

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Mobile Command Posts-Addressing
Multi-jurisdictional Response to Major Events**

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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ABSTRACT

In this time of national insecurity, increasing threat of natural disasters, and other catastrophic events that require multiple agencies to respond to manage such events, the Mobile Command Post can be an effective tool to overcome the challenges agencies face while coordinating with each other. When multiple agencies respond, communication and coordination are the major issues that are consistently present when working with one another. The method of inquiry used by this researcher included personal experience and knowledge, review of relevant literature, a personal interview, and a survey. The findings of this research suggest that the mobile command post is an asset that can bridge coordination through addressing the needs of responders. By increasing communication through technology and radio interoperability, the mobile command post helps establish and maintain a unified command improving interagency cooperation. Through exploring this subject, the researcher discovered that a mobile command post can be a useful tool that significantly increases effectiveness and efficiency of multiple agencies responding to an event. However, in order for this resource to be effective, it requires planning, the proper components and more importantly agencies putting their differences aside to work together for the common good. It is the responsibility and duty of responding agencies to improve the response and coordination to major events for the welfare of the American people.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, more than ever, there is a desperate need for agencies within a region to learn how to mutually respond to regional events in a manner that promotes maximum efficiency and coordination. For such a response, there are various considerations such as identifying resources, planning and training. The focus of this administrative research paper is to examine some of the issues that are related to a multi-jurisdictional response to a major event as well as promoting to public safety officials the benefit of a mobile command post as a resource when properly utilized during a multi-jurisdictional response to major events.

As we have learned from the events of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, there are several issues that arise as a result of multiple agencies in different areas being pulled together to work such an event. The most common issue that continues to surface as a result of the response of multiple agencies is how agencies talk to each other. This communication with each other goes deeper than just being able to talk with each other on a radio. If not coordinated effectively, mass chaos can occur. This chaos can manifest itself in numerous ways. Some of the manifestations include injury, loss of life for victims and potentially responders, as well as opportunity for looting and other lawlessness. Public Safety responders need the best advantage possible in order to be prepared to manage major events. One of these advantages is having a well-designed and well-built mobile command post (MCP) available for this coordination, having the personnel that can operate it, and having trained with other agencies for such events. This research is intended to identify the benefit of a mobile command post at a regional level as well as identify basic components that a mobile command post must contain in order to be effective in coordinating a regional event and to be a useful resource.

The research will explore multiple issues related to multi-jurisdictional response and possible solutions. First, the research will identify specific needs that responders have merging together to work an event. Second, the research will determine that a MCP can address the specified needs by identifying basic technical components of a command post that make it useful. Lastly, the research is intended to show that a mobile command post can promote a more unified command.

In an effort to obtain broad-based information on this subject, various methods of inquiry will be used. The research will consist of journal and periodical articles, a survey and a personal interview. This researcher anticipates that the major issues between multiple agencies responding to events are communication, agency coordination and technology. The communication issues exist between responders and command staff, responders with each other, and differing agencies knowing what to expect from each other. Furthermore, it is anticipated that a mobile command post can be a valuable tool to address these issues. The intended outcome of this paper is twofold, 1) to show agencies the benefit of planning regionally utilizing a mobile command post to bridge communication and information issues and 2) help agencies when planning to acquire a MCP by identifying specific components necessary to facilitate unified command. If an agency already owns a mobile command post the hope is that this research would convince agencies to restructure their MCP so that it can be used both the local and regional level.

It would be comforting to think that events like Hurricane Katrina or September 11, 2001 will never occur again. But the fact is, as public safety professionals and ultimately as Americans, we cannot afford to believe they won't. Agencies have a responsibility to begin to think in a more regional approach to major events and plan for

multi-jurisdictional response. After all, natural disasters and terroristic events don't discriminate between city limits and county lines. It's a travesty to not be more prepared today than yesterday. The benefit of a properly equipped mobile command post would at some level prevent injury, death, or manifestations of chaos due to lack of communication, information, or lack of preparation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the researcher's opinion, law enforcement will soon be faced with an increasing trend of responding to terroristic activity that will require the resources of more than one agency. In order to effectively meet the demand of an event where multiple agencies must respond and work together, a properly equipped mobile command post is necessary. "A disaster can be defined as any situation that requires resources greater than any one department or agency has to offer. Then it becomes necessary to combine the resources of many agencies to meet the demand of any given situation" (Fagel, 2000, p.3). A mobile command post is a valuable tool that can help improve coordination challenges of the responding departments working together. In order to be effective, a mobile command post should have a specific design, certain technological components, and utilized during training scenarios.

