



SW MAC Group Operations Handbook

(Updated April 1, 2014)

A - INTRODUCTION

Multi-agency coordination between wildland fire protection agencies is an ongoing process in the Southwest. The fire program managers of the various state and federal agencies involved in wildland fire protection meet regularly as the Southwest Coordinating Group, (SWCG). This group serves as a forum to implement policy, direction, and coordination in the states of Arizona, New Mexico, portions of Oklahoma and Texas. The SWCG members are the Southwest Area MAC Group members.

The Southwest Area Mobilization Guide, which includes the Southwest Area Preparedness Plan, provides direction to the Southwest Coordination Center (SWCC) on the movement of resources between units to support wildland fires and maintain response capabilities within the geographic area.

This handbook includes procedures to guide Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) activities where critical fire danger or heavy resource mobilization requires continuous, daily interaction between agencies, and resource allocation may be an issue.

B - MISSION

Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) provides a forum to discuss actions to be taken to ensure that an adequate number of resources are available to meet anticipated needs and to allocate those resources most efficiently during periods of heavy use or shortage.

Multi-Agency Coordination will ensure coordinated:

- Resource allocation, acquisition, and movement
- Prioritizing critical needs and incident prioritization
- Contingency planning
- State and federal incident response
- Information provided to media and agency heads
- Identification and resolution of issues common to some or all agencies

C - AUTHORITIES

Agency Administrators, by virtue of the leadership positions they serve in their respective agencies, have the authority to order the movement of personnel and equipment under their jurisdiction to maximize pre-suppression, suppression, and incident response capabilities of their agencies. This authority has been delegated to individual SWCG members.

Fire Program Managers of the respective agencies are authorized, within constraints of available funding, to manage fire management activities and coordinate with other agencies. They may move resources between units to best serve the needs of the respective agencies.

Southwest Coordination Center (SWCC) Center Manager, through SWCC as the Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC), has the authority to move resources across agency and zone boundaries to meet preparedness, incident and fire management needs of the participating agencies. Such movement is limited to actions specified in the SWCC Operations Guide, the Southwest Area Mobilization Guide, (which contains the Southwest Area Preparedness Plan), and various agreements.

MAC Group Members are authorized through delegation from their respective agency administrators, to commit their agency to actions agreed upon during MAC Group deliberations. The respective agency administrators provided such delegation of authority in writing in the MOU for the operation of the SWCCG.

Since the MAC Group represents agency administrators at federal or state geographic area levels, it is recommended that if an agency's fire program manager is not able to serve with the MAC Group, that their replacement be equal in status to a unit agency administrator with operational fire background.

The MAC Group may also include representatives from other agencies with jurisdictional responsibilities not represented by one of the MAC agencies, (examples: FEMA, National Guard, State Homeland Security, etc.). These individuals will not be voting members of the MAC but have the ability to provide input. The need for these additional representatives will be reviewed and agreed to by the MAC Group as the situation warrants.

D - ORGANIZATION

The Southwest Area multi-agency coordination system will consist of the designated MAC Group members and the SWCC Center Manager. A MAC Group Coordinator and support specialists will be activated as needed.

Decisions of MAC will be disseminated to appropriate state and federal agencies by the MAC Group Coordinator and the Southwest Coordination Center through the coordination system.

E - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Agency Administrator:

- Appoints MAC Group members through written delegation of authority.
- Provides feedback and information to MAC member for agency direction.
- Supports MAC Group decisions, including those that direct reassignment of resources.
- Collaborates with other Agency Administrators; resolves disagreements between Incident Unit Administrators and MAC Group.

MAC Group Members:

Prior to Activation:

- Develops and revises the SW-MAC Operations Handbook, procedures etc.
- Determines need for additional MAC Group Representation beyond the wildland agencies.
- Recommends MAC Group Coordinator or support specialists as needed.

During Activation:

- Identify issues needing action.
- Brings agency perspective to meetings/conference calls.
- Establishes priorities for allocation of resources between incidents within the geographic area.
Recommends action on identified critical needs.

