



State of Montana HSEEP After Action Host Report Form

Carbon County Fire Season AAR

After-Action Report/Improvement Plan

November 9th, 2021

Instructions: Please e-mail After Action Reports (AAR) and Improvement Plans (IP) to your Disaster and Emergency Services District Field Officer (DFO).
The DFO will review the AAR/IP for content then forward the report to the MT DES Office.

EXERCISE OVERVIEW

Exercise Name	Carbon County Fire Season AAR
Exercise Dates	11/9/2021 12 Noon
Scope	This exercise is a real-life incident-based tabletop exercise, planned for 1-2 hours at the Personal Services Building, 10 Oakes Ave S, Red Lodge, MT. Exercise play was limited to agencies and departments involved in Wildfire Response.
Mission Area(s)	Prevention, Protection, Response, and Recovery
Core Capabilities	Planning, Operational Coordination, Public Information and Warning, Operational Communication, Fire Management and Suppression, Interdiction and Disruption
Objectives	This tabletop exercise was performed to evaluate the response of the agencies and departments involved in wildfire firefighting throughout the 2021 fire season.
Threat or Hazard	Wildfire
Scenario	Carbon County had a historical year of wildfires that started in the off-season time, catching many of the responding agencies off guard and not fully ready to respond. Brush fires from smaller than an acre, to that of major wildfires like that of the Harris, Crooked Creek, and Robertson Draw Fires that reached almost 30, 000 acres covered the county from early January to September. Multiple agencies responded to the larger wildfires, and mutual aid was utilized for the majority of the smaller brush fires.
Sponsor	Carbon County Disaster and Emergency Services
Participating Organizations	Members of Forest Service, DNRC, MT State DES, Carbon County Fire Warden/GIS/DES, Carbon County Sheriff's Office and Dispatch, Northern Rockies Incident Management Team, Carbon County Commission and Road Department, Red Lodge Fire Rescue/Search and Rescue, Fromberg, Roberts, Joliet, Edgar, Bridger and Belfry Volunteer Fire Departments.
Point of Contact	Cyrina Allen, DES Coordinator for Carbon County MT 10 Oakes Ave S, Red Lodge, MT 59068 406-446-1038 Option 1 des@co.carbon.mt.us

ANALYSIS OF CORE CAPABILITIES

Aligning exercise objectives and core capabilities provides a consistent taxonomy for evaluation that transcends individual exercises to support preparedness reporting and trend analysis.

Core Capability: Operational Coordination (All mission areas)

Strength 1: For the major wildfire incidents of 2021, a Unified Command structure was established early and the agencies involved within the command system were identified quickly.

Strength 2: Evacuation warnings or orders were established for all major fire incidents during 2021, several times for a couple of the fires. Coordination between incident command and the Sheriff who declares the evacuations was successful, along with coordinating with Search and Rescue and Law Enforcement to execute evacuation plans.

Strength 3: For the Robertson Draw Fire, a unified command structure was maintained at the local level until it was decided the local resource capabilities were exceeded. Transfer of command to an Incident Management Team was introduced, and local resources and agencies assisted as requested throughout the incident.

Area for Improvement (clearly state what was the problem or the gap): Within a couple of the larger fires there was change in command from local agencies to a full Incident Management Team. This brought about confusion in who had authority and decision-making capabilities. Although the evacuations were successful, coordination between Incident Command and implementing the evacuation could be timelier.

Analysis (provide the root cause of why this area did not go well): There had been some prep work completed for evacuations prior to fire season and trainings had occurred, yet the practice of being efficient and starting the training from the Incident Command and following through the process to implementing the evacuations had not been done.

Core Capability: Public Information and Warning (All mission areas)

Strength 1: A subscription to the emergency notification system CodeRed was already in place with Carbon County Disaster and Emergency Services, allowing for to ability to notify the public of the fire incidents. Multiple users were trained and ready to utilize the CodeRed system as there were several times it was used for evacuation messaging due to wildfire activity. Over the past few years the CodeRed system had been advertised for the public to register in receiving emergency notifications.

Strength 2: Carbon County had connections with a trained PIO who is local and has established relationships with stakeholders, media, and emergency responding agencies. This allowed for public information sharing to start from the beginning, and the integration of our local PIO contact to work with the Incident Management Teams that became involved throughout the fires.

