

The Wilderness Mass Casualty Incident Command System

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Introduction:

A Mass Casualty Incident (MCI) is defined, for purposes of this discussion, as an incident that involves more casualties than the local medical response units and Mountain Rescue Organizations can handle effectively with immediately available resources. The World Health Organization (WHO), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) support a comprehensive, systematic approach to managing MCIs. The National Incident Management System (NIMS) was developed as an operational model to address incident management in general. To date, there is no comprehensive, step-by-step plan for first responders to follow for medical mass casualty incident command. Therefore, the main objective is to develop a comprehensive training program that will give first responders both the skills and the confidence to deploy these skills at a MCI.

The Clear Creek County Emergency Services and Alpine Rescue Team recognize this gap in MCI training and preparedness for Clear Creek County.

Clear Creek County is a Colorado mountain community with a base altitude of 7200' and a high altitude of 13,500'. Clear Creek County is also home to Interstate 70, which is the main east-west transportation route for the United States. Additionally, Loveland Pass U.S. Highway 6, a circuitous two-lane mountain highway pass, is used as an alternate route for I-70 when problems occur in the Eisenhower Tunnel. Both the terrain and transportation corridors make Clear Creek County vulnerable to Mass Casualty Incidents.

Alpine Rescue Team has provided all mountain rescue and high angle evacuations for Clear Creek County since 1959.

Through a collaborative effort between the two agencies, it was decided that a spring 2011 MCI exercise would be executed. Preceding the exercise there will be three classes offered to all participating personnel:

1. Wilderness Mass Casualty Incident Command System (MCICS-100 W) - This is a two day course designed to teach participants how to structure, organize, set up, and manage an MCI utilizing the Incident Command System.
2. Mass Casualty Incident Command System: Dispatch/Transportation Leader/Hospital Destination (MCICS-300) - This is a one day class that teaches EMS and dispatch personnel how to use patient organizing systems and coordinate patient transport to receiving hospitals.
3. Mass Casualty Incident Command System: Target Hazard Planning & Developing your MCI Plan (MCICS 400) - This two day class teaches participants how to strategically pre-plan high risk life safety target hazards and practice their plan.

Use of MCICS:

The Medical Incident Consulting Group's, Mass Casualty Incident Command System™ is structured to make the coordination and management processes of an MCI scalable, consistent, and effective for first responders arriving at an MCI, while reinforcing the use of the Incident Command System.

A tenet to MCICS training is that all successful large incidents are based on the competent use of MCICS on small scale incidents.

The three-course structure will allow all participants to be prepared and trained using a combination of classroom instruction and walk through field exercises before the simulation is conducted.

- The MCICS course will teach participants the small steps that lead into organizing and coordinating mass casualty incidents, while incorporating the Incident Command System. This course will highlight the important aspects of the "First Five Minutes of the Incident".
- The MCICS Dispatch/Transportation Leader/Hospital Destination course allows EMS and Dispatch personnel to appreciate the labor-intensive tasks of requesting enough resources, tracking patients both manually and with scanners, coordinating patient/hospital destination, and organizing multiple radio channels for the Medical Branch.
- The MCICS Target Hazard Pre-planning class will empower Incident Commanders and Mission Leaders to plan for all the variables that go into a successful Wilderness MCI incident. The value of practicing target hazard pre-plans will be emphasized.

Through this educational process, all participants will learn the simple foundational skills of managing an MCI, which will allow them to utilize these techniques with larger scale incidents.

Benefits:

To date the National Incident Management System in general, and the Incident Command System specifically, have received mixed use in the U.S. by first responders. Only practicing large scale disasters does not give first responders enough tangible information to absorb the process of managing an MCI. ICS gives us the opportunity to operate from a common framework. However, an operational template is needed to incorporate the skills in scene management and ICS use.

The three courses being taught will give all personnel step by step instruction and comprehension of the chronological sequence of events that must take place for any incident big or small. Each course will teach how this management structure can be used on a daily basis by first responders. Incorporating ICS into the management of a medical incident will facilitate seamless scene management and Unity of Command.

The strategic and tactical planning steps taught, will highlight the importance of understanding how to use scene management math to calculate the resources that are needed.

The weakest link in any large-scale incident is communications. The MCICS curriculum will fully prepare the communication center personnel to anticipate the need for more dispatch personnel and the use of multiple radio frequencies as well as remote communications vehicles.

The Exercise:

Tentatively, we are planning a four to six-hour exercise that will be performed at the URAD Mine site in Empire, Colorado. The site is a box canyon location, providing complete visibility of the scene for all participants, as well as, easy access and egress for transporting ambulances and helicopters.

The re-enacted plane crash site will require two 600'-700' simultaneous belay systems to evacuate incapacitated victims of the crash. We are targeting the scree evacuation of twenty victims with the addition of twenty walking wounded victims.

Obvious problems to be solved are:

- Obtaining adequate manpower - both Mountain Rescue and EMS personnel
- Communications; enough dispatch personnel & radio channels
- Adequate number of ambulances
- Scene control
- Hospital destinations

Conclusion:

None of us can predict when or where the next mass casualty incident will take place. However, we believe the training and preparation being taught for this multi-agency incident prior to the exercise, will fully prepare all participants to understand the structure, coordination, and management of any mass casualty incident they may encounter.

