—is a meaningful way to support grieving family members.
- When a visit to the fatality site is difficult or impossible, the goal of facilitating a family's understanding of events remains, requiring the exploration of means to create a virtual visit to the site.

Preparing the Site

Once the site was released from investigation, the Site Visit Group began visits with these priorities: (1) families, (2) survivors from the crew, (3) SJRD employees, and (4) BDF employees. The Group tried to structure the visits in a way that gave due honor to the site. The Group also wanted to produce tangible mementos for the family members to take with them.

The engine was left in place until after the families had visited. The site was also carefully sifted for personal keepsakes such as wedding rings. The families seemed to strongly identify with the engine and, for the most part, knew exactly where their firefighter usually sat in the engine.

A simple engraved marker plaque was placed on an unopened yellow Nomex shirt at the site where each crewmember died. Non-evidentiary personal effects of each firefighter were organized in plastic bags and placed in the firefighter's place in the engine. The family members were informed where the belongings were found and allowed to discover their loved one's belongings.

On site for each family visit, a Safety Officer made sure the site was *reset* with new shirts, flowers, and plaques each time so each family would have the same experience.

Site Preparation

- Attention to detail—both before the first visit and in between visits—is paramount in creating respectful fatality site visits. Allowing family members to take personal keepsakes and mementos from the fatality site offers a meaningful commemoration of the tragedy.

Conducting Visits

Preparing the family members by using maps, diagrams, and other aids to inform them about what they would see, hear, smell, and touch at the site helped to ensure a positive experience. Survivors self-regulated their level of participation, and having someone opt out partway through should be planned for and accommodated.

Conducting Visits

- Using maps, diagrams, and other aids to inform families about what to expect at the site helps to ensure a positive experience. Survivors self-regulate their level of participation; some may opt out partway through the visit.

Guiding the Families

Firefighters were assigned to the site to answer questions and provide background information. Survivors indicated that this information was very helpful. Guides should be carefully selected to be knowledgeable and trustworthy but not too emotionally involved in the situation.

A potential dilemma for these firefighters was questions concerning the actions of those who died. Respondents indicated that they felt on most solid ground when they answered from their own experiences without speculating about the actions of those involved. “We usually approach with these things in mind.” Or, “In my experience, I’ve taken these actions in situations like this.”

It is very important for the guide to be familiar with the site and locations of events after it is sterilized because it looks remarkably different than in the immediate aftermath of the fatality.

Guiding the Families

- The best guides for fatality site visits are knowledgeable firefighters who have a clear understanding of the sequence of events that led to the tragedy. Advance preparation for the guides—to help them answer questions without passing judgment on the actions of those who died—enables them to frame answers within the context of their own experience.

Securing the Dignity and Privacy of the Site

Respecting the dignity of the site extended from issues as minor as maintaining cell phone and radio silence to protecting the site against intrusions. During one family visit, for example, Site Group members reported that a person from the media blended in with a large family contingent and took a cell phone photo that ended up in a newspaper. In addition, armed with cameras with telephoto lenses, media also posted themselves on surrounding ridge lines until the appropriate road closures could occur. Road closures needed to start a couple hours before any visits to ensure privacy. In this case, the temporary flight restriction in place from the Esperanza Fire mitigated issues with media aircraft.

Securing the Dignity and Privacy of the Site

- Because fatality sites are subject to all manner of intrusions—noise as well as unwanted presence of outsiders and the media, strong measures need to be in place to counter encroachment upon the space.

Finance

Fiscal law limits what can be provided for expenses. Because these rules are not open to interpretation or adaptation, these limits can often seem at odds with the objectives of providing support to survivors and rendering due honor and respect to those who had lost their lives.

In some instances, the top levels of the Forest Service moved swiftly to approve financial expenditures stemming from the tragedy, such as expenses for travel for family members. Other early financial decisions requiring clear guidance included funeral expenses, memorial services, and meals for family members or support people. Timely communication of rules and restrictions from decision making entities was imperative for family liaisons.

Family liaisons had a perception that much of the guidance they received was unclear and lacked sufficient detail to enable them to move quickly and decisively. At the same time, the FSC and the command staff had the perception that they were providing clear guidance to the family liaisons that was subsequently interpreted in different ways by different people. The varying perceptions accentuate the difficulties inherent in this responsibility of working within legal limitations while compassionately supporting families.

Finance

- During a tragedy response, compassionate and decisive support for families depends on timely communication of financial rules and restrictions. Lacking clear guidance severely hampers liaisons' ability to support families.
- The emotionally charged circumstances of supporting a bereaved family often bring out markedly different perceptions about the reality of the situation. Extra efforts to clarify are often needed to guard against misperceptions and misinterpretation.

Coordination of Finance Activities

Family Liaisons often found themselves in very difficult position—trying to address money issues early and behind the scenes to prevent them from becoming issues. Because of the stress of the situation, answering financial questions and providing clarification needed ongoing Agency support.

