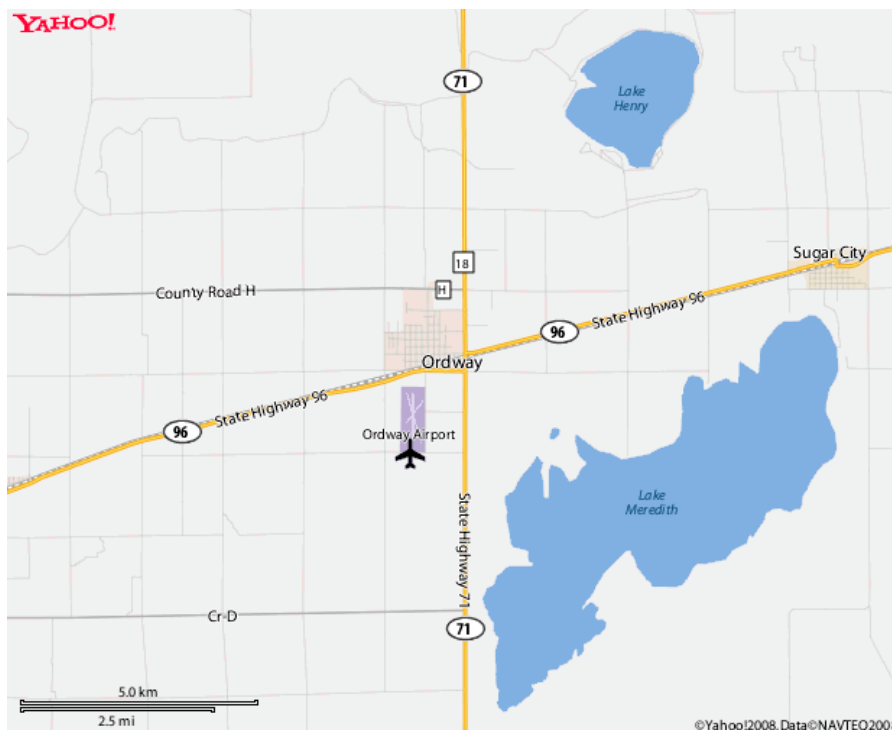


After Action Report

NAME/DATE OF INCIDENT: Town of Ordway (Crowley County), April 15-17, 2008

SITUATION:

At approximately 2:00pm MST, a wildfire was reported east of the Town of Ordway. Due to dry grasslands and wind highs the fire grew rapidly. By the time the initial reports had been received, four structures within city limits and ten in the rural area had been damaged. Many power poles were destroyed but electric supply was not effecting Atmos Energy gas operations in the region. Approximately 25-30 gas meters had been turned off with another 25-30 gas meters slightly damaged resulting in no immediate safety threat to customers. Re-lights were underway to those houses not damaged.



As of 4:30 pm April 16, the fire was considered to be 100 percent contained. Burned property stood at 8,900 acres. A total of 24 homes were destroyed. Power has been restored to the Town. While power was restored to out-lying areas on the 17. The evacuation order for the Town of Ordway was lifted at 1:00 pm on the 16th and residents were allowed to return to their homes immediately.

Shelters were originally set up in Sugar City and the City of Crowley, which were later consolidated and reestablished at the high school in Ordway.

During the course of the incident, on April 15, two volunteer fire fighters were killed. The cause of this accident is being investigated.

As the situation moved into the recovery phase, several priorities emerged (not in priority order):

1. Agricultural business issues;
2. Blowing soils;
3. Financial impact on the local economy (FMAGP Details: The threshold is \$266,678. The state probably has not met its threshold to date so this fire has to meet the single threshold. The communities have been instructed to capture all suppression/fire fighting costs, including security, evacuation, and supporting costs. A start and end date for the incident was determined. CSFS has nine months to apply for the money, or they can ask for a 3 month extension.);
4. Housing (Town Administrator has a list of potential rental properties. Division of Local Governments has a hotline for victims. Vouchers for rentals are being developed. Department of Corrections (DOC) set up mobile home units for several DOC displaced families.);
5. Infrastructure restoration (SBA damage assessment and determination of insurance coverage. SBA has set up an office in the Town Hall);
6. Mental health (Southeast Mental Health had 8 personnel working the fire area making contacts and handing out contact information.);
7. Physical health.

