

# MABAS-WISCONSIN *in ACTION*

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A quarterly report of MABAS WISCONSIN activities to underscore its value to the community and to foster growth and improvement through the sharing of actual experience

## COMMUNICATION: THE BACKBONE OF MABAS BY GARY SCHMIDT

One of the reasons for the success of MABAS is the ability to get a large amount of the correct type of resources to a stricken community very quickly. This occurs because the same terminology is used by all departments, the responses are preplanned, and the same radio frequencies are used.

This issue of the newsletter focuses on those behind the scenes - the MABAS Dispatchers. **Throughout this issue, you will find what the Comm Centers think of MABAS**, what is working for them, and what can be improved. We will also find out what it is like to be part of a WI-TERT deployment.

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER BY ED JANKE

In our last issue of "MABAS-Wisconsin in Action," I shared information that the executive board has been discussing in terms of strategic planning and the corollary issues of mission, vision, values, goals and objectives for the organization.

The draft vision statement was included: **it is our vision that one day all citizens of this State will be served by emergency services providers who are part of a seamless and universal model of receiving mutual aid when in need; having immediate access to any and every type of common or specialty resource they would ever need to deal with any peril facing them; all available through their normal dispatch process, without fear of the financial consequences to their community.**

As MABAS Wisconsin continues to develop and adapt to new opportunities for helping each other, it is important for all of us to create a strong organizational foundation for future generations to build upon. With a clear understanding of where we are and where we are going, we are likely to be much more resilient and successful. We continue to build trust in the organization and each other, knowing that we will have help when we need it. We build that trust by communicating to all of our stakeholders what it is we do, how we do what we do, and most importantly why we do it.

"What" we do is probably the easiest to answer; we coordinate mutual aid around the State of Wisconsin by defining what our collective resources are, organizing those resources into a system and provide a process for communication anywhere in the State to allow timely movement of those resources. "How" we do it is through a system which organizes resources by county and then by region.

The question is, "why" do we do what we do? We are the answer to the "why" in that we each work tirelessly to help each other in this profession knowing that we are a team of individuals who collectively commit ourselves to greater accomplishments; neighbor helping neighbor.

In this issue of "MABAS Wisconsin in Action," we look at communications from a systemic perspective. At some point in our careers, we have all experienced the frustration of attempting to transmit or receive critical, necessary, life threatening information regarding our incident, finding incredible frustration in the inability to communicate.

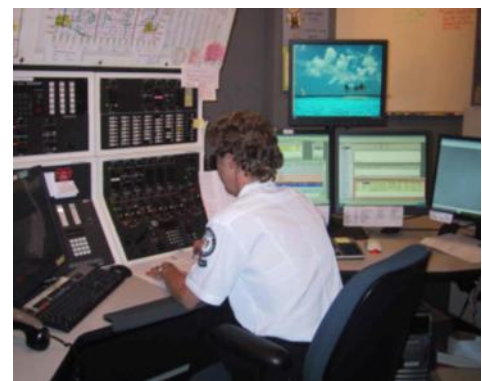
A 2003 study contracted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) determined that "one of the most significant problems facing firefighters within a

*(Continued on page 2)*



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Manitowoc County Joint Dispatch Center  
<http://www.mccemergencyservices.org/JDC/idchome.htm>

**MABAS-WISCONSIN IN ACTION**

**COMMUNICATION SURVEY QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT MABAS?**

I believe the best aspect of MABAS is that it is not a piecemeal system. I feel that it's generally easy to follow and execute.



I like the fact that additional help is always available if needed. There are certain events that one department just cannot handle, and the MABAS system is reassurance that those large-scale events can be defeated.



It provides the answers before the questions are asked.



Resources are predetermined and you do not have to rely on Command to tell you what they need as in the past.



The structure, when used properly by

on scene personnel.



The ability to remain consistent across the entire state and have a uniform system and set of protocols.



I like the idea that mutual aid is scripted and that both the Incident Commander (IC) and the dispatcher are looking at the same sheet of paper. It is all pre-planned out so the IC does not have to remember to pick who he wants for mutual aid at 3am when he is sleepy.



Before MABAS, the IC had to tell us what they wanted from whom, the dispatch center would not suggest or automatically call anyone without being told to do it.

Also, as a dispatcher, we can look

ahead to the next alarm level and prepare before the IC even calls for it.



I like that everything is already established ahead of time and there is no question on what apparatus or agency is needed.



The MABAS cards tell you exactly what departments and equipment need to be dispatched.



It takes the guess work out, you look at the card and you know exactly what resource is needed. It saves time and you know exactly what's expected of you.



I think I like that it is pretty much all laid out for you – there shouldn't be any second guessing and such as it is all right there!

**PRESIDENT'S CORNER - CONTINUED**

*(Continued from page 1)*

structure on the fireground is the ability to communicate reliably between the firefighters themselves and between the firefighters and the command post or communications center." I think we recognize that due to the hazards and risks of our profession, it is essential that we can communicate between fireground companies, command, and dispatch; despite the weather, what we are doing or where we are.

From the NIOSH reports, we further recognize that, important information is not always adequately communicated on the fireground or emergency incident scene. The result has been firefighter injuries and fatalities. Without effective communications we have no command or control.

In this issue of "MABAS Wisconsin in Action," we have shared information regarding situations and processes

for communications in divisions around the State. Some of the information may be relevant to a particular division; some of the information may be more systemic in nature and warrant consideration by other divisions.

Since communications is so important, MABAS Wisconsin is likely to convene a special committee this spring to study this issue as we consider the various types of communication systems and processes that occur across the State. In closing, I am pleased to welcome two new divisions; Division 146 – Florence County and Division 147 – Langlade County.

**MABAS Wisconsin  
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**MABAS Div 102 In Action** - Box Alarm for an apartment fire in the 2000 block of Frankie Place in Mount Pleasant on Christmas night.