The research of the periodicals and articles mainly revealed two schools of thought related to command posts. Although important, most literature explored the needs of the individual departments as it relates to a MCP (Furey, 1998; Pilant, 1994). There were few articles that covered the needs a single department and included coordinating and communicating with other agencies in surrounding jurisdictions (Hutson, 1991; Fagel, 2000). In this researcher's opinion, the opposite should be true.

Equal or more emphasis should be placed on the ability to connect with other agencies surrounding ones own. The basic needs of the department should be the foundation for preparation when contemplating a mobile command post. After all, the agency building it will utilize it more often than not for inner-departmental operations. However, the planning process should not stop there but continue in a more regional approach. This regional mentality is important in the early stages of the process so adequate planning goes into preparation for multi-agency disaster response. "The mobile command post vehicle is an excellent example of how emergency services can work together to meet a common goal" (Hutson, 1991, p. 5). It is essential that agencies cross jurisdictional lines and begin coordinating in a regional capacity.

From experiences that this researcher has encountered, for one reason or another, there are still departments that isolate themselves from other departments by focusing solely on their jurisdiction and their needs. It is unsure if the departments do not think regionally because they have never had to until recent major catastrophes or there remains a sentiment of territorialism between agencies. This researcher believes there is a mixture of both. Unfortunately, this ignorance or machismo is a factor when administrators plan or fail to plan for interagency coordination to catastrophic events. After nine eleven, however, a trend seems to be evolving that shows departments are realizing "...the new threat of terrorism is now in the forefront of all planning (Bertone, 2006, p.36). Fortunately, the majority of calls for a police department can be handled by that department. Conversely, "What happens when a law enforcement agency must respond to a major disaster, such as a plane crash or a building collapse that requires hundreds of workers to handle both rescue efforts and crowd control?" (Hutson, 1991, p. 4). Planning and coordination regionally is essential.

The consensus among the authors of the literature reviewed agreed that planning is the initial step in the development process. “In assessing the need for a command post, obvious questions are; what do we hope to gain through the use of a command post; and do we really need one?” (Furey, 1998, p. 73). There may be situations in which a mobile command post may not be necessary for a department. If a department with joining or overlapping jurisdiction already has one, then one is not needed. Again, the purpose of a mobile command post is “...to integrate command and communication during a major incident...” (Castelli, 2005, p. B1). If a department has taken steps to coordinate with other agencies and a regional plan is in place then there is not a need for that agency. This researcher would caution agencies without a plan in place against the assumption that their department can rely on other resources, especially federal or state, at least initially as they may be unavailable or take long periods of time to arrive and establish themselves in extreme circumstances such as what occurred in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

When assessing what resources are needed for a multi-jurisdictional response to a major event, it is important to assess who will be responding. Depending on the type and scope of a disaster, a department must keep in mind that there may be law enforcement agencies on a local, state, and federal level, there may be multiple fire departments and medical units as well as many charitable organizations. Resources should be handled in such a way that they are able to remain managed effectively and efficiently. This objective can be best obtained by using a unified command. A unified command means that the leadership of the responding agencies manages the event together, each agency knowing their roles and sharing information with other leaders so that respective responders focus on their specific expertise with the knowledge sharing

and communication with others. The advantage of this coordination is efficiency but more importantly, safety for both responder and victim. As part of the planning process Fagel says, "Identify responding agencies and their respective resources. Meet with representative of those agencies to develop a master plan...Determine what type of disaster could most likely occur in your area. Each responding agency should determine its role and train for its response" (Fagel, 2000, p. 4). If all of the responding agencies cooperate a MCP can facilitate the coordination by having a single location known as Incident Command. When all of the decision makers are at this location and making informed decisions together, there is a unified command.

