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LESSON LEARNED

Fire Department Operations: Alternative Means of Communication

SUMMARY

Fire and rescue organizations should plan for expedient alternative means of communications in the event that radios become overloaded and ineffective during a large-scale emergency.

DESCRIPTION

Emergency communications at the Pentagon site proved challenging on September 11, 2001. Radio communications among emergency responders quickly became overloaded. These communication problems persisted throughout rescue operations.

Foot messengers often proved to be the most reliable means of communications during the initial rescue efforts. Arlington County Fire Department Captain Jeff Liebold used foot messengers to inventory on-site units. He sent two firefighters on foot to record the identification number and location of each piece of equipment on the Pentagon ground since radio communications could not be employed to perform this task. Fortunately, a surplus of personnel was available at the incident site to serve in that capacity.

According to the *Arlington County After-Action Report*, fire and rescue organizations should establish plans for alternate means of communications during mass-casualty incidents. A number of methods can be employed, including foot messengers.

CITATION

Titan Systems Corporation. *Arlington County After-Action Report on the Response to the September 11 Terrorist Attack on the Pentagon*. May 30, 2002.

(http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/fire/edu/about/docs/after_report.pdf)

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