

## Field Communications & Homeland Security by Dan Koenig

### Florida All-Risk Incident Dispatch Team

One of the many lessons learned, or reinforced, from the tragedies of 9/11 is that incidents are not strictly defined within one discipline of public safety. The incidents of that day involved law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, health, and environmental services responses — and that is just an abbreviated list. Even before this tragedy, awareness of multi-jurisdictional events prompted the communicators in Florida to take an all risk approach to incident dispatching. Whether a dispatcher is assigned to law enforcement or fire, the basic duties and responsibilities remain communications, documentation, and accountability.

Since the first Incident Dispatch class in Palm Beach County in 1999, the program has experienced steady growth and acceptance. During the past few years, it has become a recognized

resource in the ICS/IMS. With tremendous support and assistance from Florida Fire Chiefs' Association and along with APCO, the Incident Dispatch Program Coordinator, Bonnie Maney, has set up a standardized regional organization system for training and deployment. This will assist us in the recognition and continued training of all-risk Incident Dispatchers.

One of our major successes came in the form of the Florida Incident Field Operations Guide (FOG). This document was one of the first to officially define and recognize the position of Incident Dispatcher. The FOG was developed and endorsed through the cooperative effort of agencies from all disciplines having emergency response responsibilities in Florida. Training on the FOG is just one of the modules in the 40 hour Basic All Risk Incident Dispatch training course. Also included are modules involving law enforcement, fire, rescue, forestry, ICS, Status/Check-

In recorder and table top simulation exercises. The specialized modules are presented by experienced professionals in their field.

Bonnie recently held an IDT facilitators' class at the Florida APCO conference in May 2004. These regional facilitators will enable us to hold standardized classes on a more regular basis across the State and coordinate continuing training opportunities such as regional training exercises. Our regional facilitators are already busy working on setting up training schedules for the upcoming year including planning for Seminole, Broward, and Marion County, as well as, Port St. Lucie.

Proving the flexibility of the program, the Incident Dispatchers in Florida have been called out for a wide array of incidents and events. Not only have they been called out for local emergencies, such as the recent yacht fire in

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Palm Beach, but also planned events like the Gator Nationals in Gainesville. In Boca Raton, a county-wide Incident Dispatcher response was coordinated to handle on scene communications and accountability for a meeting of 26 Governors and their spouses, while also assisting with records checks from the local, county, state and federal agencies on location. Incidents dispatchers were also on scene in Putman County for the largest railway accident in Florida history. There was an excellent response from all branches of public safety and Incident Dispatchers were on hand to coordinate responding units and document the incident. Field commanders are also routinely including Incident Dispatchers in in-service training and field exercises as part of local and regional preparedness. With SuperBowl XXXIX being held in Jacksonville, Florida next year, we hope to have the opportunity to have Incident Dispatchers from the region deployed for the event.

In the area of Homeland Security, our coordinator is working very closely with the Statewide Regional Domestic Security Taskforce. As Training Chair of the Region 7 Communications Committee, she is working with other communications personnel in the areas of funding, training and interoperability. Currently, State funds are earmarked for IDT training and we hope to access them in the near future to provide the basic course free to all students. Although, we have already been able to receive training funded regionally by the Criminal Justice Institute, we are looking forward to expanding that to all of Florida.

In Palm Beach County, Incident Dispatch Team leaders have been welcomed as part of the Special Operations Leaders' Association (SOLA). This is a group of the County's different police and fire-rescue specialty units including SWAT teams, Bomb squads, Hazmat units and, now, Incident Dispatch teams.

Incident Dispatch has been written

into different polices and procedures, at all levels, across the state. As the State of Florida grows and public safety response improves, we will continue to be a driving force in the area of communications on-scene and because the training improves a dispatchers overall response to emergencies, in the communications center as well. We will also assist in emergency planning and training locally and statewide. We are not only a voice for Incident Dispatchers but also for communications statewide.

For more information you can contact Bonnie Maney, Florida Fire Chiefs Association or any of the Regional Facilitators through the Florida IDT website at [www.springhillfire.com/idt.htm](http://www.springhillfire.com/idt.htm). There will also be a link to this site from the new [incidentdispatch.net](http://incidentdispatch.net) website.

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