Once the responders and resources are identified, the scope of the disaster narrowed, and roles identified, the components of the mobile command post begin to become evident. Include those components as well as basic components outlined later along with the specific needs of the department for a product that can both serve the immediate jurisdiction and the region. A mobile command post should be able to respond and establish itself quickly. Responding quickly is important because many times the event dictates the level of response. There are two issues that may occur as it is related to getting a handle on the event. First, there are not enough resources to handle the event and the responders on the scene are overrun and overworked. Second, there are too many resources and coordination becomes chaotic, inefficient and wasteful. It is important to get a handle as much as possible and as soon as possible for a proactive coordinated response. A more proactive approach is one that anticipates needs and resources before they are actually required. Therefore, speed in getting to a scene and setting up a unified command is essential. There are primarily two types of vehicles that can be utilized to get to a scene quickly to assist in

establishing a unified command, a recreational vehicle (RV) type or a truck trailer combination. Both have pros and cons. A RV type is self contained with restrooms, water tanks, and possible sleeping quarters. Although these items are convenient, it may be necessary to prepare other areas like local buildings if available for these basic necessities. Doing so will remove unnecessary traffic and noise away from the primary area of decision making and communication. One of the advantages of a truck trailer combination is redundancy. If the RV type vehicle has engine trouble, it can't get to the scene. Conversely, the trailer on a truck trailer rig can be removed and connected to another truck which allows the command post to still arrive at the scene in a timely manner. Regardless of the type, ensure that the chassis is compatible with the weight and space necessary to accomplish agency goals. Consideration for future needs for space and carrying capacity is important as well. The chassis of the trailer or RV should be heavy duty enough to handle the weight of the equipment, responders as well as any possible future additions. The MCP should be a living trailer that evolves for the needs of evolving events and as technology changes. Dual power supply is also an essential. A generator capable of handling the electrical load and running for extended periods of time and the ability to plug into a stationary electrical source gives the unit more functionality. At a minimum, the MCP should have three segregated rooms. One room should house and technological components, one should be designated a dispatch or communications room and the other a command room. The dispatch room should have at least two dispatch stations and allow for privacy and noise reduction. The command room should be large enough to hold meetings so that all decision makers can be involved to manage the event. An operation room "...gives me one place to go to meet with decision makers...I don't have to run around a disaster to talk to various people"

(Cima, 2006, p.3). The functionality of the command or operations room is essential in establishing the unified command structure. With this basic design the decisions can easily be made by unified commanders, passed on to the communications room for information dissemination and vice versa. Cooperation in decision making, information dissemination and communication both between agency commanders and responders in the field are essential for effective management. The basic structure of a mobile command post should promote unified command. Schaefer said that, "a mobile command post would help resolve issues by providing a mechanism for on scene coordination of radio communications, coordinate multiple jurisdictions and define their responsibility and provides location to implement the unified command system.

Rooms aside, when considering layout of a mobile command post, there is no one size fits all. Each department must consider their needs as well as those agencies they could potentially merge with given the circumstance which should be identified in the planning stage. Once the shell of the mobile command post is complete, certain basic components are necessary. These components consist of radio communications equipment, satellite uplink equipment, and computer and peripheral equipment. Radio equipment should be capable of patching multiple radio systems together. This is called interoperability. Radio systems vary from area to area which causes problems with communicating with other agencies. This challenge can be overcome. Although expensive, there is existing technology that allows the easy interface of multiple radio systems through one piece of equipment. A less expensive alternative requires planning, preprogramming radios with frequencies that are in a region and designating channels or talk groups before hand can bridge the communications gap. Again, this should be accomplished in the planning stage. For a backup, an alternate radio source