Many noted that Family Support Teams could have used an Administrative or Fiscal component—one that was specific to the Agency. This position would not need to be filled by a finance specialist per se but rather by someone who could devote the required time to getting answers regarding benefits as well as clarifying financial rules and guidelines concerning expenses, gifts, and donations.

Family Liaisons also talked about being caught up in dilemmas when limitations placed them in awkward positions of discussing money with the families at inappropriate times. Family Liaisons suggested that some kind of menu and intent—what could and could not be offered, what was and was not legal—would have made them more effective at providing support and accurate information to the families.

Coordination of Finance Activities

- In addition to receiving initial guidance regarding finance activities, family liaisons need continued administrative support to answer questions and provide clarification about financial issues. Specifically, each family needs a finance person on the family support team. The expectation that a representative from the family support teams can tie into Finance after hours is unrealistic given the unpredictable nature of family support responsibilities.
- Family liaisons indicated that a *menu*—guidelines and clear intent regarding what can and cannot be provided—would have been invaluable in guiding their actions.

Benefits

Respondents recommended meeting with families about agency benefits after the funerals. Explaining benefits prior to the funeral requires families to process too much information before they have (1) gathered needed situation awareness and (2) had the stage set for coping by having the funeral. Families were grateful to receive information about benefits, but many gave feedback that it was too much information too fast and that they were not in an appropriate state of mind to think about the system of systems.

Some respondents noted that the *automatic* death gratuity for the USFS employees is not so automatic. It must first be requested from Office of Worker's Compensation Program (OWCP), and, before it can be paid, the initial determination has to be made by investigators that the death was in the line of duty and within the appropriate scope of duties.

A benefits team from the Regional Office was very effective in getting accurate information about Forest Service to the families. A host of other benefits are also available to family members, but no formal mechanism is in place to communicate information about these other benefits to family members. Social Security, Wildland Firefighter Foundation, International Association of Firefighters, Victims of Crimes, Burned Firefighters, Department of Justice—all these are programs may need to be communicated to families.

Even though families have a need for this information, a broader question remains of how the Forest Service should meet this need. Maintaining familiarity with foundations, organizations, and other entities that may provide compensation is an enormous undertaking, likely outside the scope of responsibilities of a USFS financial officer assigned to an IMT.

Benefits

- Families need options regarding the timing of information about benefits. In light of some families' feedback that they received too much information too fast, allow each family to decide when they are ready to receive this information. In this case, families were not ready until after funerals had been conducted.

Benefits—continued

- When providing information about benefits, Agency representatives likely will need to explain the process that must be set in motion to receive a death gratuity.
- After a fire fatality, families need a means to get information about other sources of compensation including Social Security, Wildland Firefighter Foundation, International Association of Firefighters, Victims of Crimes, Burned Firefighters, and Department of Justice. However, USFS financial officers typically assigned to IMTs do not have the breadth or depth of knowledge required to coordinate this information, so the question of how to meet this need remains unanswered.

Gifts

People throughout the communities and across the country quickly responded to the tragedy with a staggering amount of gifts and donations. One department raised \$50,000 in a one day *boot drive*. The IMT recognized early on that these donations were outside the scope of the federally-funded support operation and coordinated efforts to funnel funds appropriately to supporting agencies such as the United Way and the Wildland Firefighters Foundation.

Immediately integrating a coordinator for gifts and donations can provide a parallel funding stream to accommodate reasonable and immediate expenses that the government cannot fund. When this support is integrated with government funds, the family support function can *do the right thing* for families without placing agency employees in dilemmas that result in negative perceptions, violations or infractions of spending rules, or expenses paid for out of their own pockets.

Gifts

- Quickly designating a gift coordinator who can funnel gifts and donations to the family support function allows a parallel funding stream to accommodate reasonable and immediate expenses that the government cannot fund.

Memorializing the Fallen

The scope and complexity of the Memorial grew quickly; early projections estimated roughly 1000 people in attendance, but the actual attendance was over 10,000. A stand down of the BDF fire suppression people was instituted to encourage their attendance at funerals and the Memorial. Elected officials as well as VIPs from the USDA and USFS offered to speak at the ceremony.

Scores of fire engines formed a procession to the Memorial venue. The ceremony included eulogies from VIPs, a final alarm bell ceremony, and an aerial tribute of eight aircraft. The U.S. Fire Administration broadcast it over its satellite network for fire stations. Local networks carried it live on their website.

Team Structure

The Wenatchee National Forest used a Type 2 IMT to manage the Memorial after the Thirtymile Fire. Although the IMT considered doing the same, they decided on a branch organization to preserve continuity.

The vast majority of respondents judged that a Type 2 IMT would have been very difficult to integrate within the structure given the high operational tempo. With the branch, the relationships were already in place to help overcome the inevitable friction and problems that occurred. To cope with the growing size of the Memorial, the Branch Director began to view and staff the Branch as a Type 3 IMT regardless of its actual designation.