Photo by Timothy J. Stein. This photo and others are located at [www.fvrpix.com](http://www.fvrpix.com) in the "Featured Galleries Area"

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES TO YOUR COMM CENTER DURING A MABAS EVENT?

Our dispatch center handles both police and fire departments, which leaves the possibility of all on duty dispatchers being overwhelmed and unable to provide assistance to each other. On Monday through Friday from the hours of 12pm to 8pm, there is a power shift which adds a third dispatcher. Dispatchers also handle clerical duties for the police department a percentage of the week.

The main challenges in our Comm Center during a MABAS event are units on the radio covering each other, out of county units not properly identifying themselves by their unit/

apparatus number, and unfamiliarity of MABAS with newer employees or employees who do not have much experience with MABAS.

Radio usage. Responders are calling out at the same time because they cannot hear each other on IFERN.

Communications always are an issue getting field units to use the correct channels etc. Also, getting Command to respond to you for benchmarks.

The main challenge is training - getting the dispatchers to be

comfortable doing it. We have a radio drill at least once a month, if not twice a month and some of the dispatchers seem to fear it simply because they are not comfortable doing it.

The agencies are responding on IFERN too quickly - before the Dispatcher has time to finish all the paging.

I think the biggest challenge is that it is used so little, that it can become almost overwhelming. I try to run scenarios in my mind once in a while - take the book out and go through it.

## WHAT IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED OR FORGOTTEN WITH RESPECT TO (NOT BY) COMM CENTERS BY MABAS OR DURING A MABAS EVENT?

The fact that the MABAS incident may not be the only incident occurring, especially if the Comm Center handles multiple jurisdictions and departments.

How important it is for them to be able to train with field units on a regular basis to make alarms go better. Continuity from one agency to the next.

I think that a major aspect of a MABAS Comm Center that is overlooked is that many Comm Centers have other responsibilities beyond MABAS.

This comes into play when during a MABAS call, a fire department unit that is calling MABAS Division xxx does not get an instantaneous response due to the dispatcher talking on another frequency.

There isn't a lot of training, and/or continuing education, offered specifically for dispatchers.

Be patient with the dispatcher that is responsible for the event. When there are multiple units calling and requesting multiple things to be done, they all will not be accomplished in 5 minutes. Each request must be prioritized.

The fire department gets excited and sometimes forgets to call on scene leaving us to wonder if they made it which causes more chatter on air.

Lack of understanding by the agencies responding on the amount of work the dispatcher is doing. Agencies responding forget the rest of the dispatchers responsibilities don't stop because there is a MABAS call. (Responders think they get it, but most are pretty clueless to the reality.)

ICS training for dispatchers

That we haven't actually had a live MABAS call - only monthly radio

training drills - when our agency is notified for other department's fires.

I think that we should have MABAS memorized - at least the working still.

Also, it is maybe assumed we can figure out the card correctly, without being told, but it would make me more comfortable to have the OIC tell me the card number.



**La Crosse County Public Safety Communications Center**

<http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/EmergencyServices/Dispatch/Index.htm>

**MABAS-WISCONSIN IN ACTION**

**SUPPLEMENT YOUR DISPATCH CENTER WITH WI-TERT DURING MAJOR INCIDENTS**

BY GARY SCHMIDT AND WENDY MAECHTLE, WISCONSIN STATE TERT COORDINATOR

Over the past 25 years, emergency responders in the state of Wisconsin have faced a number of disasters. The Weyauwega train derailment, the Barneveld, Ladysmith, Siren, Kenosha, and Eagle tornados, and the statewide flooding of 2008, are just a few examples.

WI-TERT response teams, including preparation for deployment and debriefing members upon return.

The **Communications Unit Leader (COML)** responsibilities include the collection, processing, and dissemination as needed to facilitate

**The actual event: Capitol Chaos, Madison, WI - Deployed from February 15 – 28, 2011 and March 10, 2011.**

WI-TERT provided 4 Regional Coordinators, 14 Team Members and 4 COML's from 11 different member agencies to provide support for interior and exterior communications at the Wisconsin State Capitol.

**How WI-TERT was activated:**

Wisconsin Capitol Police Deputy Chief Dan Blackdeer made the request after TERT was suggested to him and the process explained.

Rick Lange, Communications Supervisor, Dane County Public Safety Communications initiated the process by contacting the WEM duty officer who contacted (then) State TERT Coordinator Connie Catterall who called Lange.

Lange explained what was going on and Catterall approved the request after further consultation with DC Blackdeer. The request came from Capitol PD because their staffing was depleted and the event had quickly overwhelmed their communications staffing capabilities.



When disasters occur, dispatchers are almost always the first point of contact and typically provide essential communication for the duration of the incident. However, a disaster or critical incident can strain or even overwhelm a dispatch center, threatening the operation of vital communication links.

Operations of Command, General Staff, and Unit Leaders within a local - or State-level All-Hazards Incident Management Team (AHIMT).

The **WI-TERT Team Member** is a trained Telecommunicator who could be deployed to assist a dispatch center or support a command post in the event any state, county or local public safety communication center becomes compromised due to a man-made or natural disaster.

WI-TERT is available to augment dispatch centers in need or to provide primary communications if necessary. (source for above information: [http://www.wi-tert.org/about\\_us.html](http://www.wi-tert.org/about_us.html)).

In the **Summer, 2010 issue of the MABAS newsletter (Volume 1 Issue 3)**, we provided general information about WI-TERT. In this issue, personnel from each of the WI-TERT roles recall their experiences from an actual deployment.

Personnel receive training to fulfill one of three roles during a WI-TERT deployment.