The Crowley County Community Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit foundation, and established an account at the First national Bank of Ordway for contributions, which are tax deductible.

Agencies Involved: County/local fire departments along with law enforcement agencies:

Adventist Community Service
 American Red Cross
 Colorado Department of Agriculture
 Colorado Department of Corrections
 Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
 Colorado Department of Transportation
 Colorado Division of Emergency Management
 Colorado Division of Fire Safety
 Colorado Division of Housing
 Colorado Division of Local Governments
 Colorado State Patrol
 Rocky Mountain Coordination Center
 Salvation Army
 Small Business Administration
 State Forest Service

The Colorado Department of Agriculture provided assistance in the rendering of those animals (200 goats, twelve calves, two horses, discovered thus far) that were killed in the fire. The Colorado Division of Housing established a help line for the residents to help identify the needs of those who lost their homes and to offer possible solutions. One of these solutions was to offer rental assistance vouchers. Other assistance will be determined based upon the on-going needs damage assessment.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS:

April 15, 2008	2:09 pm	Fire first reported
	2:40 pm	Schools evacuated to Ward Middle School
	3:10 pm	Emergency preparedness network call enacted and shelters opened. The Town of Ordway placed under an evacuation order pm. Students evacuated from the Middle School to the school in Sugar City
	3:20 pm	Accident claiming the lives of volunteer fire fighters Sergeant Terry DeVore and Officer John Schwartz occurred on Highway 96 west of Ordway at mile marker 104.
	3:45 pm	Call went out to all South and South Eastern Fire Departments requesting all available fire trucks and fire fighters to the scene.
	6:00 pm	State Agencies hold a multi-agency coordination meeting in Ordway.
	8:00 pm	Southern Region Mobile Command vehicle arrived on the scene.
	10:00 pm	Fire 40% contained.
	April 16, 2008	1:00 am
7:00 am		Fire 80% contained.
10:00 am		Fire 85% contained.
11:00 am		Fire 90% contained.
12:20 pm		After viewing accident site, Governor Ritter arrives at Ordway and is briefed by command staff at the Crowley County Emergency Command Center.
1:00 pm		Evacuation Order lifted and residents begin to return.
1:45 pm		Governor Ritter visits Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility and meets with staff regarding their losses.
2:00 pm		Fire 95% contained.
3:45 pm		Governor Ritter addresses citizens of Ordway.
4:10 pm		Governor tours effected areas.
4:30 pm		Fire 100% contained. Began implementing sawyer operations within the fire perimeter. Clean up operations begin.
6:00 pm		Fire Teams demobilize and depart Ordway.
April 17, 2008		12:00 pm
	3:30 pm	Emergency Command Center demobilizes.

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. **ITEM:** Check in procedure especially in regional response.

DISCUSSION:

The chaos at the Ordway fire is the rule rather than the exception. Routine calls requiring only a local response allow for a degree of order. Job assignments, assigned radio channels and direct supervision have been predetermined allowing for organizational accountability. However, when an incident overwhelms the local responders and they request outside assistance no arrangements are made for interagency accountability. Local Chiefs rarely withdraw from the initial attack and plan for the regional responder's arrival. Regional responders operating in this information vacuum either waste valuable time looking for someone in charge to gain information and an assignment or they decide on their own what tasks to perform. Some out of frustration simply demobilize themselves without ever being heard from. If an incident management team is activated their efforts are frustrated by time spent attempting to account for resources already deployed. Responding agencies remain on their home radio channel thereby dragging their home radio traffic to the incident and overwhelming the system.