A few interviewees expressed a minority opinion that a Type 2 IMT would be better for a large event in the future. To be effective in this case, the Branch Director had to function as an IC, with an OSC, PSC, RESL, LSC, and IOFR, and a Type 2 IMT would already come in with that structure. However, after considering bringing in a Type 2 IMT during initial planning, the IC decided that the Branch was the best decision in this situation. Coordinating with existing memorial teams similar to those of the CDF and other parts of the Fire Service may benefit future efforts.

Team Structure

- Whether a Type 2 IMT or a branch is in place to manage a memorial, the team needs to function as an IMT with designated functional areas in order to have an organization in place that can handle the many and varied tasks and responsibilities that come with this type of event.

Planning

It was important to consult the families and other survivors in the planning for the Memorial to get an accurate assessment of their needs, wishes, and desires. Acting on their input produced several positive effects: more decisions were placed within the families' control; conferring with them reinforced families' and survivors' perception that they were part of the agency family; no family members encountered unpleasant surprises at the event.

The involvement of experienced production staff was important during the planning and execution of the memorial. The BDF has the services of an experienced and extremely talented graphics and production staff as well as the Forest Service Honor Guard. At a future event, this expertise may not be readily available, so the need for these kinds of resources would need to be identified and engaged early to accommodate necessary turnaround time for products.

The budget for the Memorial was roughly \$1.6 million including both government funds and donated money and services. The pressure for mission creep and accommodating all requests from all factions is significant. Defining and identifying constraints such as cost, number of attendees, and the air support required for a flyover helped set a clear and simple end state.

There were extensive last minute changes to the program. Even though the actual date for a memorial is likely to change several times in the first few days of planning, backward planning an absolute cutoff time for submitting the program for printing based on available graphic and printing support can help to prevent unnecessary changes and expenses. In this case, a last minute change after the programs were printed resulted in a reprinting that cost \$6000.

Building a timed event script was helpful as the fundamental planning document for the Memorial. The Wenatchee National Forest sent the Thirtymile Memorial Action Plan. Even though it arrived well after planning was in progress, having the Thirtymile Memorial write-up in hand greatly assisted planners.

Organizations such as the IAFF, CDF, and many municipal fire departments have excellent technical experts on planning multi-casualty memorials and funerals. They also have access to protocols, guidelines, speakers, and other support. In this case, early input from groups such as these was very helpful. When bringing outside groups in, however, it is important to identify them as technical experts and integrate them into planning process with a caveat that their expertise comes from an outside agency and needs to be adapted to the situation at hand. This outside support needs to be provided with an understanding of where they fit into the organization and how they can provide input into decision making.

Planning

- Coordinating with families to get their input for a Memorial ensures that the families can assert a measure of control, feel involved in the Agency process, and encounter no unpleasant surprises at the event.
- When funerals or memorials include special graphics or acoustics, an experienced production staff needs to be engaged early to accommodate necessary turnaround time for products.
- The Forest Service Honor Guard needs to be requested early in the process to ensure their presence.
- Identifying and defining constraints such as cost, number of attendees, and air support required helps mitigate pressures for scope creep and sets a clear and simple end state.
- Setting an absolute cutoff time for event timing changes and planning backwards to determine the final date for printing programs prevents unnecessary changes and expenses.
- A timed event script is helpful as a blueprint for planning an event. The Wenatchee National Forest can provide the Thirtymile Memorial Action Plan as a template.
- Organizations such as the IAFF, CDF, and municipal fire departments can provide expertise in planning memorials and funerals. They are willing to help with protocols, guidelines, speakers, and other support.
- When bringing in outside groups, however, it is important to identify them as technical experts and integrate them into planning process with a caveat that their expertise comes from an outside agency and needs to be adapted to the situation at hand.

Elected Officials

Coordination of the involvement of elected officials for the Memorial was extremely sensitive and overwhelming. The normal structure for dealing with elected officials at Forest and Regional level was circumvented. Given the stress and politics of the situation, it was difficult for the Branch Director to push back on the elected officials sufficiently, causing tremendous stress and loss of focus on the big picture. Having an empowered decision maker from higher levels in the agency with the requisite expertise in protocol acting as liaison for elected officials may have helped better manage much of the political pressure.

Political pressure revolved around who would speak at the Memorial. The governor, members of Congress from affected Districts, agency leadership from the affected units, other elected officials, and other VIPs offered their services and were considered for speakers. Although support from unions, foundations, and volunteer agencies was enormous and crucial to the overall success of the mission, selecting speakers from these groups is problematic because their political involvement and affiliation creates an inherent conflict of interest when they speak on behalf of agency employees at an agency-sponsored event.