The **Regional Coordinator** deploys

MABAS BOX ALARM:						
ALARM LEVEL	ENGINES	TRUCKS	SQUADS	AMBULANCES	CHIEFS	SPECIAL EQUIPMENT
BOX	Franklin Greendale	Greenfield		Milwaukee (ALS)	Wauwatosa Greenfield Greendale Franklin	Wauwatosa Truck (RIT) Oak Creek Command Milwaukee Fire Bell
2ND	West Allis Hales Corner	North Shore			NorthShore Hales Corners West Allis	Wauwatosa Utility 5 * Milwaukee County Bus * ARES Communication
3RD	Milwaukee Caledonia	South Shore		Raymond	Milwaukee South Shore Caledonia	New Berlin (RIT) * SEIMT Milwaukee County Incident Management Team
4TH	North Shore Tess Corners	City Brookfield			City Brookfield Tess Corners	* TERT Telecommunicator Emergency Response Taskforce Hales Corner U620
5TH	Milwaukee Elm Grove	Pewaukee		Greenfield (ALS)	New Berlin Elm Grove	West Allis (RIT) * LTIMT Local/Tribal Incident Management Team

A Box Card example showing TERT listed

## MY WI-TERT DEPLOYMENT: *REGIONAL COORDINATOR* BY SGT JILL M. RAFFAY, WASHINGTON COUNTY SHERIFF DEPT

I am a Regional Coordinator for the Southeast WI-TERT region. The WI-TERT regions are aligned with the WEM regions and the MABAS-WI regions. I was at work when I was notified of my deployment via phone however I had been receiving emails from the SW Regional Coordinators prior to being deployed (the deployment was in the SW Region).

I was not deployed the same day so I had plenty of time to prepare. I also was driving back and forth so I didn't need to pack many items. I was advised that there was parking and food and drink would be supplied. They supplied me with all the information needed to enter the Command Center

I did not meet others before reaching the Capitol or have a designated meeting spot at the destination site. We were to respond right to the Command Center and were provided directions and a code to get in. There wasn't anyone else from my area deployed.

I oversaw the 2 TERT members that were deployed, sat in on the Command Staff meetings, and passed the updates on to the TERT members. I also worked with the

Command Staff whenever needed. We had a person of interest and I worked with the FBI on gathering more in depth information on him due to my access into certain Law Enforcement systems.

There was a learning curve however things were already underway so a system was already in place. I mostly worked on the phone, however other TERT members had to learn to operate minimal tasks on the CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) system that Command was using.

There was some anxiety due to not being familiar with the unit numbers, names and voices. At times it was hard to understand the names being provided to us over the radio. Due to the circumstances, there was a lot of background noise causing some interference but overall things seem to run rather smoothly. We did have some locals working in the Command that would assist us if needed.

I was deployed for two days: 7am to 3 pm on the first day and 3pm to 11pm on the second day with roughly two hours of drive time each way per day. I did hold over longer on both days but not more than two

hours. I drove back and forth and food was all supplied.

### Lasting impressions

I was impressed with how everyone worked together along with seeing how well ICS worked. They had all the divisions set up throughout the building and had us meet with each one. There was another command in the capital and they did a video meeting with them several times a day to keep everyone on the same page.

### Advice for future deployments

We learned after the fact that if deployed for multiple days we could have stayed in Madison rather than drive back and forth. We had others deployed from the SE Region that drove even farther than I did and were deployed for 2-3 days. We weren't provided with that information at the time of deployment. Make sure you deploy an individual for at least 3 days so that you aren't constantly training new responders. If you have your own headset make sure you bring it. The more you are willing to learn and do, the easier it is to blend in with those you are assisting. (See *Team Member story on page 8*)

## DO YOU HAVE A SPECIFIC EVENT TO SHARE ABOUT THE MABAS SYSTEM?

Our division handled the fire at the Patrick Cudahy plant in Oak Creek in 2009. This incident lasted approximately five days, with multiple dispatchers working over the 3 shifts encompassing those days. This was the largest response since our division was founded, and was the largest MABAS response in the state. What is notable is our division did a mock drill for this location prior to the actual fire.



Our Division is young, but active. They don't give lip service to ICS, they really use it. The Division as a whole has been awesome on working together to focus on improvement after every call. They are honest with each other on what worked, what didn't, without criticism. Each call is used as a learning experience.



**Div 119 in action:** the 2nd alarm MABAS response for a fire in a restaurant saved the rest of the strip mall in Cedarburg on 2/5/13. Photo by Chuck Liedtke.

**MABAS-WISCONSIN IN ACTION**

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO DIVISIONS JUST STARTING OUT?**

I would tell them to make sure to follow the format and not to skip any steps. Also, try not to "over think" the process as sometimes it can complicate matters. Again, this all falls in line with the fact that it's not a piecemeal system and each step is clearly indicated.



Do not be afraid to ask questions. In fact, ask a lot of questions!



Hang in there, it is never easy and there is always resistance to change. MABAS works - just give it time. This is nothing new just new to you.



First and foremost, learn from the current divisions in your area...don't re-invent the wheel!! Another big piece of advice is get the dispatch center on board from the start.



In my division, we were lucky to have myself as the president, another dispatcher the vice president, and a third dispatcher as an active part of the division. You can't do it without them.... and the GIS people too.



Have training scenarios. That is probably the best stress relief for any dispatcher. The more you look at the box cards and understand how they work, the better the "real" call will be.



Include dispatch in every committee meeting about MABAS and listen to what they have to say. If the Division involves more than one dispatch, each one should be represented.



Training – training - training – get all dispatch centers and responding agencies to train and work together – remember we are only as good as our weakest link.



Review and go through the MABAS book. Familiarity is your best weapon.



Have patience. It does get better.

**AS MABAS SPREADS THROUGHOUT WISCONSIN, WHAT ISSUES HAS THAT CAUSED YOUR COMM CENTER?**

Each county does it a little differently. One example is another county had a MABAS event and needed some of our fire departments. The fire departments switched to IFERN and spoke directly with the MABAS division. At the end of the call, it was realized the MABAS Division never tracked any of their times.