should be included such as an amateur radio or HAM. Headsets are a good idea for noise reduction as well as maintaining confidentiality when necessary. Furey says to consider "... headsets to reduce noise or intelligent design, climate control, provisions for electrical power or generators (away due to noise), segregated areas" (Furey, 1998, p. 75). It is a good idea to have extra hand held radios to assign as well. A communications plan or communication guidelines should be established and shared as soon as possible. Things like plain talk, which is not using police ten codes, among other similar considerations should be established in the communications plan so that responders from differing agencies know what is expected. Advancement in technology offers much in satellite communication. Satellites are important because they are not linked to local towers. In primitive areas or areas struck with massive devastation, satellites can provide an outside source of communication. Phones lines, fax lines, internet access and media can be brought by the installation of satellite communication equipment. Redundancy with many components should be factored in to the planning. Just as vehicles could have mechanical failure, electronics can fail as well. Extra components, where possible, should be on hand in preparation for a failure of equipment. Just like any office environment, the mobile command post should have computers and other basic office supplies, maps or mapping software, dry erase board or a way to capture group information.

When planning for a MCP, common sense and simplicity are key considerations. "Command posts come in a variety of styles and complexities, with most the appropriate type to utilize being dictated by incident demands and resources" (Furey, 1998, p. 73). As with many other things, there is no magic pill as it relates to creating a mobile command post that will effectively manage every incident imaginable. One has to be

flexible as to the possibilities of events to a specific area. Once again, the needs of the region will depend on what is fleshed out in the planning stage but basic components that a typical command post should include, “A working command post will typically house a communications center with dispatch equipment, computers, television, VCR, cellular and land line telephones, fax machines, copiers and – in some cases – the ability to directly monitor the local news coverage...A mobile command post can also function more like a conference room, used for staging press conferences...” (Pilant, 1994, p. 39). From this researcher’s personal experience as well as review of literature basic components seem to be universal.

Planning and equipping are important and necessary, but just as important and necessary is training. “A small emergency can quickly grow and become a large emergency if there is inadequate preparation (which includes both equipment and personnel) to respond in a timely manner” (Bertone, 2006, p. 36). The coordination between agencies shouldn’t stop in the planning stage. It is important to have the proper equipment needed for agency coordination but there must also be personnel trained to set up and utilize the MCP and multiple agencies working together in mock scenarios. These scenarios can be valuable to work out issues in a controlled environment instead of waiting for life or death situation only to discover flaws in the plan. These scenarios are also where the roles of each department can more clearly be defined and established. This supports more cooperation when the real event occurs. The processes for how communication is to occur at all levels is fleshed out in these training scenarios and it takes less time to get people geared up to respond appropriately. It is necessary to continue that training. People forget, turnover among employees occurs, and leadership changes. These factors subtract from previous

training and can hinder agency coordination. “Planning...preparing...Practicing-these are the key elements that can help each agency to better serve its community. It is better to find a weakness in a staged exercise over which you have control than to have a problem during a real disaster” (Fagel, 2000, p. 5).

The MCP, although a valuable resource, is a tool to enhance coordination not a sole solution to interdepartmental coordination issues. “It should be noted that a command post, like any strategic tool or consideration, is not suited for every situation. However, in those seemingly increasing number of cases when extraordinary demands are placed upon your capacity to communicate, the establishment of such a post can greatly enhance your ability to effectively manage the incident” (Furey, 1998, p. 77). A MCP is not an end to all chaotic events. There is no silver bullet when managing a disaster. Many times the best that agencies can do is respond and react to the chaos. In any event, preparation, training, unified command utilizing a properly equipped mobile command post in a multi-agency response to a major event can help to control that chaos. During the interview Schaefer said that, “mobile command posts are an effective component to the Incident command system and an excellent tool for meeting response needs, however, it should not be used as a replacement for an Emergency Operations Center.”

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not agencies are thinking and planning regionally and have or have access to a properly equipped mobile command post that can be used as a resource for coordinating multiple agencies responding to major events. This research will identify the basic needs of a mobile command post to facilitate multi-agency coordination and show that a mobile command

post is beneficial in supporting the facilitation between the agencies. Further, it will explore some of the technical components available that should be considered when crafting the MCP.