Elected Officials

- The presence of an empowered decision maker from higher levels in the Agency—someone with the requisite expertise in protocol—is indispensable in coordinating the involvement of elected officials and resolving any disputes.
- Inviting speakers from unions, foundations, and volunteer agencies may be problematic because their political involvement and affiliation creates an inherent conflict of interest when they speak on behalf of agency employees at an agency-sponsored event.

Continuing Fire Suppression Operations

The objective of the Fire Suppression Branch was to ensure continuity of operations while the BDF fire suppression resources stood down in order to allow employees to attend funeral and memorial services. The BDF stand down began at 1300 on the day before the first funeral and lasted for seven days. After due honor and respect was rendered at the final funeral, employees were allowed an appropriate time to regroup before assuming their regular duties.

As a first step, leaders of the Fire Suppression Branch met with the BDF staff, their peer support, and IMT to work out the continuity plan and to clarify roles and responsibilities. People assigned to the Branch then worked with dispatch to determine the normal staffing requirements and to order resources. In the stressful environment, people on the Branch indicated that putting the outline and key agreements in writing was important. Trying to track unwritten information and agreements was next to impossible.

It was important to make a concerted effort to clarify duties for the resources and staff during the stand down. During the stand down, no issues emerged as long as the resources in stand down were conducting regular business; however, conflicts sometimes surfaced during suppression operations.

For example, some engines became available when they should have been in a stand-down mode. In some cases, resources involved in the stand down stayed in service, responding to calls because the people were reluctant to disengage. It was difficult for them to let go of their responsibilities.

All the new resources covering the BDF stand down were entered into the computer aided dispatch system, and the BDF resources were taken out during the stand down period. This process took approximately two hours, but formally documenting status of resources avoided problems with understanding where all the cover resources were located, potential errors in morning line ups, and so on.

Leaders felt that a key point for the success of this operation was good situation awareness gathered by the substitute resources and the trust built with the BDF personnel. Bringing in duty officers and suppression resources early to work side by side with BDF resources to gain local knowledge was a sound move.

While on stand down, the BDF resources briefed and provided expertise for the substitute resources. The safety function was handled by local BDF resources briefing and orienting the covering forces and selecting BDF people with strong fire behavior knowledge to work with covering resources during the stand down.

Continuing Fire Suppression Operations

- A Fire Suppression Branch is an essential component of the response when a stand down is instituted to enable attendance of fire suppression employees at funeral and memorial services as well as to ensure continuity of operations throughout the stand down. The timing of the stand down needs to encompass all funerals, memorials, and other events; timing must also allow employees to regroup before assuming their regular duties.
- Formalizing staffing requirements and agreements in writing ensures that—particularly in high-stress situations—details do not fall between the cracks.
- A concerted effort is required to clarify duties for the resources and staff during the stand down to ensure that resources in stand-down mode do not stay in service.
- Although the process takes time, entering new resources covering the stand down into the computer aided dispatch system and removing resources taken out during the stand down period is a good practice. Formally documenting status of resources avoids misunderstandings regarding cover resources.
- Bringing in duty officers and suppression resources early to work side by side with the resources going on stand down helps substitute resources gain local knowledge and increases the level of trust on both sides.

Managing Information

In the early planning stages, the IMT quickly realized that the information requirements of all operations would drive the information function into a high degree of complexity and breadth. As a result, the IMT created an Information Branch and assigned dozens of information officers—as many as 75 by some estimates.

Assigning Information Officers

Generally, people from the Information Branch were assigned to other branches and groups. Their in-briefing created a list of priority areas—family support groups, District Office, Memorial—for initial assignments.

Information officers were added to Family Support Groups as needed to support particular events. Depending on the situation, as many as 25 information officers were employed during some funerals. Because information officers were already assigned to the staff of the Groups, some confusion regarding roles and responsibilities resulted between the originally assigned information officers and the newer supporting information officers.

Although information officers were assigned to branches and groups, they did not have a clear delegation of discretionary authority to make decisions about managing information. Neither did they have a timely and responsive method for connecting back to a central coordination center.

Assigning Information Officers

- In missions requiring dispersed information officers, developing a master plan of roles and responsibilities prevents overlapping or conflicting assignments.

Staff Organization within the Information Branch

The large contingent of information officers and the many areas requiring assistance necessitated more formal staffing and organization than is typical for the Information function. Creating an Information Branch was an acknowledgement that the Information function needed out-of-the-ordinary organization, but little was done to formally staff the branch at first. As a result, the Information Branch Director became the primary coordination point and was very quickly overrun with tasks and responsibilities, resulting in an unmanageable span of control.

Span of control issues and lack of coordination generated delays and misunderstandings that affected the release of information. For example, conflicting and contradicting information was transmitted among different Family Support Groups and information officers, causing inaccurate information to be released. Proper coordination of information support with other functions was also problematic. For example, the Information Branch Director created a sub-group to assist with the Memorial, but the Memorial Branch Information Officer was not initially aware that it existed.