The biggest issue we have

experienced is when we are calling other counties for resources that are not a MABAS division, they have no idea what some of the terms are.



IFERN pages and tests can be heard from too great a distance so tendency is to turn the channel volume down.



Not all agencies participating make the process cumbersome making it a

harder sell to the dispatchers (even though it is still easier).



I believe the biggest issue will be with other activity/noise coming from the alarm box.



The only issue that I have seen from this is trying to use IFERN when there is another call going on in the area and the 2 separate incidents start talking over each other.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS, REMINDERS & DEADLINES**

- It's very important for the Wisconsin Fire Service Emergency Response Plan contact information to be current and in Esponder. It will be especially important to WEM Fire Services Coordinator and the MABAS Regional Coordinators.
- Send completed MABAS Box cards to Dean Nelson at [dnelson94@wi.rr.com](mailto:dnelson94@wi.rr.com)

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## MABAS DIVISION SPOTLIGHT - ONEIDA COUNTY BY WAYNE KINNALLY, CHIEF, NOKOMIS VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT



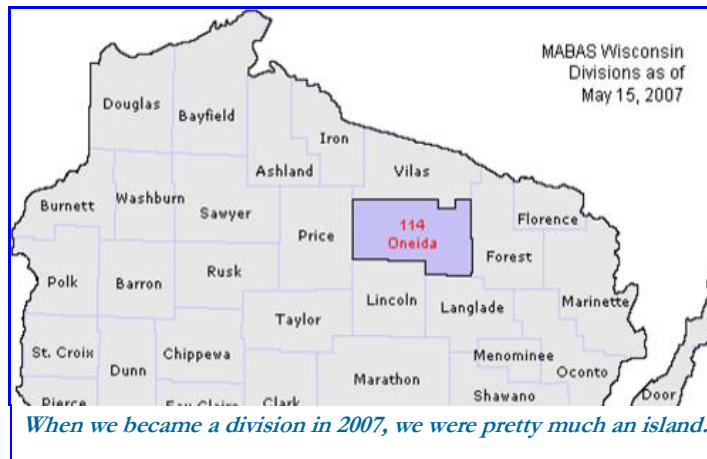
Oneida County Division 114 has 17 Volunteer Fire Departments, 1 Career Fire Department and 1 Volunteer Emergency Medical Responder unit. All departments within Oneida County are part of MABAS. It was a long haul to get live. We had our first MABAS presentation in February of 2006. We became a division in 2007, had a few bumps along the way, and a couple of timelines came and went before we were finally ready for calls in October 2010. Our first MABAS call to the box level was in December of 2012.

**The area.** Div 114 is mainly rural and departments that have had an Automatic and Mutual Aid in place for years. That aid is part of the working still level on the cards and has been adequate for most calls. Our division holds meetings every other month at different departments around the county.

**Impact of Terrain.** Our county is a fairly large county, it is about 60 miles long and with our type of terrain IFERN continues to be a challenge. We are not able to communicate with the dispatch center from the outlying areas of the county, not even with a mobile radio, and have to fall back onto the county Repeater to communicate at times.

**What is special, different, unusual, or unique?** Most departments have some sort of ATV, UTV or snowmobiles for off road rescues both in the summer and the winter. Not many of the departments have created a card for these types of calls as most seem to be either one or two people injured. Some departments have boats and most have ice rescue equipment. Again only about half of departments have water rescue cards.

One thing that is different in our part of the state is the way the Brush card is used. We are in what is called the northwoods and have a sizable wildland /urban interface issue (people like to live in the woods). We are in what is called an intensive fire protection area for the DNR, which means they have wildland firefighting



*When we became a division in 2007, we were pretty much an island.*

force's in place during the fire seasons for responding and combating wildland fires. Fire departments also get called to these fires, for initial attack.

The fire departments main responsibility is structure protection, sometimes that is taken care of with the initial attack and control of the fire. When the fire moves beyond the initial attack phase and structures are in the path of the fire it can require a large commitment by the fire departments to protect those structures (one engine per home per hour).

With that being said our Brush cards are developed with the intention of protecting structures and not fighting the wildland fire. We need engines, tenders, and brush trucks to prepare the structures for the approaching fire, or, coming in after the head of the fire has passed, to control any structures that may have issues.

**Box Cards.** We update our Box Cards each year in April and we start the process with a resource availability authorization that each

department fills out with the resources they will be able send on a call. Each department then fills out their box cards based on that information which makes the approval of the cards easier (the Resource Authorization was shared with us and we modified the form to fit our division's needs).

**Training.** After the basic *What is MABAS* classes, we developed an

*Activating & Responding* class that we conducted at departments and county FF's meetings. Radio Drills are conducted before our meetings while in route to the meeting exercises (parking lot drills), scripted radio drills, walking to assignments and communicating.

At each meeting we discuss a card (structure, brush, life safety) covering the resources, having enough resources listed, the value of each type of resource.

### Dispatching

The dispatch center is at the Oneida County Sheriff's department and they are the main dispatch for the county and our MABAS dispatch. Minocqua also has a dispatch at their PD and they page the Minocqua and Woodruff FD's.

The dispatch center plans to call in an extra dispatcher as needed for a MABAS alarm. We have also supplied dispatch with a call list of officers willing to respond to dispatch if they need an extra person/advisor to assist.

## MY WI-TERT DEPLOYMENT: *TEAM MEMBER* BY SARA MUSGROVE, EMERGENCY SERVICES DISPATCHER, OAK CREEK POLICE DEPT

### Deployment logistics

My manager called me at home after she received the initial **Capitol deployment** request via email. I received further details via email.

I was prepared to respond immediately because after I attended the initial WI-TERT Team Member training at Fort McCoy, I worked closely with my Manager and Supervisor to prepare a deployment pack and come up with a procedure we would follow in case of a sudden deployment.