RECOMMENDATION:

Any emergency response is predicated on the knowledge of resources on scene, resources needed and the effective deployment of those resources. Local Chiefs must be responsible for establishing check in procedure when requesting regional response. Responding agencies must be told where to report for check in. Upon arrival they must be assigned a MAC channel on which to operate, maps or a local guide/liaison. Type and kind of equipment/personnel recorded, job assignments issued and supervisors identified. Recommend a specific block of instruction at the ICS-100 level on check in procedures for Colorado. A state wide campaign of emphasis spearheaded by CDEM and the Division of Fire Safety supported by local emergency coordinators could be effective.

2. **ITEM:** On-Site Incident Management (Initial Attack)

DISCUSSION: As the Ordway Fire started at a Type 4 Incident it quickly expanded to a Type 2 Incident with multiple agency response throughout the South and Southeast Region along with air operations being implemented. Also the tragic complexity of a vehicle accident with a fire engine within the first 40 minutes of the incident resulting in the deaths of two firefighters.

The fire was reported around 2:09 p.m. as the response was beginning to unfold and mutual aid resources responding to the incident there was no staging area or incident command post set up until nearly 5:00 p.m. I believe this is a critical element that needs to be established on the onset of any incident to maintain accountability of personnel and to establish priorities and objectives of managing the incident.

RECOMMENDATION: These components are laid out in training through the various ICS classes offered. However it is some of these training have been provided state-wide by instructors who never been on an incident and these points are failed to be pointed out in the importance of these critical tasks. These key components also need to be held closely by the local agencies in order to effectively manage expanding incidents.

3. **ITEM:** Radio Communications
DISCUSSION: No direct communications between CDOT and CSP during initial attack of the incident. Once the incident expanded to numerous mutual aid agencies it became problematic for agencies to switch from their local channels to the State MAC Channels.

RECOMMENDATION: A radio talk group analysis should be completed to determine what agencies need to talk to other agencies directly or should this be coordinated on MAC channels. This should drive the implementation and adoption of a comprehensive communications plan that covers all agencies within the County and how to contact various State and Mutual Aid agencies. Protocols from the field command need to update dispatch of the location of check-in, staging area and the command post to streamline the radio talkgroup assignment from the time of order mutual aid resources. A radio training should then be done to all first responders and then tested and exercises to ensure the first responders know where the talk groups are located and the protocols for the State MAC channels.

4. **ISSUE:** Expectations
DISCUSSION: During the Ordway wildland fire, it was expected that the Division of Emergency Management would have a clear picture of what was taking place on the ground so that it could intercede at anytime. This is based upon a false premise that a clear understanding of the incident would occur once the incident is discovered.

Expectations lead to the perception that actions can be immediately taken to mitigate the effects of the incident. Just like tornados, mud slides, avalanches, blizzards, wildland fires will occur. Experts can make some predictions about where and when, however those are only predictions. In reality, it takes time to get knowledgeable individuals in place to observe the incident and accurately report what is happening. One problem with this is what may be a fact at minute ten may of the incident may not be a fact at minute twenty.

RECOMMENDATION: It is incumbent upon the DEM leadership to lower Governor's Office expectations.

5. **ITEM:** Recognition of automatic State agency response to local incidents.
DISCUSSION: Many State agencies (CDOT, CSP, State Forest Service, Natural Resources, etc) have equipment and personnel working in most of the All-Hazard Regions as part of their normal day-to-day operations. In most cases, local jurisdictions have a good handle on the response assets that are physically present in their jurisdictions or through surrounding jurisdictions via mutual aid. In the past, these State agency assets have been considered "local assets" because of pre-established agreements (whether oral or written) and their capability to immediately respond to a call for help.

A different take is that individual active duty military reservations are authorized to enter into agreements with local jurisdictions to provide emergency response assets from their installations. This is a mutual aid-type agreement; however is it considered Department of Defense (DoD) support? Yes and No. Yes-technical these are DoD assets, but No-the Secretary of Defense does not need to approve each "local deployment" and it does not need to go through the Defense Coordination Element at FEMA.

RECOMMENDATION: When an incident occurs, recognize that there will be a high probability that State assets will be involved to one degree or another. However, the concept of “State assistance being requested” should be applied only to those requests that fall outside of the mutual aid region.

