

San Jose Fire Department - Incident Dispatcher Team. After Action Report: Santana Row IDT Response



Santana Row: The IDT Response, August 19-22, 2002 On August 19, 2002, the city of San Jose experienced the largest fire in the city's recent history, causing over \$100 million in damage. The first alarm was dispatched to the fire at 1537hrs. By 1540hrs a 3rd alarm had been ordered, with 4th and 5th alarms at 1549hrs. By 1600hrs word of a separate fire, caused by burning embers, came in from the Huff/Moorpark neighborhood, 3 blocks away across freeway 280. The eventual response to both incidents totaled at least 11 alarms worth of equipment, including an alarm assignment from neighboring Santa Clara City Fire, three Santa Clara County engine strike teams, one Santa Clara County mutual aid alarm assignment, and two San Mateo County engine strike teams, plus a variety of special call equipment. The fire department maintained a suppression, command, and investigation presence at the site for four days.



Photo: Paul Hebert

Introduction:

The response to the Santana Row incident on August 19, 2002, affected every active member of the San Jose Fire Incident Dispatch Team, all of whom participated in either the response to the incident command posts or the management of their communications in the dispatch control room. The incident was not only the city's largest fire in at least 30 years, it was also the largest and longest-lasting IDT response our division has handled. Providentially, every IDT member was available to assist either at the scene or at communications (or, in some bases, both) during this event. It demonstrated the value and effectiveness of our Incident Dispatcher Team even while affording opportunities for post-incident analysis and implementation of enhanced guidelines to improve field communications management and team deployment.



This report has been compiled from individual After Action Reports submitted by all IDT personnel involved in the response, and approved for release by the Fire Chief.

- Randall Larson/Editor, 9-1-1 Magazine
Senior Dispatcher/IDT Director/Field Communications Supervisor
San Jose Fire Department, California
March 25, 2003



Santa Clara Fire T7, one of many mutual aid responders, operates at the Winchester @ Olin corner.

The San Jose Fire Department Incident Dispatch Team

Background: Established for rapid deployment to localized major alarms, the San Jose Fire Department Incident Dispatcher Team (IDT) provides an on-scene communications support group, releasing fireground units to resume tactical operations while providing command post assistance to an Incident Commander. The concept integrates the dispatcher's unique skills of multitasking, attention to detail, hearing-and-repeating information accurately, right into the command post. Automatically deployed during incidents of 3-alarms or greater (or when specially requested), the IDT establishes a Field Communications Unit at the Incident Command Post, assuming responsibility for incident communications, resource accountability, and documentation. Having dispatchers on scene allows an Incident Commander to concentrate on command decisions without being tied to the umbilical cord of the radio. The dispatcher handles fireground communications, relaying command decisions to the I/C when needed.



For more information, see <http://www.sjfd.org/Recruitment/idt.htm>

1. IDT Notification: 1545hrs

A good indication to IDT personnel of the initial severity of this incident came when the first group page for fire dept senior staff and IDT management skipped the 2nd and went straight to a 3rd Alarm. A radio page for the IDT group soon followed. Additional group pages were made at the 4th/5th alarm level.

2. IDT Response: 1546hrs

IDT personnel contacted communications and began responding to the scene from off-duty. Dispatchers Deanna Mateo and Lee Ann Magoski were first to arrive on scene at 1550hrs. IDT Director Randall Larson responded from home to Fire Station 26 to deploy the department's Communications/Command Post Support Vehicle, Com26, arriving on scene at 1615hrs. IDT Dispatchers Tracy Deitschman, Lisa Stabler, Kelly Landrie, Patty Hubbard, and Cathy Sgambati arrived early on in the incident. Deputy IDT Director Teresa Zagalo was at the Communications Center during the incident and served as a communications supervisor in Dispatch. Reserve IDT Dispatcher Cindy Hawke had responded to assist in the EOC, and was deployed to the scene as relief IDT near the end of the incident. Former Palo Alto IDT Director Bob Gundrum, on scene as a member of Fire Associates of Santa Clara Valley's Support Rehab Unit, also assisted in the Comm Unit for a time.