This researcher hypothesizes that there are several issues that block agencies from managing a catastrophic event that crosses jurisdictional lines mainly related to various forms of communications and coordination. It is hypothesized that most agencies have a MCP but it is utilized more for a local response than a regional. Further, those agencies that have a MCP do not have a regional plan and have not trained on that plan. Additionally, this researcher hypothesizes that the biggest challenge that departments face are radio communication with external agencies, agency coordination and cooperation and technology. A mobile command post that has been built with proper planning, contains the right components, and has been utilized in training scenarios that can significantly increase the effectiveness of multi-agency coordination to an event manifesting ultimately in saving lives.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, periodicals, and journals, personal experience and knowledge as a member of an agency that has utilized a mobile command post in a regional capacity, a survey, and a personal interview. The interview will be conducted of the current Emergency Management Coordinator of the Lower Colorado River Authority, an agency whose jurisdiction extends from San Saba Texas to Matagorda Bay and routinely plans for floods and similar events that affect multiple counties.

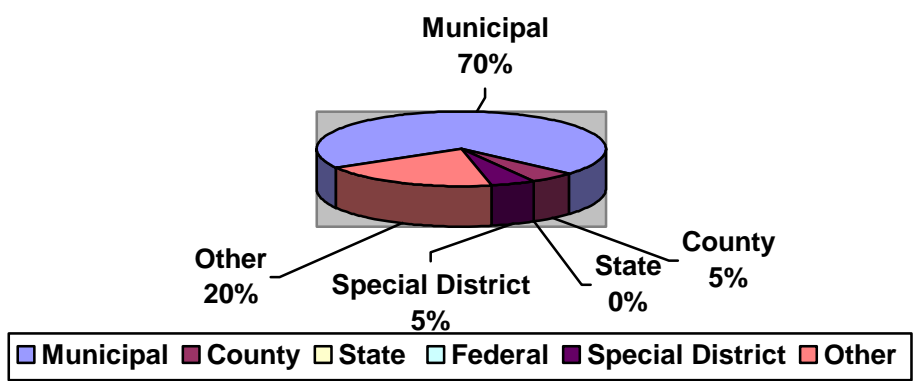
It is difficult to determine an instrument to utilize that will be able to measure the researcher's findings as it relates to the effectiveness and efficiency of agencies working together. There are, at times, forces outside the control of any department that

prohibit an effective response no matter how coordinated a department is with another. A subjective way to determine success or failure of effective response is public perception through media outlets and personal opinions of victims affected by the myriad of possible disasters. A survey will help measure the level of coordination between agencies. The size of the survey will consist of six questions, distributed to a cross section of twenty three law enforcement officials from first line supervisors to administrators across Texas. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in the return of twenty two surveys. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by this researcher.

FINDINGS

I.

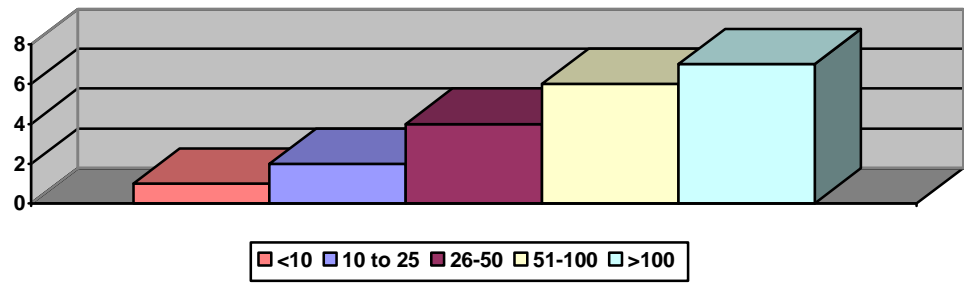
Type of Law Enforcement Agency



The information in the above chart is meant to set the framework of the various agencies that participated in the survey. The majority of the respondents work for a Municipal Police Agency.