The NWCG Task Book for Type 1 and Type 2 Public Information Officers reflects an expectation that PIOs need to be qualified to manage situations with considerable complexity. In spite of this broad range of PIO responsibilities, however, the ICS toolbox has no template for how to organize within the Information function to accomplish these tasks and responsibilities. Success depends on the leaders' experience in similar complex situations rather than the application of standard ICS processes. Once issues and problems started surfacing, more staff members were added to the Information Branch, including a PSC, which helped mitigate the problem.

Staff Organization within the Information Branch

- The *ICS Toolbox* may be missing an organizational tool that would enable Public Information Officers to meet the broad range of responsibilities assigned to them in complex operations. Information officers have a need for an organization template that provides clearly defined roles and responsibilities and enables them to task organize in predictable and repeatable ways for complex missions.

Controlling the Release of Information

The Information Branch displayed a tendency to try to control the release of information to the media as is typical during a wildfire. However, in this instance, control was nearly impossible. For example, several cell phone photos appeared in newspaper articles although no one knew the media was even on location.

People within the Information Branch were initially unaware of the announcement of the arrest of the arsonist and the filing of the charges the District Attorney. The media showed up before anyone received information about what had already been released by the Forest or had an opportunity to develop talking points for addressing media questions regarding reactions to the arrest.

Increasingly, the media often has access to sensitive information before official notification has gone out. The concept of controlling information through official release is being challenged in this age of cell phone videos, Web blogs, and ubiquitous media.

Those in the Information Branch also wanted the authority to release information, but in practice channeling information through the Branch proved inefficient. Funeral information was often held up for a variety of reasons. The timing of funeral information, however, tremendously affected the ability of other agencies to support and attend the funerals. The most successful efforts occurred when local fire and law enforcement departments were informed early in the process about an event within their jurisdiction. They were then able to coordinate the appropriate support and provide valuable information.

Controlling the Release of Information

- The information needs of a tragedy response are best met when information officers shift the focus from managing or controlling information to developing comprehensive, proactive communications strategy that reflects both immediate- and long-term goals—developing a consistent message to convey the official Agency reaction to the tragedy and the goals of the response.

Controlling the Release of Information—continued

- Assigning people to monitor the media to gather information about what is being reported by outside sources enables information officers to understand and take a proactive stance to reports generated by others.
- Providing local fire and law enforcement departments with early information about events within their jurisdiction helps to ensure the appropriate support from outside entities.

Critical Incident Stress Management

The need for Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) or other support may extend to many levels, including the forest, district, and IMT.

Initially both the CDF IMT on the Esperanza Fire and leaders at the BDF launched efforts to meet the immediate CISM needs. However, these efforts were parallel and overlapping, not within a coherent framework. Once the IMT was in place for the Support Mission, the CISM Branch was established, consolidating all efforts.

Critical Incident Stress Management

- The need for Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) or other support may extend to many levels, including the forest, district, and IMT.
- Establishing a CISM Branch effectively consolidates initial responses from separate agencies, preventing parallel or overlapping efforts.

Initial Intervention

The first efforts to address the need for CISM were largely ineffective. The BDF initially used an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) contractor for its first CISM session. A single contractor conducted the session, which was held two days after the burnover on Saturday morning. More than 50 people attended, overwhelming the contractor and seriously compromising the effectiveness of the session. This event, however, was beyond the scope, capability, and intent of the EAP. An effort to provide toll-free phone numbers to employees for assistance also was ineffective.

An approach using peer counseling was more effective for the initial intervention. Training and SOPs on how to do small-group CISM may help mitigate the initial need for a large-group CISM in the future.

Initial Intervention

- For initial interventions, peer counseling proves much more effective than a large group session conducted by a behavioral health professional. Training and SOPs for peer counselors may help strengthen the effectiveness of the first interventions.

District Needs

The CISM needs of the SJRD were different and clouded by the legal component. The legal ambiguity concerning liability prevented statements from being taken on site. Because CISM conducted by licensed Behavioral Health Professionals (BHP) falls under confidentiality privilege, it was decided to proceed with the CISM process. However, it was not clear if those being counseled perceived any difference between the confidentiality implicit with a licensed BHP and others.

There are also long-term considerations for the guiding and possibly setting up long-term CISM support, such as for holidays, birthdays, when seasonals are laid off, and cumulative effects. The CISM Group created a Post-Memorial, 3-month, 6-month, 9-month plan for follow-up.

District Needs

- Legal ambiguity concerning liability presents a potential barrier to providing meaningful CISM to people most closely affected by tragedy. When offering CISM to those who may be uncertain about liability issues, it is important to clarify that the CISM conducted by licensed Behavioral Health Professionals (BHPs) falls under confidentiality privilege, and those working with BHPs can speak freely without fear of repercussions.
- Follow-up plans at timed intervals need to address guiding and setting up long-term CISM support.