Larson: Responding to Station 26, I heard the IC broadcast to all units that this would be a defensive operation only and that no personnel should be inside the building. Shortly thereafter, dispatch was advising reports of embers having caught a roof on fire on an apartment complex across the freeway from Santana Row. I arrived at Station 26 at 4PM and hurriedly loaded my gear into Com26 and then hit the road. I heard BC Conant, as Operations, request two strike teams of engines, noting that the structure fire had become a firestorm "making its own weather." I also monitored IDT member Deanna Mateo, on scene as Winchester Communications, reporting several collapses within the structure. I prepped myself for a major incident.

3. IDT Operations, Monday, August 19:

Mateo: Traffic congestion made Winchester impassable. I parked at Winchester/Magliocco and ran the rest of the way to the Command Post [CP] at Winchester/Olin. Lee Ann came with me. As I was running toward Santana Row I could see the flames rolling over the buildings like surf. The fire was incredible. I could detect a change in wind direction and had the unmistakable feel of the fire sucking the air toward it. I was on the sidewalk in front of the theaters across six lanes of roadway and could still feel the heat.

Mateo: We made it to the command post at about 1550hrs. We walked into a sea of chiefs. Fire Chief Alarcon was at the back of the suburban and when he saw me he handed me the mic and calmly said, "Give me two more alarms." Someone told Lee Ann to take the TAC channel. One of our first tasks was to sort out where all the units were assigned and what the incident organization was. Everyone was still trying to catch up and the incident organization hadn't been mapped out yet. I tried to get out the appropriate ICS forms but radio traffic was so heavy that I couldn't get to them, so I started writing everything down on the grease board instead. FE William Griffith from HIT29 [Hazardous Incident Team] came up to assist, and his crew started accounting for everyone's assignments. He stayed with me for the duration of the fire, and was invaluable. He and his crew figured out where the majority of units were and he organized the grease board so that we had some semblance of order.

Larson: It took 14 minutes to arrive on scene from Station 26. I encountered extensively congested traffic along Moorpark from Bascom to Winchester but maneuvered around it and into the traffic control zone where PD had Winchester shut off from Moorpark to Stevens Creek. Without the code-3 equipment on Com26 permitting access to the scene through that congestion it would have

San Jose Truck 14 operates a water tower on the northwest corner of the incident.



The Winchester Command Post during the overhaul phase of the Santana Row Fire. San Jose's Field Communications Unit served as a command post facility at the incident for four days.



Communications were challenging throughout the fire, with all command and tactical channels congested. Incident Dispatchers managed most of the tactical traffic from the field command post.



taken forever to get there.

Magoski: We were the first IDs to arrive at the Command Post. Since this was my first IDT call out, Deanna had been giving me tips and reminders of IDT responsibilities on our way in. While Deanna ordered the next two alarms for the IC, I was asked to try and contact Communications on my cell phone. I was unable to get out, as all systems were busy. I was then assigned to monitor the TAC Channels and to start logging information on an ICS 214 form [Unit Log]. At this point in the fire, there wasn't much traffic on the TAC channels, although there was a lot of commotion at the Command Post. There were questions about the Huff Fire and if they needed a TAC Channel over there. Med30 [FD Paramedic Supv.] was sent to Huff to determine its needs.

Larson: The CP was set up in the parking lot of a gas station. A group of Chiefs along with Deanna and Lee Ann were huddled around the back of the Battalion 10 Suburban. I positioned Com26 back-to-back behind it, set up the van for operations, and then set to work establishing a Resource Status (ReStat) and Documentation Unit.

Mateo: Randall arrived with Comm26, and boy was I glad to see him! He began setting up the Comm Van and other IDT members started arriving. I asked if he would start the ICS forms and run a log because I hadn't been able to do that yet. We decided that he would log all the traffic so that I could concentrate on handling the requests. This worked out pretty well. I kept trying to pass unit status information to the IDT members in Comm26 so that they could get the board organized and we could move the CP inside but things were changing so fast it wasn't happening. I considered relocating into the Comm Van but we were too busy to move the notes we had on the white board, so we decided against that; it would have complicated the process to uproot the comm position at that point.

