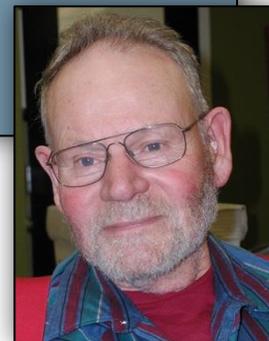


Selkirk School District and Pend Oreille County emergency operations trailer are considered vital contributions to the Baldy Fire Incident suppression success.



Logistics Chief Jim Hammer of the Washington Interagency Incident Management Team #4 thankful for the school facilities, emergency command post trailer, and local support

Ione, Wash., -- When the Baldy Fire was detected on Saturday, August 1, 2015 it grew quickly to about 300 acres in size. The fire had the potential of burning toward the town of Ione located six miles southeast of the fire, other communities along the Pend Oreille River, critical power lines and a state highway. The small town’s population grew as hundreds of firefighting personnel began arriving.

All of these firefighters needed a place to stay. The Washington Interagency Incident Management Team #4 (WIIMT #4) arrived to assume command of the fire and help meet the needs of the firefighters. This includes providing sleeping areas, food, toilet facilities, showers, supplies, information, and operational planning oversight. The Selkirk High School was ready to accommodate these needs.

According to Jim Hammer, logistics section chief for WIIMT#4, the school was ready for the Team and firefighters. The Colville National Forest arranged for the school to become the base camp for operations and negotiating agreements with the Selkirk School District to establish the Baldy Fire Incident Command Post (ICP) at this convenient location. The School had all of the qualities needed for a large incident: space for 400 to 500 firefighters to set up tents, parking areas, and rooms for his team to immediately begin supporting the firefighting effort.

“Schools are usually good locations for ICPs because they are available during fire season, and are easily converted into fire unit offices to immediately begin operations,” he said. “The Selkirk High School facility made plenty of rooms available for our operations and eliminated the need to bring in trailers and yurts. The school already had the electricity, WiFi, water, restrooms, heat and air conditioning, saving time and money that would otherwise been spent setting up these amenities,” he added.

Hammer said school facilities are a preferred location for fire ICPs because they are healthier locations for firefighters and Team members. “The Selkirk High School has grass lawns for tents, a dust-free road environment, modern sanitary conveniences, and air-conditioned meeting and work areas,” he said.

MORE

When asked whether or not such an increase in use would have a negative impact on the facility, Hammer said that the Team would leave the school in as good condition as possible once everyone is demobilized from the fire. “Lawns that cannot be watered where tents are set up are generally the largest impact we have,” he said. “We stayed off the football field, so it is still in great condition and, by next spring, nobody will be able to tell we were here.”

After a long career of setting up ICPs for fires, Hammer was pleasantly surprised to find such a friendly and cooperative staff with which to work. “The school principal and maintenance staff have been available to help us with every need. They have worked late and on our second night in the School, we literally had to pull them out of bed to come help us when the town of Ione lost electricity,” he said.

“Our working relationship with the School has been amazing. We are lucky to have the full use of the grounds and rooms for our business operations all at one place and at such a great location. Sometimes, things don’t work out this well,” he said.

The Pend Oreille County Emergency Command Post Trailer

Upon their arrival at the Selkirk High School, Pend Oreille County Sheriff Alan Botzheim, made a very generous offer to WIIMT #4, offering the Team use of the Pend Oreille County Emergency Command Post trailer – a self-contained command post with built-in radio and satellite communications. The Team’s Communication Unit immediately accepted the offer and they are glad they did.

The command post has provided an excellent working environment for the eight Team personnel from the Communications and Medical units. According to Hammer, the trailer has been in use 24 hours per day for radio communications between the ICP and firefighters at the fire. “Radio operators have found the design of the command post fits their needs for transmitting and receiving vital information over the radio,” Hammer said. “The unit has an isolated area where background noise is minimized and radio signal strength is excellent,” he added.

Medical Unit personnel have also found the command post to have adequate privacy and space for treating minor injuries. “The co-location of the Medical and Communication Units is an ideal situation for emergency medical situations,” Hammer said, “and in the case where an injury is serious enough to require transport of a patient, immediate help by Communications personnel is essential.”

Because the command post has a generator that operates the entire trailer and satellite communication systems, it was used by WIIMT #4 to produce a daily action plan for firefighters when a transformer malfunctioned and electricity was cut off to the town of Ione and the School. “We were able to sit in the fully-lighted trailer, use our computers and print the plan for the next operating period,” Hammer said.

While using the command post, the management team personnel are evaluating additional needs for future use of the trailer at fire incidents. “We have compiled some specialized requirements for cloning national wildfire frequencies, setting up a public announcement system for firefighter briefings, and installing external phone connections specifically for fire incident use,” he said, “and, with these additions, it will be an even more important asset next time it is needed.”

END

Incident Command Post Photographs:



**Radio Operator,
Marika Barto, Command Post**



**Selkirk
High School**



**Michelle Ellis and Scott
Blystone, Situation Unit**



**Communication Technicians
inside Command Post**



**WIIMT #4 Briefing
Area at Selkirk High School**



**David Johnson,
Computer Specialist**



**Command Post used by
Communications and
Medical units at Baldy Fire**



**Dean Warner, Fire
Behavior Analyst,
Planning Section**



**Rob Jeter,
Ordering**



**Command
Post**



**John Fox, Incident
Meteorologist, Planning Section**



**Karen Ripley, Public
Information Officer**



**Command
Post**



**Marilyn Coleman and Meredith
Butcher, Resources Unit**



Command Post



Finance Section