Contracting

When the number of people needing CISM support overwhelmed the local employee assistance program, no higher-level contract was in place for augmenting the staff. The team had to contract with many BHPs at significant expense. Further, the quality of those contracted varied widely.

In addition, there was no available standard as to the length of time to provide CISM services for family members. The initial contract was to cover 30 days. For employees, the normal EAP process is available for long-term use. A regional or national contract could alleviate these problems.

Contracting

- A regional or national contract to augment BHPs in case of a tragedy mitigates the need for last-minute sourcing, which results in considerable expense and a lack of quality control. Such a contract could also address providing CISM services to family members and standardize the length of time for such assistance.

Legal Issues

Natural friction points develop among the employee support, family support, and investigation objectives of a tragedy response mission. The needs for a thorough and complete investigation and preservation of evidence must be balanced against the needs of the families for situation awareness and closure and the needs of employees to proceed with the CISM process.

This dilemma is significantly compounded by the current ambiguity around liability, employee rights, and the mandatory OIG investigation required by Public Law 107-203. Delays in obtaining and communicating the legal guidance can cause barriers in the interview process, compromise the quality of the investigative process, and impair the healing process.

Agency responsibility; external OSHA and OIG investigations; employee rights, responsibilities, and liability—these are major issues to resolve in the initial phase of a tragedy. Concurrent with the immediate support to families and affected employees, these issues require high-priority discussion, analysis, and coordination with agency leadership so that clear intent and legal guidance can be provided to those affected by the investigation.

Employees had no agency *legal advisor* to help them determine what they should say or do. Delays in receiving meaningful legal and liability guidance had a significant effect on the stress levels and decision-making abilities of those involved. Areas of legal ambiguity—such as whether or not employees are compelled to provide statements, or whether they have protection if they are compelled—also affect the ability to conduct a timely and effective investigation. Delays in the investigation process may impair the ability to conduct site visits for families and a myriad of other interconnected downstream activities that have to occur in a time compressed environment.

Efforts were made at all levels to influence outside agencies to account for the Forest Service's transition to principles-based operations. These efforts appeared to be minimally effective. The decision to compel employees to give statements, thus effectively giving them immunity, was an attempt to do the right thing. In the long run, however, the agency has a vital need to clarify legal and liability issues, developing meaningful ways for holding people accountable for their actions while encouraging strong processes for organizational learning.

Legal Issues

- The Agency has a vital need to clarify legal and liability issues, developing meaningful ways for holding people accountable for their actions while encouraging strong processes for organizational learning.

Conclusion

In formulating this unique mission, the Forest Service strived to honor unreservedly the service of firefighters who died in an inherently dangerous environment. The Forest Service demonstrated its respect for these firefighters even while struggling against the numerous rules that imply that such a tragedy must cast doubts on the actions and decisions of those who had lost their lives.

Based on the anecdotal feedback from families, people who attended the memorial and funerals, and that of the interviewees, the Forest Service succeeded in rendering due honor to the fallen, supporting the families, providing fire suppression coverage, planning for long-term planning for re-engagement, and making an effort of which its employees and the firefighting community can be proud.

By conducting this support mission, the Forest Service took a significant stride towards its goal of basing operations on principles instead of rules. This step can be a catalyst for similarly applying principles to investigations.

While there are many difficulties still to overcome, this earnest attempt to apply the attitudes and expectations of principles-based operations to such sensitive and consequential tasks as honoring firefighters and investigating their deaths should encourage the Forest Service that its leaders have a readiness to step up to this challenge.

Applying Judgment and Principles

This effort involved identifying intent and focus areas for abstract concepts such as honor and compassion. To do so required adapting an organizational system designed for fighting wildfires to one that took into account such sensitive and human tasks as conducting family visits at a fatality site and celebrating the service and lives of the firefighters at a Memorial.

To support the unique needs of each of the five families, the Forest Service employees, and the public, the members of the IMT were dispersed across several branches that acted on their own initiative, guided by unifying principles and leader's intent.

Adapting to these unique requirements necessitated the careful judgment of nearly 300 people in an exceptionally stressful situation. In most cases, there were no rules in place to underpin the exercise of this judgment. Where they were in place, rules sometimes worked against the mission or were not organized clearly enough to aid those assisting the families.

In the end, people employing their judgment and the principles of the Forest Service adapted and applied their tools, including ICS, to a significant and consequential mission as different from fire suppression as can be imagined.

Adapting ICS

In this mission, the CIIMT-1 further proved that ICS is a flexible organizational system that can be adapted to new and unique missions.

Special adaptations included but were not limited to the following: creating an Information Branch to better organize the dozens of information officers; creating a Memorial Branch that was not under Operations; pushing the branch planning process to the group level; providing flexibility to logistics personnel assigned to Family Support Groups to enable them to work independently or report back to the logistics section; and providing personnel such as a Planning Section Chief and Resource Unit Leader to the adapted groups and branches to conduct meetings and develop written Action Plans while coordinating with the IMT Planning Section.