Deployment requests are sent to my Dispatch Manager via phone or email. She then checks our staffing levels and makes the decision whether or not our agency can send a WI-TERT member to assist another agency. If everything works out, she then calls me to make sure I am personally up for the deployment.

We have a WI-TERT deployment pack set up at our station that includes items like a sleeping bag and other camping accessories, a first aid kit, and rain gear. At home, I have an emergency pack set up with personal hygiene essentials, common over the counter medications, petty cash, etc. My manager and supervisor have a three day grocery list that they will use to shop at a moment's notice while I finish packing and notify my family members.

This is all necessary because you never know what type of deployment might be requested, where you might have to stay, and how soon you will have to go. In this case, there was no need for my Manager and Supervisor to run to the store with the previously supplied three day deployment list. All I was asked to bring was my department ID.

I was also asked to email my WI-TERT Southeast Regional Coordinator on a daily basis with

mileage, travel time, length of shift, and general duties so that the information could be compiled in a file and reviewed during a future debriefing.

In the case of this particular deployment, almost none of these preparations were necessary. First of all, I had a little over an entire day's notice before I needed to respond to Madison, so it wasn't an emergency deployment. I had time to prepare. I wasn't going to be staying overnight anywhere or working 12+ hour shifts, so I didn't need to pack much of anything.

*"It was a unique, once in a lifetime experience and I was thrilled to be a part of it!" – Sara Musgrove*

However, we were taught in our initial WI-TERT training to be as prepared as possible because we never know what kind of situation or work setting we are going to be thrown into, so I also brought a notebook, writing utensils, protein bars and water (just in case), my GPS system, my cell phone, Tylenol, various notes for programs such as eSponder (in case I was asked to use the program).

I found that I was overly prepared in some respects, but not as prepared as I could have been in others. For example, I didn't think to bring my own headset. Luckily, they were able to find an extra, but I brought my own on the second and third days.

So, I let my husband know my work situation was going to be different for a few days, and made some quick arrangements at work, such as setting up an unmarked squad to use and asking coworkers to assist with some of my duties while I was away (due to the close proximity of Madison to Oak Creek, it was decided an unmarked squad would be driven back and forth each of the three days).

I was just told to respond to the Fire Administration Building. Once I got there, I was directed to the exterior command post that was set up on the top floor and I was showed the station where I would be working for the next few days. I worked 4-6 hour shifts, second shift hours (starting at 1500 Hrs each day), with 3.5 – 4.5 hours of drive time each day (there were a couple snow storms that affected some of the drive time).

I stayed at home, so nothing was much different than normal. My department typically reimburses for breakfasts, lunches, or dinners during trainings and deployments, but there was food provided at the command post each day so I didn't need to go anywhere to purchase any meals.

### My Duties

On the first day, I entered the front of the building and was escorted up to the Command Post by Fire Administration personnel. Afterward, I was provided with the pass code to enter and exit the building more freely.

The Command Post was located in a series of rooms on the top floor. They had the rooms divided by sections: Operations, Planning, Logistics. It was a very neat experience to see the Incident Command System in action and the online training at OCPD as well as the additional training I received during my WI-TERT training definitely helped me understand what each section was responsible for.

The room I was working in was occupied by representatives from a number of agencies, including (but not limited to) Madison PD, Capitol PD, Dane County Sheriff, and the Department of Justice.

Three dispatch positions were set  
(Continued on page 9)



## MY WI-TERT DEPLOYMENT: *TEAM MEMBER* - CONTINUED

*(Continued from page 8)*

up with triple monitors and wireless headsets: one to monitor interior capitol radio transmissions, another to monitor exterior capitol radio transmissions, and a third position for the WI-TERT team leader, which during this deployment was always a Regional Coordinator since only one WI-TERT dispatcher was requested per shift instead of a typical team of three or more.

The WI-TERT team leader was primarily responsible for making sure everything was running smoothly with the deployment process and providing breaks and support when needed. The exterior radio position was primarily being staffed by a Dane County Sheriff dispatcher due to their advanced knowledge of the area and typical agency operations.

The position I sat was responsible for monitoring interior capitol transmissions. This included listening to a separate interior dispatcher and over three hundred officers. If a request was made for emergency medical services, it was my job to either notify one of two paramedic teams inside the capitol building on a separate radio frequency, or have the Dane County dispatcher CAD the request for a transport unit. I had access to maps of the building and the surrounding area in order to direct these services to the right location.

On the second day, I was told that there may not be a Dane County dispatcher available to work the next day, so I received a crash course in Dane County's CAD system (ADSI), which was completely foreign to me. By the end of the day, I was able to place units on and off duty, track their locations, send messages to squads, and place them on and off calls for service. However, I was told I would need to place a call to Dane County Sheriff's dispatch center if

any calls for service actually needed to be entered into the CAD, since they stated it was way too complicated to teach someone to do it in a day's time.

Some other miscellaneous duties I had while working in the Command Post included answering a few phone calls and transferring them to the correct departments, monitoring camera views of Capitol square, the interior Capitol, and the underground tunnels for anything suspicious, and letting people in and out of the building.

*"If you feel nervous, remind yourself that you are there because you have a special skill set that is essential to the operation" – Sara Musgrove*

On the first day, Communications Director Rick Lange gave me a great tour of the Command Post in which I was working and also the Interior Branch Command Post and other areas inside the Capitol building (the mutual aid debriefing room, the underground tunnels, the basement PD, etcetera). It was a unique, once in a lifetime experience and I was thrilled to be a part of it!

### **The learning curve**

I had to learn the basics of a new CAD system and also the basic geography of the Capitol square. Most of the tasks I performed were not very complicated, but would be very foreign to someone who has never been a dispatcher or a police officer.

