

Directors' Remarks
S-520 Advanced Incident Management
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It is always an honor for me to be invited to NAFRI to speak to you at the opening of your first week in Arizona. My favorite speeches to give are those at the Apprenticeship graduations in California when I get the "new recruits," who are easy to motivate, right out of the shoot, ready, willing and able to do anything; and my annual speech here at NAFRI to the S-520, Advanced Incident Management class.

I don't have to tell any of you what a tremendous opportunity and privilege it is for YOU to attend this class. Every year, a substantial number of folks request to be nominated by their respective geographical areas; and every year, a substantial number of folks are not selected—there are just too few slots to take everyone. It's a problem that we've struggled for years to solve, especially in light of the rapid turnover of qualified Type 1 Command and General staff members, as our aging workforce retires; but it's one that continues today. SO, by virtue of your selection for and attendance here today, you have been deemed to be "the best of the best," candidates for the 2009 S-520 class that the interagency fire community has today. What an honor!

Now, with the title, "the best of the best," comes a huge level of responsibility. It is a responsibility first to yourself here this week to use all that knowledge, and those skills and abilities that you've gotten from your many assignments and all that mentoring you've received prior to reaching this level to give your all this week and graduate from this class—to reach the level of the "most elite" in your respective discipline. Then, after your graduation, your obligation is to your respective organization within the wildland fire community to use those skills and join one of the national teams who are in the need of that knowledge and the skills and abilities you possess. Lastly, your obligation is to those folks throughout this nation, and around the world, who find themselves in

the midst of some type of devastation where there is a need to bring order to the chaos that surrounds them. It's no small feat!

As you all well know, when a national team is called to an incident, it's because whatever the situation—a wildfire or all-hazard incident, the people involved need the “best of the best.” Most of the time, it's a high-profile—incident of national significance, and not only are the folks directly impacted watching you and your performance but it's those across the country who are watching, as well. You MUST demonstrate the highest level of INTEGRITY while you are wearing that title of Type I qualified. You assume that responsibility because that's what it means to be Type I qualified.

During this class, you will be tested; but through the process of reaching this level, you have all been well prepared. Use the training and experience that you've obtained throughout your previous assignments, and you will do well.

Now, let's talk for a short period about the future. Who knows what the Quadrennial Fire Review is?

The QFR is an evaluation process that looks at fire management conditions/risks into the future—a decade or two out. It's not a plan or policy making document, and there are no recommendations. It's purely an “advisory” document. I call it my “crystal ball.”

The first QFR was completed in 2005; the most recent report was published at the beginning of this year. The 2009 review tested the conclusions of 2005, applied the lessons learned, and tested broadly held assumptions. It is an integrated report, with participation on the federal, state, local, tribal governmental and non-governmental levels.

One area reviewed was asymmetric fire and strategic management response, a component of which included incident management and reshaping emergency response within fire leadership. When I talk about asymmetric fire, I am talking about the challenge of greater fire, larger fires, and longer fire seasons occurring irregularly within and across the regions. This demands greater flexibility and more agile capabilities within fire management. Going forward will require revising the overall fire suppression management strategy,

moving us beyond appropriate management response to “strategic management response.” SMR is a framework involving a multi-phased approach to address incident management. The phases include: preparedness, response, strategic plans for fire on the landscape, and a continual revision process.

With SMR, we are creating the capability to better integrate cost sensitivity and risk management into the acquisition and allocation of all resources. Allocation of resources in accordance with priorities is more than simply management of multiple demands and putting resources on the most needed fire locations, it also must be able to tackle the issue of overall supply. One of the strategic elements of SMR is to possibly redesign incident management team structures to not only broaden their ability to respond but instead of forming larger teams, we will possibly shift the focus to more modular and meld able incident management organizations—in other words, build the organization to fit the particular situation. We need to bring fire management response more in line with the National Response Framework which will lead us to a concurrent approach for reconfiguration of emergency response within fire leadership.

As we all very well know, large fires and longer fire seasons are not the only natural disasters in the headlines. We have a role and must be prepared to step up beyond simply fulfilling a role in the national emergency support function. While we will always make our land stewardship and protection responsibilities the primary objective of our work, the federal fire agencies need to work effectively with FEMA and state and local emergency response forces. We are looking to build beyond the strong training and technical assistance roles in national incident management that are already well established to promote stronger interplay and planning for emergency response efforts by all agencies and jurisdictional forces. Therefore, this strategy may entail a recalibration of emergency response into a total force concept, which will develop the capacity of incident management organizations so that all team members (Type I, II and III) have the training and ability to address wildfire and emergency response situations, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. We will continue to train and assist other communities and other partners in incident management and add fire

and emergency response planning to emergency response training. The goal would be to build the capability of all incident management teams to be able to integrate and work effectively within emergency response, focusing first on local incident management teams working with FEAM All-Hazard Incident Management Type 3 teams and extending to larger national and even international areas of operation.

It's a change from a few years ago, when the 2005 QFR supported efforts to limit emergency response efforts primarily to the NIMO teams and to emphasize short-run response efforts and avoid longer-term disaster recovery operations. The environment has changed and the capabilities of FEMA, local and state emergency response forces have changed as well. Fire management's engagement in a "total force concept" recognizes that all fire incident management resources must be able to participate effectively in emergency response, both in fulfilling emergency support functions and in assisting in other areas as appropriate. At the same time, I expect we will see additional participation from FEMA and state and local Emergency Response forces (such as seen this past year in northern California) as a future indicator of a more reciprocal state of emergency response.

As you begin this course, take advantage of not only the expertise of your instructors and mentors, but look toward the expertise that exists among yourselves. Draw from your past experience and apply yourselves, working as a team. Although important to know your functional area within the team, it was best said by one of college's longest-standing coaches Joe Paterno, "when a team outgrows individual performance and learns team confidence, excellence becomes a reality." Remember, you are the "best of the best;" and I look forward to the positive contributions you can make to the whole and working with you all in the future.

--Tom Harbour, Director
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