

# INTERAGENCY DISPATCH OPTIMIZATION PROJECT (IDOP)

## NORTHERN NEW MEXICO TEAM

### BRIEFING PAPER

**Date:**

February 5, 2014

**Topic:**

Analysis of Alternative #6, the "Virtual Dispatch Office" concept.

**Background:**

The Northern New Mexico IDOP Team was asked to look at the possibilities of creating a "virtual" dispatch office concept. This has been analyzed as one alternative to consolidating dispatch centers.

The virtual dispatch office concept has not been fully defined, but the question posed is: With modern technologies, is it feasible to conduct effective dispatch operations without the dispatchers in the same location?

In theory, when consolidating dispatch offices, this could eliminate the need to construct new/or larger facilities, and would preclude the need to deal with the cost and disruption related to transferring employees to different duty stations.

**Detailed Analysis (Facts, findings, methodology, participants):**

The Southwest Area Dispatch Center Managers were chosen as a focus group to conduct an analysis of the possibilities for a virtual dispatch center concept. As a group, the center managers are our subject matter experts, and have extensive experience in all aspects of wildland fire dispatching. They are familiar with the current state-of-the-art technology in dispatch, and are aware of future trends in technology.

The center managers placed this task on the agenda for their annual center manager's meeting in Prescott, Arizona during the week of December 9, 2013. Points the center managers were asked to consider included:

--A virtual dispatch office would not be a "4<sup>th</sup> tier" dispatch operation.

--A virtual dispatch office should not require a significant start-up cost, or major changes to infrastructure.

The center managers discussed this concept in depth during the meeting and came to consensus on the following points:

--In initial attack dispatching operations, virtual positions are not an option. The dispatchers need to be in the same location (i.e. on the same "dispatch floor") for adequate and rapid communication.

--The communication in dispatch often includes overhearing what is going on at other desks, overhearing radio traffic, seeing body language, observing the tempo of activity, etc. These are things that cannot be communicated via telephone or writing. In practice, initial attack dispatchers are continually hearing and seeing what each other is doing.

--Much of the exchange of information in dispatch consists of a multitude of small bits of information, often just a few words at a time. The efficiency and effectiveness of dispatch would be significantly reduced if any of the dispatchers were located remotely from each other.

--Expanded dispatch operations, as opposed to initial attack, are often conducted remotely from initial attack, although the ideal situation is for expanded to be located at the same facility. However, expanded dispatch operations also need to be done in one room (on the same dispatch floor) to achieve the most effective and efficient communication among the dispatchers assigned to expanded dispatch.

--The unanimous consensus of the dispatch center managers is that it is not feasible to operate an initial attack dispatch center under a "virtual" concept. The reduction in effectiveness would be almost like reverting to a 4<sup>th</sup> tier dispatch operation.

### **Conclusions:**

For initial attack dispatch operations, the dispatchers all need to be in the same location to be most effective.

Creating "virtual" dispatch positions as a means of combining dispatch centers would reduce disruption to employees and would reduce start-up costs, but would result in an overall reduction in efficiency of dispatch operations.

**Recommendations:**

The Northern New Mexico IDOP Team recommends the “virtual dispatch office” concept be removed from further consideration as an alternative for combining the Taos and Santa Fe Dispatch Centers.

**Final Disposition:**