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LESSON LEARNED

Emergency Management: Updating Incident Action Plans Throughout an Incident's Response

SUMMARY

Incident commanders should consider having incident action plans (IAP) routinely updated during extended response activities.

DESCRIPTION

On October 5, 2006, at approximately 9:38 a.m., the Apex Fire Department (AFD) responded to a report of a chlorine odor at a street intersection in Apex, North Carolina. AFD Engine Company 3 reported a large vapor cloud upon arrival to the scene at approximately 9:43 a.m. and immediately requested a second alarm. The fire chief arrived soon thereafter and established the incident command post. The Apex Police Department (APD) activated the Apex Reverse 9-1-1 system, which provided Apex residents with relevant emergency and shelter-in-place information. APD officers also went door-to-door to evacuate those residents living downwind of the gas cloud.

AFD reconnaissance teams could not determine the source of the chlorine release throughout the initial response and evacuation. However, a fire eventually burned through the roof of the nearby Environmental Quality Company and released a plume of unknown chemical vapors. AFD immediately sounded a general alarm that recalled its entire staff to respond to the incident, and APD recalled its officers for extended evacuation duties. AFD personnel and contract firefighters could not begin offensive operations until the fires died down at 9:00 a.m. the next day. In all, approximately 17,000 evacuated their homes, and 33 individuals sought medical attention for respiratory distress and skin irritation.

For additional information on the incident response, please see the [US Fire Administration Chemical Fire in Apex, North Carolina Report](#).

During the response, the planning section provided incident command with an IAP for each 12-hour segment as well as a second IAP for the next consecutive 12-hour segment. The planning section routinely updated the IAP, which ensured that incident command had a current and future plan in place at all times. This enabled the AFD to effectively integrate mutual aid into the ongoing response operations. The planning section successfully updated the IAP despite being short-staffed. The US Fire Administration noted that "AFD personnel had been using an IAP daily for shift staffing and assignment." This helped build familiarity with the IAP process, which helped eliminate any problems with line personnel during the response to the chlorine vapor cloud.

Incident commanders should consider having IAPs routinely updated during extended response activities.

CITATION

Department of Homeland Security, United States Fire Administration. *Technical Report Series: Chemical Fire in Apex, North Carolina*. April 2008.

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