- Develops contingency plans and resolves issues common to some or all agencies.
- Develops procedures to implement National MAC decisions.
- Re-allocates resources between incidents when necessary due to shortages.
- Initiates special actions to alleviate resource shortages and to meet anticipated demands.
- Keep agency administrators informed of situations and of MAC decisions.
- Keep cooperating partners, (e.g., state fire marshal, state emergency management, National Guard, neighboring states, landowner interest groups, NMAC), informed of the situation and of MAC decisions.

MAC Group Chair:

- The MAC group chair is the chair of SWCG. If absent, the MAC chair will be filled by the vice-chair of SWCG. The responsibility of the MAC group chair is to work with the MAC Coordinator and SWCC Center Manager to facilitate MAC meetings and help resolve issues to the satisfaction of MAC members.

MAC Coordinator:

- Gathers appropriate intell, identifies issues and recommends solutions to the MAC Group.
- Completes draft allocation, information, and prioritization charts before meetings.
- Ensures adequate and timely identification of specialists needed to support MAC activities. Coordinates the work of the support staff specialists, as delegated by the SWCC Center Manager.
- Acts as facilitator of MAC Group meetings.
- Documents and distributes MAC decisions.
- Works with the SWCC Center Manager to maintain and archive the permanent records of MAC activities.

MAC Support Specialists: (may or may not be assigned)

- Examples would be: Fire Behavior Specialist, Decision Support Specialist, GIS Specialist, etc.
- Provides technical information on their specialty relating to the situations. Some are regular SWCC employees, some may be detailers.
- Typically provides the following information to assist the MAC members in making their decisions:
 - Current incidents
 - Weather
 - Fire Behavior/Safety
 - Resources – By Incident (On order, filled/unfilled, critical shortages)
 - Media/VIP issues
 - Agency and NMAC Issues

SWCC Center Manager:

- Recommends activation of MAC to SWCG Chair as the situation warrants.
- By direction of the SWCG/MAC, works with MAC Coordinator to schedule and activate the MAC time, place, and conference line, etc.
- Serves as a non-voting MAC Group member.
- Recommends issues needing MAC action.
- Works with staff to assemble intelligence information to support MAC activities i.e., resources committed (ICS-209 and ROSS reports), outstanding resource orders and unable to fill status, resources available and projected, projected need by incident, etc.
- Implements decisions as directed by MAC.
- Monitors security status of MAC password website.

Third-Tier Dispatch Centers, Incident Expanded Dispatch Organizations, Buying Teams, Area Caches, or Local Ordering Points:

- Managers and supervisors facilitate flow of intelligence information needed to support MAC activities.
- Facilitate flow of MAC decisions to field units, Incident Management Teams, Area Command, and local agency units as appropriate.
- Implements actions associated with MAC decisions as may be appropriate to the dispatch system.

Incident Management Teams, Area Commands, and Zone Coordinating Groups:

- Provides accurate information relative to incident status, threats and projections of needs as requested to support MAC activities.
- Daily participation in IC portion of MAC meetings/conference calls.
- Assists in timely reallocation of resources in coordination with SWCC.
- Implements actions associated with MAC decisions as may be appropriate to the Incident Management Team, Area Command or Zone Coordinating Group.
- IMT's/Zones complete ICS 209's and other required documents before required meeting time.

F - GENERAL OPERATION GUIDELINES

MAC Activities by Southwest Preparedness Levels: See SW Mob Guide for the Preparedness Plan which provides the actions at each PL level.

MAC Group Activation Procedures:

With activation of the SW-MAC Group, the SWCC Center Manager will contact the designated agency representatives.

If pre-designated individuals are not available, the SWCC Center Manager will contact the SWCG alternate or appropriate agency administrator through the agency fire program manager and request that a MAC Group member be provided. Alternate members should have equivalent agency status, background and skills as the pre-designated individuals they are replacing.

Based on the situation, the MAC Group may mobilize the MAC Group Coordinator and support specialists, as appropriate.

MAC Group Working Guidelines When Activated:

- Routine meetings should begin promptly. The agreed upon time that has worked best in the Southwest is 1500 New Mexico time.
- MAC Group members, SWCC Staff, IC's deployed or on ordered stand-by or others may be asked to provide reports of significant activity that others have not reported on.
- MAC Group members only will collaborate on decisions.
- Opportunity will be provided for all agencies to comment and identify issues at the end of the meeting.
- Side discussions will be limited, and pagers and cell phones turned off to minimize distractions.

