



"Providing leadership and direction to all members  
of the Los Angeles County Fire Department"

**INCIDENT PERSPECTIVE AND  
OBSERVATIONS OF  
THE "CROWN FIRE"  
(July 20 - 24, 2004)**

*By Al Schriver, Battalion Chief  
Battalion 17-C*

The following observations are being submitted as part of the lessons learned; things that went right and things that went wrong on the Crown Fire;

1. Early establishment of jurisdiction and Unified Command with ANF:
  - a. Within 10 minutes of arrival at scene I was able to look at the maps and determine that 1) this fire started on and was currently burning on SRA land, and that it was an immediate threat to the ANF. It was also determined that the fire was within the IAZ with the Angeles Nat'l. Forest.
  - b. As soon as Dick McCombs arrived at scene, we did a face to face and he confirmed my previous beliefs, and we established unified command at that point. We decided to utilize ANF resources on the South Flank, Division Z, and to concentrate LAC resources on the North Flank, Division A.
  - c. When Chief Blackburn arrived (2<sup>nd</sup> BC) I transferred Command to him, and assumed the OSC role. Later with the arrival of Chief Crawford, (3<sup>rd</sup> BC) I assigned him to Branch I for the entire North side of the fire for perimeter control. Branch II was assigned to ANF (Lane) for the entire south flank for perimeter control.

**2. EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF SRA JURISDICTION AND REQUEST FOR CDF AGENCY REP.**

- a. As soon as I determined that this was an SRA fire, I notified LACC of that fact, and requested a CDF Agency representative, and placed an order for any available CDF Fixed Wing Air Tankers
- b. Contact was made with Helco and he was instructed to concentrate the rotor-wing aircraft on the north flank in support of the Structure protection efforts in Aliso Canyon, and eventually out along Angeles Forest Highway.
- c. I don't believe personnel in our dispatch center really know what to do with that information when it is provided to them, and this was evidenced

by comments made by the OES Rep. Ismael Messer at the closeout meeting.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Provide additional training to FCCF personnel on what this information means, and how to process it.
2. Include the CCBC in future closeout meeting so they can hear this information first hand.

**3. EARLY ESTABLISHMENT OF STRUCTURE PROTECTION BRANCH**

- a. Upon arrival of Chief Greg Jones he was assigned as Structure Protection Branch Director and was instructed to create as many SPG's as needed, and to name them geographically as opposed to numbering them.
  - i. On several occasions recently there have been attempts to number Structure Protection Groups, using the excuse that it is less confusing. I do not agree with that line of thinking for the following reasons:
    1. Numbered groups do not give you any reference to where they are, and as the incident progresses it becomes difficult to remember which number was where.
    2. Geographically named groups give you an indication where they are to be located and cuts down on radio traffic explaining to people how to get to them.
    3. One of the arguments used in favor of numbering groups is that you can move the group anywhere on the incident without having to rename it. But that just adds to the confusion; Group 6 used to be in Aliso Canyon, and now it is moved to Topanga Canyon. When groups are named geographically the group name stays in existence for the duration of the fire. Once there is no longer a need for resources in that particular group, they are re-assigned to either a new group or to another existing group that has a need for additional resources.
    4. Finally, Branches are always numbered. Numbering Groups will cause confusion with Branches.

#### **4. VALUE OF HAVING PRE-STAGED RESOURCES**

- a. Having a Type I Engine Strike Team staged in Battalion 6 was crucial to the timely deployment of Structure Protection Resources.
- b. Although not technically pre-staged, resources that were made available from the Foothill Fire had the same impact on early Structure Protection attempts.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Continue to Pre-stage resources whenever conditions warrant, and possibly expand that program during periods of extreme fire weather.

#### **5. DO NOT ALLOW COMMAND AND CONTROL OR CHIEF OFFICERS IN HEADQUARTERS TO SECOND-GUESS INCIDENT COMMANDERS;**

- a. At one point when the fire was making a serious run on Angeles Forest Highway I placed a request for the 10 closest engine companies for Structure Protection and was told that I would be getting Strike Teams from the LA Basin. This was not acceptable, and I told them so.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Give Incident Commanders what we ask for. We are very aware on the impacts on service delivery when you take 10 engines out of any area, but we are also highly in tune with the results of losing 10 or 20 structures. As soon as additional resources become available, the 10 closest can be returned to district.

#### **6. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN PROCEDURES:**

- a. On each of the last three major wildland fires there were problems with LA Dispatch using the Command Frequency to communicate with the Incident Commander.
- b. While it is clear that the Dispatch Center has to talk to Incident Commanders, the primary purpose of establishing a Command Channel is to enable Command Staff personnel to communicate critical and sometimes-emergency information between the IC, OSC, Branch Directors and Division Supervisors. When this ability is compromised by being constantly “stepped on” by LACC it becomes impossible to effectively manage the Incident, and creates a serious Safety Issue in that LCES is violated. The Command Channel MUST be reserved for Incident Command personnel at scene.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- i. Modify our existing Communications Plan Procedures to always include “BLUE 4” as the “Administrative Frequency”.
- ii. Train our Incident Commanders that they must always monitor BLUE 4, and that they must communicate with LACC on that frequency only.
- iii. BLUE 4 is already designated as a countywide administrative Channel, but is seriously under utilized.
- iv. By having ALL Incident Commanders monitor and use BLUE 4, not only do we free up the Command Channel, but also we enable Incident Commanders of various incidents to communicate with each other directly. This could ultimately lead to sharing of resources, establishing priorities, and long range planning of incidents, much like the concept of Area Command.
- v. This procedure was used successfully on the Pine Fire, the Foothill Fire, and the Crown Fire. It was done because several local Battalion Chiefs had discussed this issue in advance, and had decided to implement it on our own. The results are obvious. Three major wildland fires, minimal structure loss, minimal injuries, and overall success on all three.

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*Battalion Chief Al Schriver is a 32-year veteran of the County Of Los Angeles Fire Department and has vast experience in commanding incidents both locally and nationally. During the “Crown Fire”, BC Schriver acted in the capacity of the Initial Attack Incident Commander and Operations Section Chief. Also recently, BC Schriver served as the Initial Attack Structure Protection Branch Director on both the “Pine Fire” and the “Foothill Fire”.*

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