Larson: Deanna maintained all communications in and out of the incident, but Chief Alarcon made several requests of me that I tried to handle on the radio as well. It took a long time to get ReStat set up. I first needed to run the event history on the MDT [Mobile Data Terminal] and then ascertain where all of the units were assigned; this in the midst of new requests for resources, plus the increasing needs of the apartment fire on Moorpark/Huff. A 6th alarm plus another mutual aid alarm was ordered at 1626hrs. Chief Alarcon asked me to have Staging release some equipment and send it to Huff; but I was advised there were no units currently in Staging to be assigned. I knew at least two strike teams had been ordered so I relayed to Huff IC that we would divert strike team units to Huff when they arrived.

Deutschman: When I arrived at the CP, I was immediately approached by Assistant Chief Foster who asked me to contact the appropriate water company for this area and boost the water pressure. I went to the cab of Com26 and used the San Jose Fire frequency to make the request as well as to place myself on scene. Then I reported to Randall who asked me to see if Deanna needed assistance on the primary radio. I handed her a bottle of water as she quickly said, between transmissions, "I'm okay."

Hubbard: This was my first response, so I was unsure as to how I was even going to make it through the traffic, given the size of the incident, let alone how I was going to actually make it to the comm van. The traffic was very hectic and congested and I had to divert down some back roads.

Larson: Command Communications were handled primarily from the B10 vehicle by Deanna, while ReStat, Documentation, and Support Communications (including relay between the Santana and Huff CPs, using both radio and cellphone, and between the separate Fire and Police CPs at Santana) out of Com26. Due to the size and frequent congestion of the CP (with numerous fire, police, and utility company personnel) this worked out reasonably well because it allowed for additional IDT personnel in Com26 to handle these other tasks without interfering with the handling of the relentless command channel traffic. It did present a slight barrier in communications between



San Jose Fire Incident Dispatchers assume "Winchester Communications" for 9 hours during the heart of the Santana Row Fire. The IDT also provided resource status/accountability and incident documentation out of the Field Comm van.



San Jose Incident Dispatcher Kelly Laundry enters data into the Field Comm Unit's mobile data terminal. The MDT served both as a communications conduit with the dispatch center and as a documentation center for the incident.



Incident Dispatcher Deanna Mateo was the primary voice of "Winchester Communications" for more than 7 hours during the height of the Santana Row

us in the Van and Deanna at the Suburban. [Postscript: to alleviate this in the future, I have equipped our IDT cache with three FRS (Family Radio Service) portable radios to serve as an informal logistics network between IDT locations at an incident scene. We have used these subsequently and they worked out very well.]

Fire.

Larson: It was a huge relief to find new IDT members showing up. Every time I turned around, it seems a new dispatcher was here, although in the flurry of the constant activity there wasn't much time to coordinate specific directions for them – but they quickly found work to do and assisted wherever needed.

Sgambati: Due to numerous roadblocks and slow snarled traffic, my response was delayed, arriving at the command post at 1756 hours. To my surprise as I entered Comm 26, I found it deserted with the radios blaring. Scanning the scene I found Deanna working the radios at the back of the BC's Suburban but there were no other IDT members currently around to brief me. I noticed that the ReStat board was incomplete, so I decided to start working on that. A few minutes later Kelly came into the Comm Van and I asked her to brief me. She stated she had only been there for a little while and she had limited information, as she had been a runner. She informed me that the Huff Fire was being handled as a separate detail on Command 4 with IDT members Lisa and Lee Ann on scene there. While I was working on ReStat, Randall returned to Com26, briefed me, and started working on documentation. Patty, who is new to IDT, arrived and was assigned to assist me with ReStat. It took us a while before we had that set up, since there were lots of mutual aid equipment, strike teams, and SJ reserve engines with no T-cards [ICS Resource Status cards].



