



Rocky Mountain Area Incident Management Team Black Sand Creek Fire, Lessons Learned

Rocky Mountain Area Incident Management Team Black (Team Black) was ordered to the Sand Creek Fire on the San Juan National Forest, Pagosa Ranger District, on Sunday June 21. The Black Team assumed command of the fire on Thursday, June 25. The Sand Creek Fire was burning within the Little Sand Fire scar (2012) in heavy down fuels. Fire spread was curtailed due to herbaceous fuel conditions, fire location and aggressive use of aerial resources. Team Black's given incident objectives were to limit fire spread, mitigate COVID-19 transmission, and validate Management Action Points including structure assessment. Rocky Mountain Area Incident Management Team Black recommends an adaptive management approach to implementing the COVID-19 Response Guide. Adaptive management is a learning process, with a conscious intent of increasing the corporate knowledge of all Incident Management Teams.

COVID-19 Transmission Mitigation Best Management Practices Implemented:

- Best Management practices as identified in the '*Rocky Mountain Incident Management Teams Incident Response Guide in the COVID-19 Environment (May 20, 2020 v1.0)*'
- Separate incident camps were established
 - The Incident Command Post (ICP) was established at a hotel
 - A Base Camp was established as logistical support base for the incident
 - Several Spike Camps were established
- Individuals, prior to checking in at ICP or at the Base Camp, were required to pass a Health Screening questionnaire, including a temperature check
- Social distancing and face masks were required if working outside your established work areas
- LOFR and MEDL tied in with local county health service officials very early in the incident to determine pandemic impacts on local community, testing procedures, and testing capability
- Hand sanitizer was readily available at many locations in ICP
- Radio briefings was utilized throughout the life of the incident
- Virtual TNSP, GISS and LOFR were utilized
- Type 1 Hand Crews, WFMs, and Type 2 Hand Crews were all self-sufficient allowing them to social distance
- Caterer was able to provide resources staying in Spike Camp meal supplies upon request
- Paperless check-in, demobilization, time submission, and training processes were utilized
- Voluntary COVID-19 testing for all incident personnel was offered

SECTION COMMENTS:

GENERAL

Improve:

- Exposure contact logs were not widely used by incident personnel
- Cleaning/sanitizing of high use areas and surfaces was not aggressively implemented
- Maintaining Team cohesiveness while social distancing is a challenge

Sustain:

- Utilizing existing facilities as a Best Management practice
- Forward Operating Bases/Spike camps closer to fire
- Adjust footprint of all camps based on anticipated size and need of the incident
- Dispersed camping of crews/modules

COMMAND

Improve:

- The personal connection to stakeholder is not as effective as in-person
- Provide a 'S' number for costs associated with virtual staff for use of personal equipment
- Limit number of individuals attending in-briefing and all other meetings
- Obtain Zoom Pro license to facilitate virtual meetings

Sustain:

- Internet and cellular connectivity was good for virtual Team members
- The virtual LOFR had the ability to make several contacts and compile general information before the on-scene LOFR arrived
- Continue to set the expectation of social distancing and wearing face masks

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Improve:

- Limit access to PIO work area through better signage

Sustain:

- Keep the PIO office right sized to maintain social distancing
- No contact "thank you" request, via QR code, made submission easier and safer for all

OPERATIONS

Improve:

- Do not establish fire management decisions and risk assessments based on COVID-19
- Provide a consistent message of self-sufficiency
- Provide a S#'s for personnel to help maintain self-sufficiency
- Clarify COVID-19 protocol in terms of Black Team SOGs
- Utilizing a smaller potable H₂O truck to keep water fresh
- Utilize COWs and Satellite phone in areas with limited cellular communications

Sustain:

- Continue to keep line resources near fireline to increase safety and efficiency
- Stage potable water and fuel tenders in the field
- Allow field resources to be self-sufficient
- When available, use a third LSC2's to better support field resource at Forward Operating Bases and/or Spike Camps
- Provide each crew with their own portable bathroom and wash station

SAFETY/MEDICAL

Improve:

- Better understand and define the "module of one" or "distinct working group" concept
- Increased involvement of SOF2/MEDL in the Base Camp Planning process

Sustain:

- Make contact early in the incident with Local Public Health Agency (LPHA)
- Provide COVID-19 testing for incident personnel when possible
- Dispersed camping of crews/modules facilitated physical isolation between modules and ICP/Community members

FINANCE

Improve:

- Everyone needs to have a FireNet account in advance.
- Section members have all applied for a FireNet account and have been denied
- Portable monitors important with increase in electronic filing processes
- Improve electronic communication/transfer between check-in and finance.

Sustain

- Section utilized 100% the electronic filing system
- Paper documents were not accepted at all
- Use of auto-reply in email to inform senders an electronic message was received
- COVID-19 related signage to stop people from entering the Finance section work area

PLANNING

Improve:

- Complete FireNet and Office 365 training prior to incident
- COVID-19 PPE and proper work space configuration for SCKN/DMOB
- Order THSP for software support for FireNet365, Teams, IROC, eSuite, Zoom, etc
- Restrict Public & External access to SCKN / ICP
- Develop better signage for Planning area and ICP

Sustain:

- Use of QR codes to share information traditionally included in IAP
- Establish FireNet Incident accounts immediately upon Team order
- Utilization of electronic forms for all resources.
- Use of Enterprise eSuite allows for virtual and remote collaboration
- Direct filing in e-Documentation folders

LOGISTICS

Improve:

- A reliable and strong cellular signal is required to effectively complete logistic tasks
- Lack of IROC training and knowledge proved challenging
- Rent or procure mobile scanner/printers for each section to use to better facilitate going 'paperless'
- More clear and concise information on 213's general messages to support spike camps

Sustain:

- Having three LSCs assisted with multiple camps and coordinating closely with Operations
- The COML and COMT were issued flight helmets to be retained throughout the season mitigating COVID-19 transmission

Troy Hagan,
Incident Commander
Rocky Mountain Area IMT2 Black Team

Rob Powell,
Deputy Incident Commander
Rocky Mountain Area IMT2 Black Team