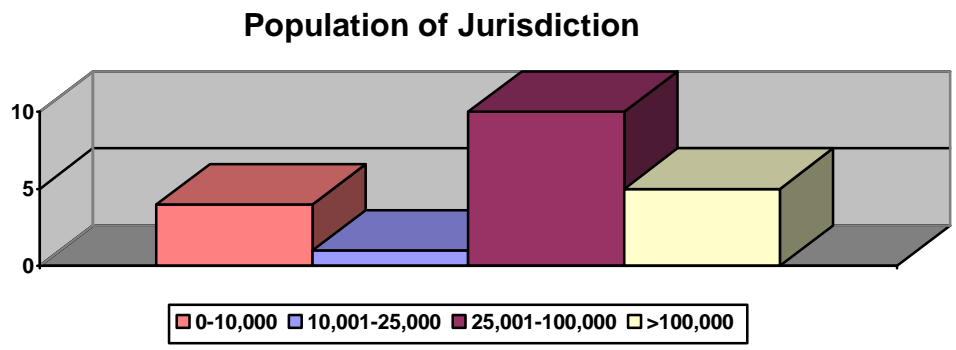
II.

Number of Commisioned Officers



The results of this chart, again is meant to set the framework for the research. This chart shows the number of commissioned officers employed in the agencies that were surveyed. The majority of respondents work for an agency with more than one hundred commissioned officers.

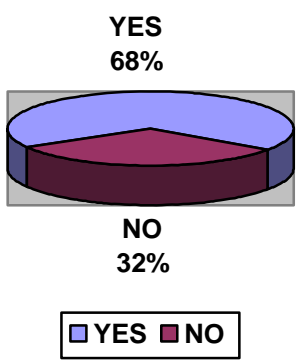
III.



This chart reflects the population of each of the respondent's jurisdiction. The majority of the jurisdictions represented in the survey have a population of twenty five thousand and one to one hundred thousand.

IV.

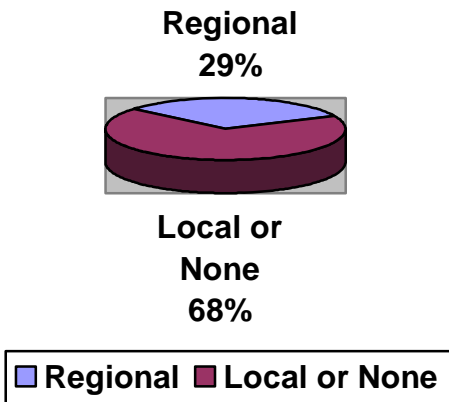
DO AGENCIES HAVE A MCP?



According to the survey, the majority of the departments that were queried have a mobile command post as seen in the chart above.

V.

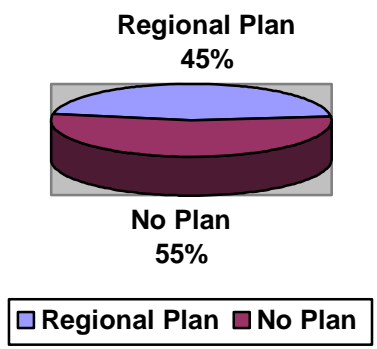
REGIONAL VS. LOCAL OR NO RESPONSE



This chart reveals that the majority of agencies surveyed either have no MCP or a MCP that is equipped only for a local response. This confirms the hypothesis of the researcher that law enforcement agencies are not adequately prepared for a regional response.

VI.

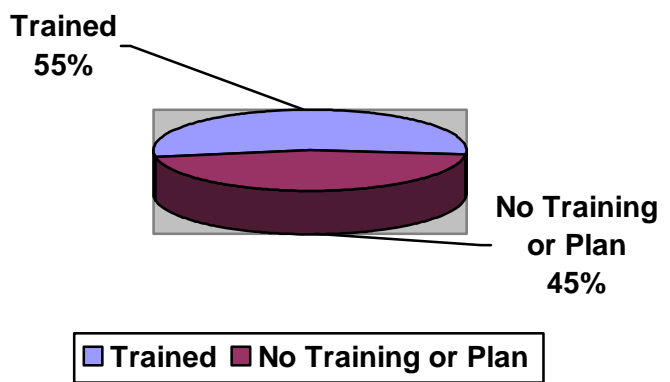
DO AGENCIES HAVE A REGIONAL PLAN?



This chart further supports the researcher's hypothesis that agencies need to be better prepared. The majority of the departments surveyed do not have a regional plan that utilizes the resource of a MCP.

VII.

