



Volunteer Firemen Create Mobile Command Unit

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Eastland County, Texas

Eastland County, TX – A 2006 wildfire destroyed nearly 25 percent of Eastland's land mass burning 60 homes within 12 hours. Part of the problem stemmed from a lack of communication and management. Lessons learned prompted the need for a mobile command unit.



"We had fire departments from our county and the surrounding areas scattered out over 20 miles. People were trying to contain the fire at different sections of the community. Logistics was extremely difficult," said Steven Watson, professional firefighter and 911 dispatcher. "There were areas where we couldn't talk from one section of the incident to the other. We had fire trucks stacked up in one area with not enough work to do. Meanwhile, houses were burning down in another area."

A meeting was held to evaluate performance following the incident.

"We had a big critique session. What did we do right? What were our problem areas?" Watson said. "The biggest problem was communication. We didn't have anyone with tools available to them to coordinate efforts."

As a result, a 2003 motor home was donated to Eastland County. Firemen from Eastland's eight volunteer fire departments used their skills, on weekends, to create a mobile command unit.

"We went to a trade show in Dallas hosted by Fire Rescue International to look at the mobile command units on display. We consulted with representatives to determine how each piece of equipment was utilized," Watson said. "Texas Department of Homeland Security gave us \$30,000, and we received a donation of \$20,000. We used that money to equip the unit, and we furnished the labor." The unit was appraised at \$175,000.

In June 2007 Lake Leon flooded, endangering the lives and property of the residents living on the waterfront. Residents had received a warning to evacuate. Only 35 percent heeded it. Boats and military trucks were used to rescue 150 people.

"Instead of someone running a section of the incident with maps spread out on the hood of a truck and a portable radio that you can barely communicate messages back to the town, we had a unit centrally located at the lake and ready to handle the flood event," Watson said.

Having the unit on site resulted in smooth rescue efforts.

"We had 12 boats and a fleet from the National Guard. Geographically the lake is in a lower area, making it more difficult to use two-way radios for communicating. With the unit we could expand communication all the way around the lake, and we could relay information to the city," Watson said. "We had people in place keeping track of all the resources and a place to coordinate efforts and to disseminate information."

"Thanks to the Texas Department of Homeland Security, a private contribution, and concerted efforts of fellow firemen, we have a host of communication equipment right at our finger tips," Watson said. "Frankly, I don't know how we were ever able to manage without it."

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region VI**

State: **Texas**

County: **Eastland County**

City/Community: **Eastland**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Severe Storm; Tornado; Flooding; Hurricane/Tropical Storm; Fire; Wildfire**

Activity/Project Type: **Mitigation Planning/Disaster Resistant Universities**

Activity/Project Start Date: **09/2006**

Activity/Project End Date: **01/2007**

Funding Source: **Private funds; State sources**

Funding Recipient: **Local Government**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$175,000.00 (Estimated)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **No**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **1709 , 06/29/2007**

Repetitive Loss Property? **No**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.eastlandcountytexas.com/>

Reference URL 2: <http://www.fema.gov/hazard/flood/index.shtm>

Main Points

- A 2006 wildfire destroyed nearly 25 percent of Eastland's land mass burning 60 homes within 12 hours, part of which was attributed to lack of communication and management.
- As a result, a 2003 motor home was donated to Eastland County. Firemen from Eastland's eight volunteer fire departments used their skills, on weekends, to create a mobile command unit.
- In June 2007 Lake Leon flooded, endangering the lives and property of the residents living on the waterfront. Residents had received a warning to evacuate, but only 35 percent did, leaving many people that needed to be rescued.
- Having the unit on site resulted in smooth rescue efforts - they were able to communicate better, they had people in place keeping track of all the resources, and a place to coordinate efforts and to disseminate information.



Eastland County's Mobile Command Unit



Steven Watson manning mobile command unit.



Eastland County's Mobile Command Unit