I was very nervous before the deployment because I had no idea what they would need me to do. I expected to be thrown into a chaotic, unfamiliar environment. After being shown what I needed to do, my anxieties dissipated because I realized I could easily handle the

tasks set out for me. Also, I wanted to make a good impression for both WI-TERT and my agency (Oak Creek PD), so it was almost like going to a job interview in the regard that I wanted to present my skills, mannerism, and self in a positive way.

### **Lasting impressions**

It was an excellent opportunity to see the incident command system in action. It was my first WI-TERT deployment and I think it greatly helped prepare me for what to expect from future deployments. I believe confidence and comfort in the ability to be a great dispatcher are built mainly through experience. The more I push myself outside of my comfort zone, the more I grow in my capabilities. I also felt that I played a role in something that will likely be added to the history books, which was neat.

### **Advice for future deployments**

The more preparations you and your agency make ahead of time, the easier the entire process will be. If you feel nervous, remind yourself that you are there because you have a special skill set that is essential to the operation. Volunteering yourself to help in any way will make a good impression and establish your worth.

All in all, I felt the deployment process went very smoothly because of the planning that went into it between my Manager, my Supervisor, and I beforehand.

Although we are working on it and will be more prepared soon, our agency isn't 100% ready at this time for all types of WI-TERT deployments to other agencies or requests for WI-TERT responders to our own agency. This particular deployment was not in a disaster

*(Continued on page 10)*

## MY WI-TERT DEPLOYMENT: *COML* BY RICK R. LANGE, COMMUNICATIONS SUPERVISOR, DANE COUNTY PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS

I was the initial COML assigned to the Capitol incident as I was in the Command Post when the event expanded exponentially. I was actually involved in the planning stage for this event.

The command post was initially set up for basic local communications. Upon realizing this was a much larger event than we had anticipated, the communications plan was quickly revised to include multiple mutual aid departments from throughout the State.

I requested additional COML support and received incredible assistance from three additional COMLs who met me at the command post.

As COML's, we established interoperable radio communications for all responding agencies, expanding from local, single-channel operations to multiple channel radio patches.

We established video conferencing capabilities between two area command posts and the planning division, arranged for satellite television for one of the area command posts that had no television, and implemented a robust backup communications system.

We ordered and received about 200 portable radios from various radio caches throughout the area which provided responding agencies with additional communications resources.

After the initial incident communications was established and tested, we continually monitored the communications and were responsible for troubleshooting issues. I'm sure we did a number of other things as well.

### The learning curve

I had the opportunity to work with some excellent COMLs who taught me a lot throughout the event. We also had a wonderful group of communicators assigned to our event, many of whom had never worked with our CAD.

Fairly early on, our communicators developed a document explaining how to use some of the basic parts of our CAD for those coming in from the outside. The TERT communicators were such an excellent crew!

### Deployment logistics

I had two or three days off throughout the event. Otherwise I was present for 8 to 12 hours every

day. I work and live locally, but we had a lot of catered food inside the command post. Usually, I ate three times a day (breakfast, lunch, dinner) at the command post.

### Lasting impressions

TERT works, but I would do it differently next time. Had we known how long this incident was going to last we would have had members deployed for three days at a time. As it was initially arranged, we tried to expose as many TERT members to the event as possible since activations are so few and far between. TERT has established procedures that should have been followed more closely, but may have interfered with the availability of those members.

### Advice for future deployments

Learn from past mistakes. Appreciate the assistance as much as our local departments did. Establish compensation or reimbursement agreements in writing early. This was the second deployment of TERT and by far the longest and most labor-intensive. Leave your ego at the door, open your mind, and don't let the situation control you. Enjoy the experience and use it to improve things for next time.

## MY WI-TERT DEPLOYMENT: *TEAM MEMBER* - CONTINUED

*(Continued from page 9)*

zone, so it was much easier to manage. We are taking further steps to have our supplies prepared in case one of our dispatchers is deployed to a disaster zone and this incident has opened our eyes to the many ways in which we can better prepare our agency to welcome WI-TERT responders should we need to make a mutual aid request.

For example, not every responder might be familiar with our CAD system or other aspects of our

operations, so we are working on preparing cheat sheets and compiling them into binders beforehand. It would have been easier for me (personally) to learn Dane County Sheriff's CAD system if I had had a cheat sheet to work off of.

Again, this was a great experience and a wonderful opportunity to see firsthand what our own agency can do to prepare for major events during which mutual aid is requested. It was great to see the WI-TERT program in

action since there are many times dispatchers could use additional help as well as police, EMS, and fire responders.

### How to Contact Us

Your contributions to the various columns will make this newsletter a success. Let us know about your MABAS response activity at [garyschmidt@wi.rr.com](mailto:garyschmidt@wi.rr.com). In particular, pictures of activity are needed.

## WHAT WOULD YOU WANT TO SEE CHANGED WITH RESPECT TO MABAS?

I don't think anything should be subjected to a change at this time, but I would probably suggest more training in both Comm Centers and with Fire Departments. I do believe refreshers are needed for Comm Centers, and in some cases Fire Department personnel in order to keep up with changes. MABAS incidents aren't as frequent as medical calls or fire alarms, so sometimes our exposure to them can

be limited.



I would like to see more familiarity of MABAS among dispatchers in centers that do not use MABAS on a regular basis.



I would like to see it mandatory throughout every County and City.



One of the biggest training issues I think exists is the lack of scenario-

based training, especially for Comm Centers that don't do MABAS dispatching very often. I think being able to practice and get feedback is important.



I would like everyone to have IFERN-2 as another option when two agencies have a MABAS call.



The ability to turn down the volume on the Plectron, especially on days when they are testing.



**Div 107 in action:** a Box alarm was called for a fire in a 2-story funeral home in West Allis at 1603 South 81st Street on 11/30/12. Photo by Chuck Liedtke.