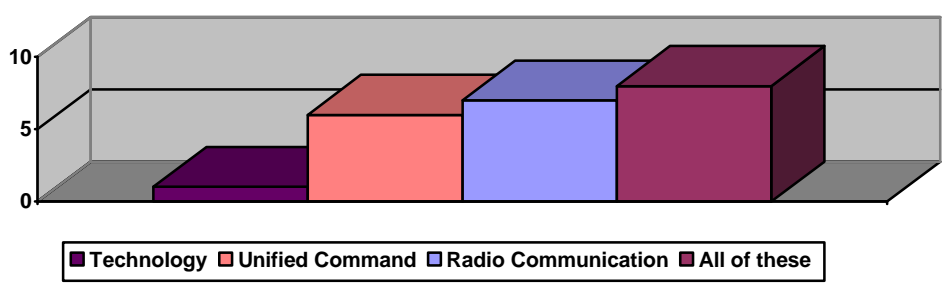
DEPARTMENTS THAT TRAIN UTILIZING A REGIONAL PLAN



Although the majority of agencies do not have a MCP that is equipped for a regional response or even have regional response plan that utilizes a MCP, the majority of agencies have trained in a regional capacity utilizing a MCP.

VIII.

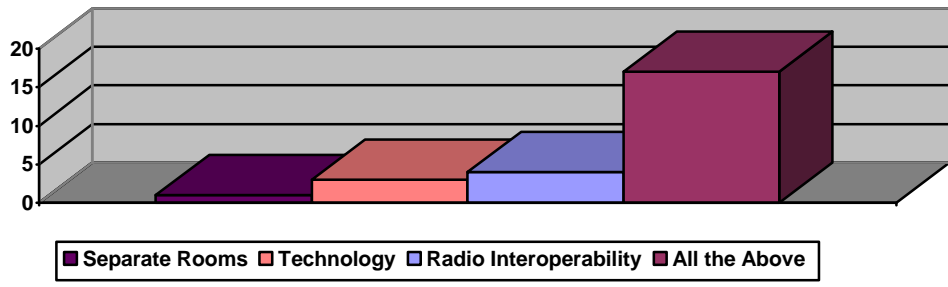
MAJOR ISSUES



The survey revealed that most of the individuals felt that radio communication, agency coordination related to unified command, and utilizing the latest technology were the major issues that agencies face when coordinating with other agencies in a regional event.

IX.

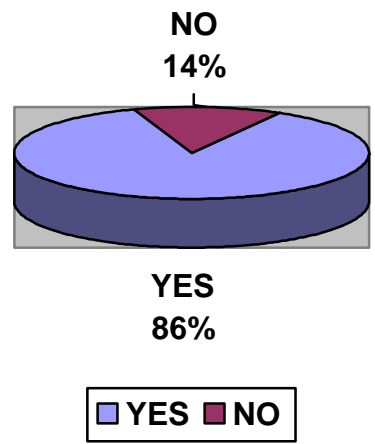
NECESSARY COMPONENTS



The majority of survey respondents agreed that having separate rooms for unified command, having the latest technology, and radio interoperability equipment are all necessary components that a mobile command post should to make it more effective.

X.

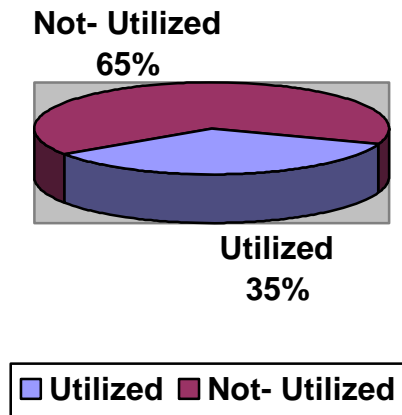
CAN A MCP RESOLVE THE ISSUES?



Overwhelmingly, the respondents surveyed felt that a properly equipped mobile command post could resolve agency coordination issues and help promote agency coordination in a multi-jurisdictional response to a major event.

XI.

Departments That Have Used a MCP in a Regional Event



According to the survey, the majority of the departments that were queried have not used a mobile command post in a regional or multi-jurisdictional response to a major disaster.

