



Southwest Coordinating Group



August 24, 2006

Directed to: Agency Administrators

From: Southwest Coordinating Group

Topic/Issue: Converting from Four-tier to Three-tier Fire Dispatching

Introduction: The Southwest Coordinating Group (SWCG) consists of Fire Directors or their representatives from the USDI Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), Fish and Wildlife Service (F&W), USDA Forest Service (USFS), and the States of Arizona and New Mexico. The SWCG represents Southwest Agency Administrators of Wildland Fire agencies through delegations of authority. The SWCG has been directed by agency administrators through the Southwest Strategy Regional Executive Committee (SWS) to facilitate the transition of the remaining fourth-tier fire dispatch centers to three-tier fire dispatch centers, to further increase safety and reduce risk to our firefighters. USFS, BLM and F&W are mandated to transition to Three-Tier; and although BIA and NPS are not mandated, they are strongly supportive of this change. The States of Arizona and New Mexico have agreed to support the endeavor to the extent possible.

Background: In the South Canyon Fire Investigation, developed by the Interagency Management Review Team (IMRT) in 1994, it was determined that the lack of coordination between the fourth-tier and third-tier dispatch centers was a contributing causal factor to the entrapment. Subsequently it was recommended that federal agencies move to a three-tier system. USDI-BLM was directed to move to three-tier system as soon as practical. The 2003 Lessons Learned Study of the Southwest fire season prepared by the SWS, directed agencies in the Southwest Geographical Area to move to a three-tier dispatch system for efficiency and safety. The SWS assigned this task to the SWCG to review current organizations and make recommendations to eliminate or reconfigure all fourth-tier dispatch offices in the Southwest Geographical Area to three-tier systems.

The Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations, 2006, states; "The wildland fire dispatch system in the United States has three levels (tiers): National, Geographic, and Local". A third tier dispatch center may have single or interagency responsibility; however, for increased efficiency interagency is encouraged. Fire Planning Units defined in the Fire Program Analysis (FPA) may have one or multiple dispatch centers.

The three-tiers of a coordination/dispatch system are:

- 1) Incident to third tier dispatch center (local),
- 2) Third tier dispatch center to Southwest Area Coordination Center, (geographic),
- 3) Geographic Area Coordination Center to National Interagency Coordination Center, (national).

Action: It has been determined that your organization operates or participates in a fourth-tier fire dispatch center. The SWCG requests that your organization work cooperatively with your interagency partners, and submit a proposal and transition plan that will move your organization to a three-tier system. The deadline for the proposal and plan is January 5, 2007. The background and criteria for this plan are set forth below.

Your transition plan should be coordinated with your interagency partners where applicable and should include an analysis of the following:

- Current fire dispatch/coordination center in relation to the Southwest Area Coordination Center.
- Current staffing plan or organization chart for your dispatch office.
- Current administrative or political boundaries in your dispatch area.
- Current incident dispatching and administrative workload for each agency in your dispatch center represented by numbers of fires or resource numbers, volume of dispatch communications, number of operational frequencies and radio consoles.
- Proposed three tier organization for your local area and a recommendation for the most logical three tier organization (in a perfect world) using available technology regardless of budget, FTE, personalities, politics.
- Identify workload change for third tier center, zones or GACC.
- Propose logical administrative or political boundary(s) for coordination/dispatch center(s). These can be but are not restricted to Fire Management Units defined in FPA.
- Proposed third tier office locations, staffing, and estimated budget needed for implementation and continuing operations.

It is the intent of the Southwest Coordinating Group to facilitate this transition by supporting existing partnerships, assisting ongoing three tier transitions, and fostering new partnerships. This process will enable each agency and area to develop their most efficient organizations while meeting the ultimate goal of enhanced firefighter safety. Final approval of proposals and transitions will be determined by the SWCG.

For questions please contact Kelly Castillo, Three Tier Dispatch Committee Chair at 602-417-9550 or cell, 602-689-6224, or your agency representative on the SWCG.

/s/ Pamela McAlpin

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