



Washington State Patrol State Fire Service Mobilization Report

2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington State Patrol (WSP) is required under RCW 43.43.965 to report on an annual basis the following information for each emergency or disaster in which the Washington State Fire Services Mobilization Plan (Mobilization Plan) was used for purposes other than fire suppression, and reimbursement was made under RCW 43.43.961:

- The type and nature of the disaster or emergency;
- The reasons why the host jurisdiction and mutual aid resources were exhausted;
- The additional risk resources provided under the mobilization plan;
- The cost incurred by the state patrol;
- The amount of reimbursement made under RCW 43.43.961 to the host jurisdiction and each non-host jurisdiction providing all risk resources; and
- An assessment and any recommendations of actions that can be taken by the host jurisdiction and its mutual aid network to prevent future use of the fire mobilization plan for similar disasters or emergencies.

STATE FIRE SERVICE MOBILIZATION

State Fire Service Mobilization was authorized three times for incidents other than fire suppression; once for COVID-19 vaccination support, one pre-mobilization resource staging for wildfire, and one pre-mobilization resource staging for flooding.

On **February 16, 2021**, through an interagency agreement with the Department of Health, WSP Chief John R. Batiste authorized the use of the Mobilization Plan to assist in the coordination of the delivery of vaccines by incident management teams in five regions, as defined by the Department of Health, based in the following counties: Benton, Chelan, Stevens, Thurston, and Yakima.

At that time, some local, county, and state agencies, did not have qualified incident management personnel/teams or had exhausted their pools of available personnel to fill positions within incident management organizations.

On **July 8, 2021**, Chief Batiste authorized the pre-positioning of wildfire response resources to Okanogan County, due to significant fire activity on two large wildfires that threatened lives and property in and around Okanogan County Fire District #6 and the towns of Twisp and Winthrop.

At that time, local resources were committed to the initial attack of other wildfires within their jurisdictions and did not have available resources to engage existing large wildfires if they entered their protected areas.

On **November 27, 2021**, Chief Batiste authorized the pre-positioning of swift-water rescue resources to Whatcom County, in anticipation of record flooding that may require technical swift-water/river rescue of citizens.

At that time, existing local resources were not sufficient in numbers and capability to respond to rescue incidents if floodwaters reached their predicted stages, as modeled by the National Weather Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, and US Geological Survey.

RESOURCES

The resources provided to other state and local agencies for the COVID-19 vaccination support were qualified incident management personnel, who assisted local, county, and state agency incident management teams in their activities.

The resources provided to Okanogan County consisted of wildland fire engines and qualified supervisory personnel.

The resources provided to Whatcom County were swift-water rescue boats and qualified personnel, including qualified supervisory personnel.

COST

As of November 30, 2021, the overall estimated Mobilization cost (CY21) incurred by WSP is \$18,265,000. Of that amount, an estimated \$3,850,000 was for DOH COVID vaccination efforts, \$260,000 (estimated) for pre-positioning of resources, and the remaining \$14,214,000 (estimated) for traditional wildfire response.

The amount already reimbursed to local jurisdictions is \$6,900,000. The WSP anticipates reimbursing an additional \$11,050,000 (estimated) for invoices not yet received from local jurisdictions and state agencies. Estimated WSP costs are \$200,250.

The WSP expects total reimbursement of \$3,850,000 (estimated) from the Department of Health.

In 2021, No “host” entities received reimbursement for non-wildfire uses of the Mobilization Plan.

ASSESSMENT

There continues to be a limited number of organized Type 3 Incident Management Teams (IMT) within the state of Washington that accept assignments other than wildfire suppression and other emergency responses. Nearly all of the members of those IMT’s have regular jobs that require some level of emergency response or incident management, which impacts their ability to fully participate in IMT assignments. The duration of IMT activations during the COVID-19 response also heavily taxed the ability of IMT’s to continue to fill positions within their organizations.

Additionally, the number of Type 2 IMTs in the Pacific Northwest Region (defined by the United States Forest Service as Washington and Oregon) has declined over the past three years, and many members of the remaining IMTs also participate in local Type 3 IMT’s. This dual participation taxes the system, particularly during periods of increased wildfire activity.

Nearly all of the standing IMT’s are “interagency” in nature, meaning their members come from a variety of agencies and disciplines. The diversity of the teams’ membership broadens and deepens their skill sets, and makes them highly effective in managing incidents of all types.

During periods of high wildfire activity, some local jurisdictions who are heavily reliant on volunteer responders do not have sufficient personnel or other resources to manage both initial attacks of small fires within their jurisdiction. They are not able to respond to existing larger fires that grow into their jurisdiction at the same time.

Weather events, such as floods, require very specific technical resources with highly trained personnel to perform life-saving rescues. Though varying forms of water rescue responses are performed by fire departments across Washington (and nationwide), per statute (RCW 38.52.400) search and rescue activities in Washington are the responsibility of the chief law enforcement officer of each political subdivision. There are not sufficient existing inter-local agreements between county sheriff’s offices to protect the public without the participation of fire department personnel and resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Washington State Patrol recommends that local, county, and state agencies continue to support the sponsorship of, and participation in, interagency Incident

Management Teams of all types. This is to include providing employees the time to participate in training, exercises, and deployments, as well as supporting the technology and infrastructure needs of those IMTs.

Local, county, and state agencies should also continue to evaluate the likelihood of having to manage a prolonged incident, continually assess their capacity to manage those incidents, and establish/maintain their incident management capacity.

The Washington State Patrol also recommends that the Emergency Management Division execute the appropriate inter-local agreements with fire and law enforcement agencies providing water rescue resources so that augmenting those law enforcement activities can be done through the state Emergency Operations Center's Search and Rescue (ESF #9) and Law Enforcement (ESF #13) Emergency Support Functions.

The WSP further recommends that local health jurisdictions establish inter-local agreements with local fire agencies and EMS organizations, so that they may readily seek assistance from those entities during responses to infectious disease outbreaks.