Aerial view of the Santana Row Fire.

Hubbard: At the Command Post I found Deanna working the radio with the IC. Cathy and Kelly were inside Com26. Upon entering the Comm van, Cathy put me to work on the ReStat board. This was a very hard task as we had 2 strike teams as well as all of our units. Some of the San Jose units on our detail had actually been diverted over to the Huff incident. I made phone calls to Dispatch and we checked with different firefighters and BC's to find out which apparatus were at which incident.



Aerial view of the Huff/Moorpark apartment fires. Caused by embers blown across the freeway from Santana Row, the multiple incidents challenged the county's mutual aid response plan.

Deitschman: My assignment was to answer several different mobile phones that were passed to me to handle a variety of questions and requests. I overheard radio traffic from incoming mutual aid units reporting they were having difficulty locating a Staging Manager. The Ops Chief realized the Staging Manager had been reassigned. Knowing there were sufficient IDT personnel at the CP, I asked Opts if he would like me to assume Staging. The offer was appreciated and I donned the designated ICS vest and commandeered a police officer to drive me to the Staging location. I was met by the captain of County Fire Engine 9, who provided me with an ICS-201 form. He was very helpful and offered his assistance. After several San Jose reserve units arrived in Staging they realize they didn't have any T-cards. I attempted to raise Opts on my portable radio just as several firefighters came up telling me "Opts is calling you on the radio!" Turned out my freshly charged radio from Com26 had died. I moved my Staging workstation to the cab of one of the SJ engines so I could use its radio. Kelly brought out a fresh radio and a stack of T-cards. Requests for resources were complicated by the fact that many of the San Jose reserve apparatus in staging were not fully equipped. I went down the row of apparatus noting what equipment they had or didn't have – tarps, portable radios, ALS/BLS equipment, etc, so I could assign them properly when requested. I also assigned them radio IDs if they didn't have them.

3a: Huff Communications

Larson: At 1740hrs I assigned Lisa and Lee Ann to report to the Huff Incident and set up IDT support for BC George Vega and DC Lacy Atkinson who were running that operation. Division Chief Thomas was assigned to the Huff incident. I told Lisa the best route of travel to get to Huff, since she would be driving over in her personal vehicle and would encounter various road blocks and fire hoses across Winchester.

Magoski: Lisa and I parked on Winchester and proceeded on foot down Huff until we located the Command Post. There were aerial ladders up and they were spraying water over the street; it felt good to walk through the spray after feeling the intense heat of Santana Row. We met with BC Vega and DC Atkinson at the Command Post. Chief Vega immediately relinquished to us his radio and position at the back of the Suburban. Lisa assumed Huff Communications and I began track the division assignments on the ICS 201 form. Radio traffic was heavy and it was hard trying to determine where each division was. When we arrived we had five divisions (Alpha-Echo).

Stabler: Chief Vega had already drawn the fireground map on the workstation located in the rear of the Chief's Suburban. He also had the Division groups and units assigned to them written with the grease pen on the workstation. This helped, as the position of the command post was getting a lot of spray from the fire hoses. We eventually took over the radio and the status keeping. We transferred the information from the workstation to appropriate IDT forms 201 and 214.

Magoski: There were numerous units in Staging at Huff/Magliocco and there was also a separate Staging area for trucks at Baywood/Huff. Managing these units became a big task. Because radio traffic was so heavy and we needed to have contact with Winchester Communications we began to call each other on our personal cell phones to coordinate staging and other responsibilities. We also had to relay information that was pertinent to the IC. If we had not had cell phones it would have been harder to pass on information.

Magoski: The night rolled on. Mutual aid units in staging were eventually released, although later we requested additional SJ trucks for overhaul. Winchester Communications was also tracking our resources so we had to relay all released equipment information to them. The log we kept was the only reminder of how much time had passed. At one point I realized I had been standing behind that suburban for 5 hours straight.