As the USFS assumes other new and varied missions, making these adaptations of ICS to non-fire missions will become more common, be they for responding to tragedies, managing all-hazards incidents, or taking on some other as yet unanticipated task.

Agency-Wide Issues

The BDF Engine 57 Support Mission demonstrated a need for the Forest Service to address a number of issues that will inevitably resurface in subsequent tragedy responses if no corrective action is taken. The complications experienced during this mission due to the ambiguity surrounding these issues calls for a comprehensive resolution.

- **Protocols**—This mission uncovered a pressing need for standard protocols for matters such as notifying family members, transferring remains, providing family support, planning funerals and so on. For example, protocols could include roles and responsibilities for Family Liaisons. Importantly, the protocols must be readily accessible because the need for them inevitably occurs in high-stress, chaotic situations. A number of entities have already invested considerable time and energy in developing such protocols, so they do not need to be created but rather centralized and coordinated.
- **Financial Policy**—Ambiguous and inconsistent guidance regarding financial policy created numerous dilemmas for those working in family support groups. A lack of clarity regarding what can and cannot be provided using agency and donated funds exacerbates an already difficult situation for Forest Service employees.
- **Benefits**—The Forest Service needs to decide how, after a fire fatality, it will coordinate information regarding benefits effectively to family members. Information includes Forest Service benefits as well as compensation from other sources—Social Security, Wildland Firefighter Foundation, International Association of Firefighters, Victims of Crimes, Burned Firefighters, and Department of Justice.
- **Legal and Liability Concerns**—A set of foundational principles that explicitly acknowledge the inherent dangers of fighting fire is a critical underpinning for resolving legal and liability issues. Such principles would then allow and encourage the Agency to develop the legal mechanisms that protect responders and incident management teams while holding them accountable for their judgment and decisions. Failure to address these issues will compromise the ability of the Forest Service to respond to tragedies decisively and comprehensively in the future.

Appendix: Decision Support Matrix

Initial Response

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Initial Response	Stand down other resources associated with tragedy.		
Notifying Families	<p>Send Forest Service employees to notify families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify people with appropriate demeanor or experience. Be aware that personnel information may not be current. 	Integrate initial notifiers into continuing response efforts.	
Peer Support	Tap into personal network of peers and colleagues to act as backup and force-multipliers.	Engage in ongoing discussions for clarifying roles and responsibilities as well as for setting trigger points for handoffs and transitions.	
Developing Initial Priorities	Begin a process that uses a defined <i>end state</i> as the starting point for developing priorities, intent, and objectives.	Once the end state is defined, employ ICS in a deliberate decision-making process to refine further.	
Ordering a Type-1 IMT	<p>Consider employing a Type 1 IMT.</p> <p>Ideally, the team is from the mission area and of a level that ensures interagency composition.</p>		

Managing the Effort

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Mission Analysis	Undertake a formal and deliberate process to analyze the mission at the onset to set the stage for a successful mission by articulating the scope and end state of the mission and identifying clear leader's intent, objectives, and priorities.		
Applying ICS	Use ICS even for non-traditional missions. It provides a meaningful frame of reference that enables responders at all levels to respond effectively.	When overlaying ICS on a non-traditional mission, keep a keen eye on default terminology and practices that may need to be adapted.	
Displaying SA		For out of the ordinary response requirements, typical means of visualizing the response may not be sufficient. Begin finding creative ways to communicate the organization and status of the response.	
Operational Tempo		Persist in asking questions that keep situation awareness high and help team members sort through priorities to keep their focus on the most critical tasks.	
Establishing a Presence at the District	Begin integrating your presence at the district and instituting an effective means of communicating and coordinating between the district and the IMT.	To manage relationship with the District, continue early discussions and ongoing communications to ensure a reasonable balance that meets the district's needs.	
Communications	Use cell phones for initial communications.	Cell phones allow the communication of sensitive information with family members, the public, and outside entities dictates. Consider using radios to supplement and backup the use of cell phones.	

Supporting the Families

Survivors

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Staffing		Clarify the requirements and clearly stipulate the amount of authority given to group supervisors to ensure that they can be flexible and responsive at all levels.	Ensure that those working with family members maintain appropriate relationships with the families they support.
Hospital	Begin establishing a presence at the hospital and developing protocols.	EMTs and other medically trained people can facilitate communication between the medical staff and the families.	
Hospital	Implement security to reflect the wishes of the family while addressing well-wishers.	Work with the hospital staff to acquire the necessary workspace, phone lines, and Internet access and to clarify limitations on cell phone or radio use.	