Attendance and Participation in MAC Call/Meeting

Attendance and participation will be determined by activity levels as discussed by the MAC Group, SWCC Center Manager, and MAC Group Coordinator. There may be limited number of call-in lines to the meeting; the SWCC Center Manager and MAC Group Coordinator will monitor attendance to insure there are enough available lines for all invited to call in from their incidents or offices.

Meeting Format

- Meeting will follow a standard announcement and format; information will be gathered from participants and recorded by the MAC Group Coordinator, see "Attachment 1 – SW MAC Call Format".
- Incident Commanders will present their incident information via "Attachment 2 – IC MAC Report Format".
- Zone Coordinating Group Chairs or Center Managers may be asked to provide information on the activity within their zone via "Attachment 3 – Zone Rep Outline" and communicate any existing or future needs the zone may have.
- After all IC's and Zones share intelligence information, the MAC Group asks everyone except MAC members to leave the call. Resources allocation decisions will then occur based on the known intelligence at the time. MAC Group members base these decisions on values at risk (i.e. communities, residences, infrastructure, natural and cultural resources), but will also ensure human life, safety, and initial attack remain a top priority.

MAC Group Decision Model:

All issues brought before the MAC Group will be resolved by consensus that will result in one of the following actions:

Option 1: Make a collaborative decision and assign responsibility and expectation of implementation.

- Option 2: Delegate a decision with expectations of intended outcomes or results to a MAC Group member, the coordinator or staff.
- Option 3: Defer decision for consideration at a later date (e.g., defer for more information or defer for further development of fire situation).
- Option 4: Determine that the issue is outside the scope of the MAC Group's responsibility. Defer issue to the appropriate organization or individual.

Record Keeping and Documentation:

- Attendance at all MAC Group meetings will be documented and saved for the permanent record.
- Information presented at MAC meetings will be summarized and retained in the permanent record. MAC group decisions will be recorded and retained in the permanent record.
 - The Criterium Decision Program and associated scoring sheets are only analysis tools and “not” the final decision from the MAC Group.
- The permanent record will be retained and archived by the SWCC Center Manager.

Follow-Up Responsibilities:

It is the SWCC Manager or assigned MAC Group Coordinator’s responsibility to track assigned actions or deferred decisions to completion and to notify the entire group of status as appropriate.

Communicating MAC Decisions:

- MAC conference call notes (Attachment 1) will be approved by the MAC group chair (SWCG chair) within a week of the call/meeting.
- MAC decision documents will be distributed to the involved agency representatives, zone representatives, incident commanders or other individuals responsible for implementation through the Southwest Coordination Center using the coordination system, via FAX, electronic mail, or hard copy.
- The MAC Chair or Coordinator will share decisions with the National MAC Representative, especially if they are not on the call.
- The SWCC Center Manager will be the normal contact with NICC on any issues that have national coordination implications.
- Tactical or specific operational information, or other information that might be sensitive, will not be released. All such information must be approved for release by the MAC Group Coordinator, MAC Group Chair and/or involved Agency Representative(s), as appropriate.

G – MODIFICATION OF MAC OPERATIONS HANDBOOK

This Operations Handbook will be reviewed annually by the SWCG and modified as necessary.

- H – REFERENCE** **National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) Organization**
 (2014 National Interagency Mobilization Guide – Ch. 30)
 (2014 Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations Ch. 08-6)

When competition for wildland fire resources occurs among Geographic Areas, the National Multi-Agency Coordination Group (NMAC) at NIFC will establish national priorities and confirm drawdown levels.

When requested, Geographic Areas will establish priorities for their incidents and wildland fires and report them to NICC.

The single overriding suppression priority is the protection of human life – both, that of our firefighters and of the public.

In setting national priorities and drawdown levels, the following criteria will be considered:

- Protecting communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources.
- Maintaining initial action capability.
- Limiting costs without compromising safety.
- Meeting agency suppression objectives.
- Support to National Response Framework (NRF) tasking.

I – ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 –SW MAC Group Call – Guidelines and Meeting Outline

Attachment 2 - SW MAC Group Call – Incident Commander Reporting Format

Attachment 3 – SW MAC Group Call – Zone Liaison Reporting Format