Magoski: I was amazed at how much I picked up and remember from IDT School last October. I guess when you are baptized in this fashion you have no choice. As I started to feel more confident I began to take over radio communications and Lisa was released so she could go home. I stayed at the Command Post until approximately 2315 when Kelly and Patty relieved me. I returned to Winchester Communications for demob.

Stabler: Chief Vega and Chief Thomas were fantastic to work with. As different problems or situations arose, they listened to our suggestions and agreed with what we had offered as solutions. With the Chiefs trusting our knowledge and input, this really gave us the ability to handle administrative situations, allowing them to concentrate on the fire suppression, tactics, safety, etc.

3b: Winchester Communications

Mateo: Later in the evening we transitioned from the B10 Suburban into Comm26. The radio traffic was heavy but manageable. I used a cell phone to communicate with Lee Ann at Huff. Both command radio channels were too busy to run logistics traffic. I didn't even realize the extent of the fire on Huff until two days later. I had my hands full with Santana.

Sgambati: Once Com 26 took over as Santana Row Communications we were inundated with requests. Since so many dispatchers were working on different tasks it was difficult to tell who was working on what. Numerous requests were either made to or from the City EOC [Emergency Operations Center], which had been opened to support the incident operations. Coordinating jobs between IDT members was even difficult. This hectic and chaotic pace continued until I left at 2100.

Larson: San Jose PD's Dispatch Response Team (DRT) was called out by PD command to support the Police Command Post, which was located across the street from us in the parking lot of the Century Theaters. The distance caused some problems in communicating with them; but we used both runners and the Police radio in Com26 to relay messages to their Command Post. PD units were heavily involved in traffic and crowd control and assisting the fire dept in tracking down additional reports of embers raining down on surrounding neighborhoods.

Deitschman: There was some confusion as to unit assignment between Winchester Staging and Huff Staging that took a while to sort out. Winchester Staging was shut down approximately 1956 hours and I returned to the CP on foot. I then assisted Randall in formulating a 12hr Comm Plan and then cleared the scene at 2239 hours.

Larson: By 2030hrs I began to relieve some of our IDT staff, since some had to work dayshift in the Communications Center. Cathy was released at 2100. At 2200 I assigned Kelly and Patty to relieve Lisa and Lee Ann at Huff so the latter could be demobilized. Tracy was released at 2239. I arranged for a swing shift dispatcher to hold over and cover my midnight shift in Dispatch until 0130hrs so I could remain on scene. Then I had IDT Reserve Cindy Hawke (who had come in to assist in the City EOC) respond to the scene to relieve Deanna at the Command Post. I checked with the IC, now BC Von Raesfeld, about his needs for IDT support throughout the night; he indicated that he wanted the Comm Van to remain on scene overnight to serve as a Command Post but that IDT did not need to staff it. I said I would arrange to have IDT handle Winchester Comm until 0130hrs at which time we would demobilize personnel but leave Com26 on site. I would return after my shift at 0730hrs and take the Comm Van back to Station 26. Bob Gundrum, a retired IDT manager from Palo Alto, was on scene with the

Fire Associates of Santa Clara Valley Rehab Unit, volunteered to assist in the Comm Unit. I felt that Bob and Cindy and I could support the incident's needs prior to termination of the Comm Unit and that additional IDT mutual aid was not necessary. If this turned out to be incorrect, I been in communication with Gilroy IDT dispatcher Dave Larton, who said he was available at home for mutual aid IDT if needed.

Hawke: At approximately 1730hrs I received a call from dispatcher Lisa Smyth (who was off duty), telling me that there was a major fire working at Santana Row. There was extensive news coverage indicating the magnitude of the fire was significant, and after a brief discussion we both decided to respond to Communications to offer any assistance that might be needed. I was responding from Santa Cruz, so when I reached the Los Gatos area, I called communications to advise them of my response and ask whether my assistance would be more beneficial at Communications or at the fire scene. I was directed to respond to communications and reported to the control room. I arrived at approx 1845hrs. I was assigned to answer the city "help line" that had been activated by the EOC. This line was to serve as an answer point for citizens whose homes where impacted by the fire and to provide information regarding transportation to the evacuation and shelter site established by the Red Cross. This line also served to provide information to those wishing to volunteer assistance or make donations. This answering point was established in the Training Center and I worked this position until approx 2230hrs. I then received word that I was to respond to the command post for the Santana Fire.