**Div 107 in action:** at a fire at a hobby store in West Allis at 8021 W National Ave on New Years Eve, 12/31/12. This was one block from the fire on the left. Photo by Chuck Liedtke.

## DURING A MABAS EVENT, WHAT IS HAPPENING IN YOUR COMM CENTER THAT THOSE IN THE FIELD MIGHT NOT REALIZE?

Nothing is routine, including the dispatch end of MABAS incidents. We may be handling other incidents on top of the MABAS call. We may be dealing with agencies that are unable to provide. We may be dealing with equipment malfunctions.



That all the dispatchers are participating, but they only hear one voice.



Nothing else stops during a MABAS event.



We get many duplicate 911 calls. For example, eight 911 calls came in for

a car fire and a vehicle in the ditch received twelve 911 calls.



Not realized is the length of time it takes to get through a MABAS page. Also, normal activities don't stop and in many cases increase because the incident is big.



The large number of calls that potentially would have to be made to get all the appropriate departments responding – it all takes time to do. In small dispatch centers that do both dispatch/jail duties, you could have only one dispatcher handling the whole MABAS call.



Our phones don't stop ringing once you're dispatched. Just recently we had 32 phone calls reporting the same house fire, but you can't assume, you have to make sure it's not a different incident...and then there's the media phone calls.



Those in the field do not realize how busy the MABAS call is and how involved the dispatcher is. Those in the field know that there is a major event, but if they are not in the dispatch center to see what is happening, they really have no idea.

*The Daily Union*  
opinion page



## Calling for mutual aid

We often hear television newscasters describe fires by the number of alarms. The more alarms, the higher level of response necessary to fight the blaze. It's a quick way of indicating the fire's severity and difficulty to contain.

A common misconception, however, is that a "three-alarm fire," for example, means that three firehouses responded to the fire. This is not the rule behind the naming convention, albeit some cities might use it for multi-alarm designations because that is the simplest way to determine an alarm number.

Jefferson County, and all of Wisconsin, actually, uses the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS), a preplanned method of mutual aid requests for emergency personnel. Under a MABAS box alarm, a pre-described amount of equipment from within a fire department's geographic area is sent for mutual aid. From that point, the alarms increase to third, fourth and fifth if more personnel and/or equipment are needed. Beyond the fifth alarm, it increases to an interdivisional request from outside the county.

We witnessed the efficiency of this system last Saturday as firefighters battled a Town of Oakland blaze that destroyed one barn, heavily damaged two others and killed some 21 head of registered Holsteins at Ehrke Farms west of Fort Atkinson. When Fort Atkinson firefighters initially arrived on scene, at least one of the barns was fully engulfed in flames, so they immediately made their first mutual-aid request. Under MABAS, firefighters from the Cambridge, Deerfield, Edgerton, Helenville, Ixonia, Jefferson, Johnson Creek, Lake Mills, Milton, Palmyra, Rome, Sullivan, Waterloo, Watertown and Whitewater fire departments provided various pieces of equipment and personnel to fight the blaze.

Two hours later, an interdivisional strike team was requested from Rock County due to the ongoing need for more personnel. Responding were firefighters from Beloit, the Town of Turtle, Janesville, Edgerton and Evansville.

## MABAS IN THE NEWS

SUBMITTED BY LLOYD SCHULTZ, PIO, JOHNSON CREEK FIRE & EMS DEPARTMENT  
From PAGE 2, FEBRUARY 13, 2013 DAILY JEFFERSON COUNTY UNION

The cold weather and snow prompted the rising mutual aid calls, so firefighters could rotate in and out of jobs and water tenders or tankers could haul water in from hydrants on the city limits in a continuous fashion.

A similar high level of response took place two weeks ago when six Jefferson County area fire departments provided some of the hundreds of firefighters involved in battling a blaze at a Burlington food-processing plant. Firefighters from more than 80 departments in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois took turns fighting the raging fire at the 70,000-square-foot Echo Lakes Foods facility. Area crews were called via an interdivisional request for a taskforce of equipment from Jefferson County.

Typically for every box alarm, there are three interdivisional cards set aside in the event of a substantial fire. A task force is a designed amount of equipment that is different.

In the Burlington blaze, there were engines, aerial ladder trucks and squads (equipment trucks). By design, equipment is drawn from multiple departments to ensure a division or individual department is not completely drained if responding to another emergency in its own geographic area. Comparatively, a strike team is made up of one type of apparatus, such as all engines or all aerial platform trucks.

Jefferson County sent the following to Burlington: chiefs from the Fort Atkinson and Watertown fire departments; fire engines from Watertown, Lake Mills, Palmyra fire departments; an aerial ladder truck from the Jefferson Fire Department and an equipment truck from the Helenville Fire Department. Once they arrived, they were held in a staging area, ready to rotate in whenever or wherever needed.

Closer to home, MABAS also was used Feb. 1 to fight a fire that extensively damaged a large 108-year-old three story home in Edgerton. A total of 22 fire departments from southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois were involved in battling the blaze, which displaced a family of 13. And the next

day, Fort Atkinson was among the seven departments involved in fighting a fire in the Town of Albion.

Since MABAS Wisconsin was organized in 2004, at least 20 counties have formally established divisions and an additional 14 counties are in the process of doing so. MABAS includes more than 25,000 firefighters and daily staffed emergency response units, including more than 950 fire stations, 1,100 engine companies, 375 ladder trucks, 800 ambulances, 150 heavy rescue squads, 135 light rescue squads and 275 water tankers. Fire/ EMS reserve (back-up) units account for more than 600 additional emergency vehicles. And MABAS also offers specialized operations teams for hazardous materials, underwater rescue/recovery and above grade/below grade, trench and building collapse rescues.

This is an impressive program and we are very fortunate that Jefferson County-area departments are involved. Having a formal, task-specific effort in place ensures that the right number of firefighters, EMTs or other rescuers and the right types of equipment will be on the scene quickly to attend to whatever emergency arises.