Funerals

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Service Planning		Tailor service planning to meet the needs and desires of the family members.	Set up a command post for each event to enable quick response to unexpected disruptions or changes without disturbing the ceremony.
Service Planning			Be prepared to coordinate significant security arrangements at ceremonies to manage both external effects to the family and potential issues resulting from internal family dynamics.
Legal Requirements		Provide family liaisons with a briefing packet or checklist of critical tasks with examples to access. If unavailable, create this packet.	
Legal Requirements		If a visit to the fatality site is difficult or impossible, develop other ways to meet the intent of helping families comprehend the nature of the tragic events.	

Fatality Site Visits

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Preparing the Site			To ensure a positive experience, prepare family members by using maps, diagrams, and other aids to inform them about the site in advance.
Conducting Visits			Ensure that personal keepsakes and mementos are provided to family members and can be taken with them after the visit.
Conducting Visits			Begin identifying guides for fatality site visits. These guides should be experienced firefighters and prepared to appropriately answer questions.
Conducting Visits			Plan to secure fatality site areas from all manner of intrusions—noise as well as unwanted presence of outsiders and the media.

Finance

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Benefits		Quickly communicate clear guidance to family liaisons regarding financial matters in support one of the primary response objectives: meeting the surviving families’ immediate needs decisively, honorably, and compassionately.	Continue administrative support to answer questions and provide clarification about subsequent issues.
Benefits		Offer options regarding when information about Agency benefits is communicated, allowing each family to decide when they are ready to receive this information.	
Benefits		Be prepared to explain to the families the process for receiving a death gratuity.	
Gifts		Establish a coordinator or other mechanisms for directing gifts and donations to the family support function.	

Memorializing the Fallen

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Team structure		Whether a Type 2 IMT or a branch is in place to manage a memorial, ensure that the team is able to function as an IMT.	
Planning		To mitigate pressures for scope creep and to set a clear and simple end state, identify and define constraints such as cost, number of attendees, and air support required for flyover tribute.	
Planning		Set an absolute cutoff time for event timing changes and plan backwards to determine the final date for printing programs to prevent unnecessary changes and expenses.	Tap into organizations such as the IAFF, CDF, and municipal fire departments. They are willing to help with protocols, guidelines, speakers, and other support.
Planning		Begin working closely with families to get their input for a Memorial service.	
Planning		Begin engaging an experienced graphics or acoustics production staff to accommodate necessary turnaround time for products.	
Planning		Request the services of the Forest Service Honor Guard early in the process.	
Planning			Use a timed event script as a helpful blueprint for planning an event.
Elected officials		To coordinate the involvement of elected officials and resolve any disputes, appoint an empowered decision maker from higher levels in the Agency with the requisite expertise in protocol to act as the liaison for elected officials.	Exercise caution when and if selecting speakers from unions, foundations, and volunteer agencies.

Continuing Fire Suppression Operations

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Team structure		Establish a Fire Suppression Branch or other structure to enable fire suppression employees to attend funeral and memorial services while ensuring continuity of fire suppression.	When planning for a stand down, explicitly formalize staffing requirements and agreements.
Roles and responsibilities		Clarify duties for the resources and staff during the stand down to ensure that resources in stand-down mode do not stay in service.	Formally document status of resources in resource tracking systems to avoid misunderstandings regarding cover resources.

Managing Information

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Roles and responsibilities		In missions requiring dispersed information officers, begin developing a master plan of roles and responsibilities to prevent overlapping or conflicting assignments.	Adapt structure as situation evolves.
Methods		Develop methods for managing information from across all branches and groups as well as how to feed information to a central coordination center.	
<i>Controlling the Release of Information</i>	Recognize that information is difficult to control in modern environments.	Shift focus from controlling information to developing comprehensive, proactive communications strategy that reflects both immediate- and long-term goals.	
<i>Controlling the Release of Information</i>		Begin monitoring the media to gather information about what is being reported by outside sources. Develop a consistent message to convey the official Agency reaction to the tragedy and the goals of the response.	
<i>Controlling the Release of Information</i>		Work to provide local fire and law enforcement departments with early information about events within their jurisdiction to ensure the appropriate support from outside entities.	

Critical Incident Stress Management

	Immediate	First days	Subsequent days
Initial Intervention	For initial interventions, peer counseling proves much more effective than a large group session conducted by a behavioral health professional.		
Team structure	Recognize that the need for Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) or other support may extend to many levels, including the forest, district, and IMT.	Consider establishing a CISM Branch effectively consolidates initial responses from separate agencies, can prevent parallel or overlapping efforts.	
District Needs		Legal ambiguity concerning liability presents a potential barrier to providing meaningful CISM to people most closely affected by tragedy. When offering CISM to those who may be uncertain about liability issues, it is important to clarify that the CISM conducted by licensed Behavioral Health Professionals (BHPs) falls under confidentiality privilege, and those working with BHPs can speak freely without fear of repercussions	
District Needs			Follow-up plans at timed intervals need to address guiding and setting up long-term CISM support.
Contracting		Acquiring additional CISM resources may require issuing ad hoc contracts.	