Hubbard: After several hours at Santana Row, Kelly and I went over to the Huff incident and relieved Lee Ann. The relief BC for Huff IC arrived on scene at the same time as we did. We checked with a captain on one of the Engines to find out which units were still on scene there and made sure the paperwork was still up-to-date for the new IC. Around midnight we were advised by our IC that we could terminate our Comm Unit, so we returned to Winchester CP.

Larson: Cindy arrived at 2345hrs and assumed Winchester Comm. Deanna, Patti, Kelly, and Lee Ann were released at 0032hrs. Cindy handled the radio traffic while I finished up our documentation and the chiefs coordinated fire watch assignments that would maintain suppression of hot spots throughout the night. At 0130hrs the Comm Unit was demob'd. I drove to Communications and assumed my shift where we managed communications during the overhaul phase, coordinated relief company response, and handled other emergencies citywide until 0730.

Hawke: Although the incident was well under control when I assumed Winchester Communications, it was a wonderful opportunity to review the IDT Comm Van set up, and re-orient/review on scene status keeping and IDT support of the incident commander. At this stage of the incident, this was strictly a training opportunity for me, doing light status keeping of units while under the supervision of senior IDT members. I remained at the scene until Winchester Communications was cleared & all IDT personnel were released at 0130hrs.

4: IDT Operations: Overhaul, Tuesday August 20

Larson: At 0730hrs on Tuesday I returned to Winchester and met with BCs Von Raesfeld and Vega, who said the decision had been made to keep the Comm van on site all day to serve as a Command Post. BC Vega said he would like IDT assistance for the duration. I arranged with Fire Communications for two IDT members to respond out and serve this purpose until 2100hrs.

Stabler: I was able to return to the scene on Tuesday and work in Com26, assisting the IC during the overhaul phase. It was very helpful that I had been at the fire the night before and was aware of different requests and situations that had occurred.

Magoski: I was asked to report at 1500 on Tuesday to the newly relocated Command Post, which had been moved to the Santana Row Leasing Office parking lot. I arrived there and relieved Lisa Stabler who had been there all day. Deanna had been there since 1000 and she and I were scheduled to be there until 2100. Chief Vega was the Incident Commander for the operational period. Our duties were to monitor the radio and to keep unit status. Comm26 was parked next to all the food that people were donating to the firefighters, so it was a pretty popular spot.

5: IDT Operations, Overhaul, Wednesday, August 21

Larson: I checked back at 0800hrs on Wednesday. BC Vega wanted to keep the van another day to support ongoing Fire Dept presence at the site. The Van had become a symbol of our ongoing attention to the incident. IDT personnel would not be needed.

6: IDT Operations, Investigation Phase, Thursday, August 22

Larson: I returned the following morning and demob'd the Van. While there Fire Investigator Jim Acker asked if we could supply an IDT dispatcher to assist with the Arson Task Force's investigation, operating as a scribe and communicator for the county Arson team. I called

Communications and made arrangements for Cathy Sgambati (along with her trainee Rahul Maharaj as an observer) to respond out to provide this assistance. I left my IDT turnouts and safety gear at the site for Rahul (who was not IDT equipped) to wear while assisting Cathy on this assignment.

Sgambati: I arrived at scene at approximately 1040 hours and found Rahul setting up the video equipment, which would be used for interviews by the Arson Investigators. After that was done, a briefing commenced. In attendance were investigators from San Jose, Mountain View, Santa Clara City, and ATF. It was decided that Rahul would be assigned to the arson investigators going through the building looking for the evidence and I would be assigned to assist Investigator Acker who was conducting site interviews. Rahul assisted with logging of evidence and taking photos while I worked with paperwork, photos and telephone calls and messages. I also coordinated lunchtime meals. The afternoon session was planned and at 1315 hours the work resumed. Rahul and I returned to our previous assignments. At approximately 1500 hours all team members returned to the conference room for a debriefing and completion of documentation. Rahul was released at approximately 1530 hours to return the lunch receipts and the loaner turnouts to Communications. I cleared the scene at approximately 1630 hours and went home.