DISCUSSION

Broadly stated, the problem or issue examined by this researcher considered whether or not agencies are prepared to use their resource of a mobile command post for a regional response. The purpose of this study was to explore issues associated with multiple agencies responding to a major event and how a mobile command post can resolve some of these issues through technology, radio communication, and promoting unified command. The researcher hypothesized that agencies are not prepared to effectively respond to a regional event and do not have the proper equipment to facilitate a unified command and communication. Furthermore, it is anticipated that a mobile command post can address this issue. The researcher concluded from the findings that the majority of departments surveyed have mobile

command posts. Of those surveyed the majority of agencies either did not have their MCP prepared for a regional response or did not have a MCP at all. Additionally, it was determined that the majority of agencies did not have a regional plan that included a MCP. It was discovered, however, that the majority of the agencies have trained regionally with other departments utilizing a MCP. Further, research discovered that there was no single issue but three issues that prevented an efficient and effective response; an environment that is conducive to unified command, technology, and radio interoperability. There was overwhelming consensus that a properly equipped mobile command post could improve agency coordination.

Overall, the research supported the hypothesis. Some agencies are prepared for a regional response to a catastrophic event requiring multiple agencies but the agencies in Texas have significant room for improvement. The study of the use of a mobile command post as a resource that can improve interagency coordination to a response of a catastrophic event is relevant because it shows the deficiency of Texas Law Enforcement Agencies. The research also shows the benefit of planning regionally utilizing a mobile command post to bridge communication and information issues as well as serving as a general blueprint for agencies planning to build or purchase a mobile command post by identifying specific components necessary to facilitate unified command. From personal knowledge and experience, from interviews with Homeland Security Officials, and from a survey of police officials from across Texas, overwhelmingly the evidence is that in some form or fashion a preplanned mobile command post that is designed for a regional response and has been utilized in the capacity of a unified command system can significantly improve the response and coordination to a major event that requires multiple agencies to respond. Schaefer says

that as a result of events like 911 and federal and state promotion of regional planning, the trends are changing and agencies are seeing the advantage of mutual aid.

Ultimately, the lives of responders and victims in a terrorist or catastrophic event could be saved if agencies were equipped, prepared, and coordinated by utilizing a mobile command post. In the researcher's opinion, law enforcement is on the forefront of a war yet to be waged on American soil, a war of terrorism that is inevitable. As keepers of the peace, we as agencies must adapt to the changing environment. The days of agency isolation are coming to an end and preparations must be made to coordinate effective responses regionally. Utilizing the resource of a properly equipped mobile command post significantly increases agency cooperation and coordination resulting in a safer place for the American people.

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APPENDIX

ARP Survey for Jason Hoffman

1. Does your department have a Mobile Command Post? (If no skip to number 3)
Yes No

2. If so, is it equipped right now for more of a local response for just your department or is it capable to coordinate a multi-jurisdictional response to a major event (radio interoperability, etc)?

Local Multi-jurisdictional

3. Has your department trained with other regional agencies utilizing a Mobile Command Post?

Yes No

4. In the context of working a major catastrophic event in your jurisdiction where other agencies are a necessary resource, what is the biggest challenge your department and other agencies will have working together?

- a. Radio communication
- b. Unified Command –agency coordination
- c. Technology (internet, phones, television)
- d. All the above
- e. Other (please specify)_____

5. In your opinion, would a properly equipped mobile command post resolve at least in some way any or all of the issues?

- a. yes
- b. no

6. In your opinion, what components are necessary for a mobile command post to be effective in helping to manage multi agency response to a major event?

- a. Ability to patch radio channels / spare radios
- b. Technology (internet, phones, television)
- c. Separate dispatch / planning rooms
- d. All the above
- e. Other (please specify)_____

ARP Addendum Survey for Jason Hoffman

1. What type of law enforcement agency do you work for?

Municipal County State Federal Special District (ISD etc...) Other

2. How many commissioned officers does your agency employ? _____

3. What is the approximate population of the jurisdiction that you serve?

0 - 10,000

10,001 – 25,000

25,000 – 100,000

>100,000

4. Has your department ever used a Mobile Command Post to coordinate multiple agencies in a regional or multi-jurisdictional response to a major disaster?

Yes

No