6. **ISSUE:** EOC/ICP Back-up Power & Internet Services

DISCUSSION: Crowley County installed a new generator approximately one year ago that has the capability of supplying electricity to the entire Justice Center. As such, although the power was out in much of the county and all of the Town of Ordway, the Incident Command Center, was never in the dark.

Although the power was always on, internet was disrupted as a result of three issues. (1) The County's IT specialist was not allowed to travel into the town of Ordway. He attempted to call someone to help, but the cell phones were not working adequately, (2) The fiber optic lines melted, and (3) The building housing the equipment was not connected to the generator. Thus, no power. The county's internet is supplied by SECOM. Although unknown prior to the fire, SECOM's fiber is located above ground, exposed to the elements of weather as well as fire. The equipment necessary to run internet is located in the Admin. building, a facility not serviced by the new generator. When the power went off in the Town of Ordway, it rendered the county internet inoperable. When we connected the equipment to power via an extension cord, we found that the fiber lines had melted.

RECOMMENDATION: We have issued the County IT specialist an ID card and are considering issuing him a county radio for emergencies. This should correct the problems noted in # (1) above. We have corrected the problems resulting from melted fiber optic lines by installing CenturyTel's DSL in the Justice Center. These fiber optic lines are located underground, where they are not exposed to the weather or fire. Since the Justice Center has the back-up generator ensuring continuous power, the remaining problems noted in (3) above should be eliminated.

7. **ISSUE:** School District Emergency Situation Drills

DISCUSSION: Crowley County Schools will continue to conduct regular drills for emergency situations. Drills include specific information and instruction for students.

RECOMMENDATION: We will conduct safety meetings with appropriate agencies to continually strive for preparedness. Additionally we will work to improve and upgrade our communication system/equipment with local law enforcement and emergency responders with school officials working with key players and practicing procedures.

8. **ITEM:** Requesting Support through PIDC

DISCUSSION: When PIDC received the first call for assistance (Air Tankers) it was for a fire in Ordway, PIDC was unable to get a location from the Crowley County Sheriff's Office for the fire other than West of Ordway or in the Town of Ordway. With little intelligence and situational awareness other than it was big and had several homes threatened by the fire. PIDC picked the location that was given and assigned a Lat/Long coordinate and Township/Section/Range. PIDC also was supporting the TA-25 fire with requests for Air Tankers. With little available intelligence PIDC was prioritizing based on what we knew, which could have resulted in the Ordway incident not receiving resources. Ordway was not able to communicate on our assigned radio frequencies for the Air to Ground and PIDC was unable to establish reliable contact with someone from the fire. At one point it was being considered to divert the air craft away from the incident as there was no communications being established with the incident. At one point CSP started calling PIDC to advise us to tell the Air Tankers where to drop (which we were unable to do) after they had established communication, which was very confusing and PIDC was only able to tell CSP that we could not do that they had to go through the Incident Commander, which was unknown at the onset (initial attack) of the actual Incident Commander. Ordering of personnel and equipment seemed to go well except for the orders that went through to individual agencies instead of PIDC. Cancellation of some resources could have been missed as they were just sent by fax and not followed up with a phone call for some time.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Departments should include PIDC into their emergency plans (for wildland fires) and become familiar with the operating guidelines that are in place for working with PIDC.
2. Departments should have established radio's for Air to ground use for wildland fires.
3. Departments should know procedures for ordering aircraft through PIDC (PIDC is willing to assist with this) or establish a local procedure that matches PIDC's.
4. Departments should become familiar with working with Aircraft.
5. Departments should become familiar with how to order aircraft and working with the WERF.
6. Departments should understand what regional and national priorities are and how these priorities are associated with Tactical Aircraft and Values at Risk.
7. Departments should have readily available radio frequency lists
8. Departments as available visit PIDC and see the operations.
9. Department Dispatch Center personnel as available attend the annual Dispatch Workshop held by PIDC.
10. Local (co state) IMT and PIDC hold meetings to learn each others operations for future support needs.
11. PIDC is willing to assist any agency in training or support as needed