7: Final Remarks

Mateo: I'm very proud of the way everyone in this Department pulled together and handled this incident. This fire had the potential for wiping out a large part of the city. We could have easily had a firestorm that burned for blocks.

Larson: All told, IDT provided communications, ReStat, and Documentation support for 26 hours of the Santana Row and Huff incidents – 9.5 during the suppression phase, 11 hours during overhaul the next day, and 6 hours for the initial arson investigation two days after that. With the entire team involved in these incidents, our involvement with the Santana Row and Huff incidents was by far our most significant response to date. We were extremely busy and our assistance was earnestly sought and appreciated by command staff.

8. IDT Lessons Learned

1. Due to the high workload and intensity of this incident, each IDT member fell into taskwork right away, precluding a coordinated assignment of IDT tasks and responsibilities, as well as an introductory briefing with the IC to go over his Communications concerns, which would have been valuable in view of the significance and scope of this incident. Following this incident, a standardized Major Incident Operations Plan for IDT was devised, prioritizing IDT positions and responsibilities in order to accommodate automatic IDT assignment; when dispatchers arrive they simply assume the next vacant position in the Comm Unit to avoid duplication or confusion of tasks in the event they can not be briefed upon arrival.
2. Separate components of IDT operating separately need to use separate identifiers with talking on the radio. We all can not use a "Communications" designation unless we are working at the same position. Even though we are all in the same Unit, other positions need to use a radio ID specific to their position, such as "ReStat" or "Documentation," in order to maintain a consistent communications path.
3. All IDT members need to insure their radios are charged at all times and have extra charged batteries available on deployment. Funding should be secured for a cache of extra radios and charged batteries to be kept in the Comm Van.
4. The possibility of IDT Mutual Aid presented itself and was considered but deemed unnecessary – except for the inclusion of Bob Gundrum during the last 90 minutes of the initial deployment. With support from Dispatch Supervisors and Management, we were able to fill all the IDT requests with San Jose personnel, a significant accomplishment. At the same time, offers of IDT mutual aid from Gilroy, Sunnyvale, and San Mateo County were much appreciated and provided a vital alternate source of staffing had it been needed.
5. On a major, long-lasting incident like this, utilize relief IDT personnel to ensure everyone takes a break. Pair up two IDs on primary radio positions so both keep a grasp on the ongoing radio traffic, that way one can take a break without needing to give a new dispatcher an

extensive briefing. When together, one ID talks, the other scribes.

6. Extra cellphones and radios are necessary for critical incidents like this. The cellphones assigned to both the BC Suburban and Com26 were quickly snatched up by chiefs to use. IDs used personal cell phones extensively to speak to Fire Comm, each other, and the EOC. Many times the information being passed by cell phone was critical. It also needs to be thoroughly documented since it is occurring on a nonrecorded channel.

7. Insure all IDT members have each other's cell phone numbers programmed into their personal cell phones to expedite inter-IDT communications as needed.

8. Recognize that in an incident escalating as quickly as this one did, and as resource-intensive as this was, that it is going to take a while to get caught up on things like ReStat and SitStat and that is ok. Don't get flustered because it's not initially as organized as it might be during a smaller response. Perform our usual duties, assign staff proactively and effectively to get caught up as quick as possible, but take the time to make sure it gets done accurately. But be used to the idea that it will take longer than we might like.

For Additional Information on Incident Dispatcher Teams, see:

www.incidentdispatch.net

For Additional Information on San Jose Fire's IDT, see:

www.sjfd.org/idt.htm

For Additional Information on San Jose Fire, see:

www.sjfd.org

Additional photos from the Santana Row Fire appear in our June 2003 issue, which also features a report from the Napa City Fire Dept on setting up their Incident Dispatcher Team.

Close Window