At the same time, it protects the health and welfare of the men and women who put their lives on the line to protect our people and property.

We should all sleep much sounder tonight with that knowledge.

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If you see MABAS described in your local community news, please let us know at:  
[garyschmidt@wi.rr.com](mailto:garyschmidt@wi.rr.com)

## DIV 109 INCIDENT COMMAND POST

BY GARY SCHMIDT

Every year, on July 3rd, over a half million people come to Milwaukee's downtown lakefront and east side parks to view a spectacular fireworks display. Many come early, some camping over the previous night, to get a prime viewing spot. The coordination of the Milwaukee Fire Department's contingent of fire trucks, paramedics on bicycles, and ambulances, occurs within the Incident Command Post (ICP).

The ICP is the base for communication for units responding to a myriad of EMS incidents and an occasional fire run. The Incident Commander can monitor the crowd via the ICP's telescoping camera. Numerous radio consoles are available for dispatchers and fireground communication.

This is one example of how the rig is used. The ICP responds to all third alarm or greater assignments and many other incidents of extended duration in Division 109 and is available to other divisions.



**Top:** The City of Milwaukee Fire Department Incident Command Post (ICP)

**Middle left:** the rear of the ICP with telescoping cameras.

**Middle right:** the interior showing how the smaller computer screen can be displayed on a much larger screen.

**Left:** When parked and in use, the driver's side wall extends out.

**Below left:** From the exterior, a screen showing the view from the telescoping camera (can also be seen inside). Also, there is a radio console available.

**Below right:** the interior of the ICP has numerous television and radio console stations, allowing for multiple fireground and/or dispatch channels to be monitored at a large scale incident.

Photos by Chuck Liedtke.





# MABAS – Wisconsin

## Mutual Aid Box Alarm System

Organized 2004

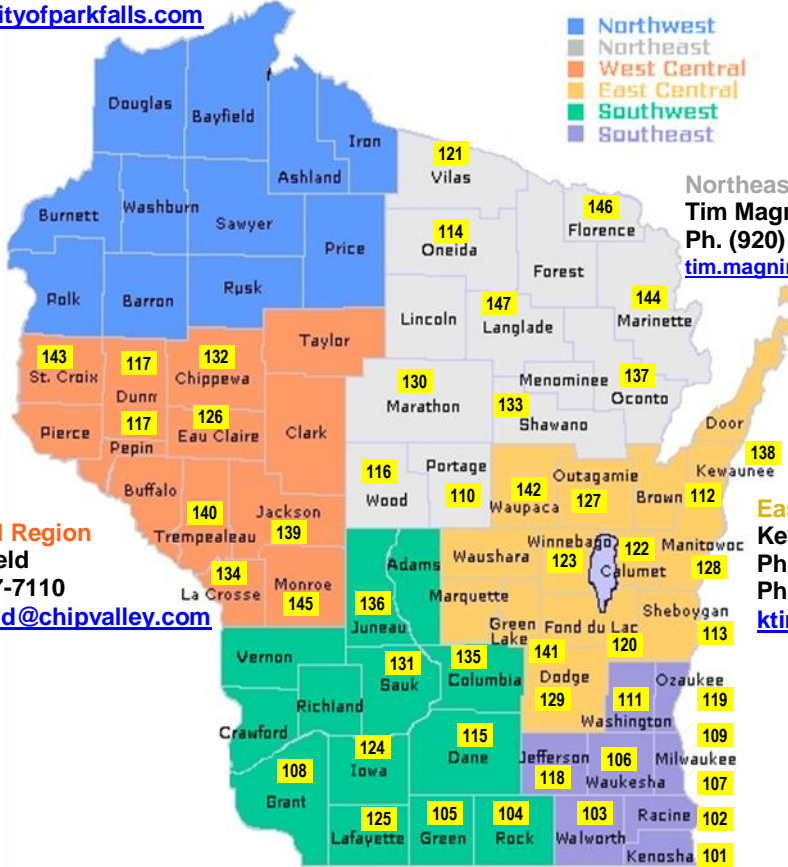
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#### Divisions

- 101 – Kenosha County
- 102 – Racine County
- 103 – Walworth County
- 104 – Rock County
- 105 – Green County
- 106 – Waukesha County
- 107 – Milwaukee County
- 108 – Grant County
- 109 – Milwaukee City
- 110 – Portage County
- 111 – Washington County
- 112 – Brown County
- 113 – Sheboygan County
- 114 – Oneida County
- 115 – Dane County
- 116 – Wood County
- 117 – Dunn/Pepin County
- 118 – Jefferson County
- 119 – Ozaukee County
- 120 – Fond du Lac County
- 121 – Vilas County
- 122 – Calumet County
- 123 – Winnebago County
- 124 – Iowa County
- 125 – Lafayette County
- 126 – Eau Claire County
- 127 – Outagamie County
- 128 – Manitowoc County
- 129 – Dodge County
- 130 – Marathon County
- 131 – Sauk County
- 132 – Chippewa County
- 133 – Shawano County
- 134 – La Crosse County
- 135 – Columbia County
- 136 – Juneau County
- 137 – Oconto County
- 138 – Kewaunee County
- 139 – Jackson County
- 140 – Trempealeau County
- 141 – Green Lake County
- 142 – Waupaca County
- 143 – St. Croix County
- 144 – Marinette County
- 145 – Monroe County
- 146 – Florence County
- 147 – Langlade County

#### MABAS OPERATING FREQUENCIES

IFERN

IFERN2

MABAS1 (WISCOM)

MABAS2 (WISCOM)

MABAS Alerting / intra-Divisional responses

Alternate intra-Divisional responses

Inter-Divisional Responses

Contact with Wisconsin Red Center

Regional Coordinators - WEM Coordination\*

\*Future use