Strength 3: There were several avenues established for information sharing regarding wildfire and incident information, including local radio stations, media, newspapers, and social media.

The PIO teams utilized these along with paper trails of information in high-trafficked buildings and businesses.

Area for Improvement (clearly state what was the problem or the gap): There is a need to continue advertising and educating the public on what the CodeRed emergency notification system is, and what capabilities it has. Another area to improve is being more consistent with messaging between agencies and the need to establish a primary source of who's information is then shared. It was also mentioned that a county-wide PIO group could be implemented, educated, and trained to help in response and times when responders may have several positions during the initial incident response. Responders and incident management teams also need to listen to and be receptive of community concerns and ideas.

Analysis (provide the root cause of why this area did not go well): It's not that this area did not go well, but there is always room to improve in getting more residents of Carbon County to subscribe to the emergency notification system. More education could be done to show the importance of getting emergency alerts from local authorities and what to expect if one were to get an emergency notification.

Core Capability: Planning (All mission areas)

Strength 1: Incident management planning processes were utilized to develop the strategies needed to meet the objectives and goals of which were set by the Incident Command.

Strength 2: Carbon County DES, Sheriff's Office, and Search and Rescue had been working on updating evacuation plans and procedures in regards to wildfires, flooding, and other potential disasters, including training on executing these plans. This allowed for a strong response when the 2021 wildfires presented evacuations needs.

Strength 3: All major wildfires included many agencies in the response. With this came plans from several agency representatives, who all came together in the incident command structure to develop plans, strategies, and tactics specific to the incident at hand.

Area for Improvement (clearly state what was the problem or the gap): It was identified that contingency plans need to be in place to protect resources, minimize impact, and help the ability to recover from unforeseen incidents. Resources used for the fires exceeded what Carbon County had locally. Initially, staging areas were not established for these resources to respond to, which resulted in the IC unsure of what resources were available. There is a need to change the notifying process when going door-to-door for evacuations as it was too long for the imminent and immediate danger homes were in. Evacuation kits need to be prepared and ready for deployment, and more than one responder with access to them.

Analysis (provide the root cause of why this area did not go well): When developing the strategies, tactics, and resources needed, a staging area was not established. The survey used to gather evacuee information is long lengthy, and needs to be condensed. Only basic and pertinent information is necessary to get the evacuation notices out quickly.

Core Capability: Operational Communication (Response)

Strength 1: For the Robertson Draw Fire, determining an exact location was difficult due to the area an access to the fire. The local 911 dispatch center was able to disseminate information from reporting parties to help direct responders in the area needed to find the initial fire area.

Strength 2: With the major wildfires there were several agencies involved. Communication was successful between these agencies, which allowed for ordering of resources, developing strategies, and assigning tasks to be done quickly. The PIO was involved with the Incident Management Team through the fire incidents and able to have direct information from the Incident Commanders.

Strength 3: The Incident Command Teams had regular briefing meetings where they were able to recognize changes that were occurring with the fires, also allowing them the review evacuation situations, trigger points, and the need to order resources.

Area for Improvement (clearly state what was the problem or the gap): Although there was communication amongst the different agencies involved with the 2021 wildfires, there is a need to improve in the line of communication to make sure the incident command structure was being followed. There were also issues with ordering resources from state and federal departments, causing a delay in resources arriving on scene. Another area to improve would be that responders tend to wear several hats during the initial incident, and that pertinent information about the incident needs to be shared appropriately.

Analysis (provide the root cause of why this area did not go well): It appears that this fire season caught many agencies off guard and not prepared to follow through with resource ordering and fulfillment. An area to assess would be getting the appropriate paperwork for resources completed prior to fire season, the process to order resources evaluated to make sure it is efficient, and that all agencies involved understand the process and are prepared to follow it.

Core Capability: Fire Management and Suppression (Response)

Strength 1: The incident command quickly identified the need for extra resources and ordered them early in the incident for all of the major wildfires.

Strength 2: Those that served within the incident command were knowledgeable and trained to recognize fire behavior and fire growth, allowing them to set objectives and help determine the strategies and tactics needed to manage the incidents.

Strength 3: Fuel mitigation projects have been in place in some areas of Carbon County to help prevent wildfires from rapid growth and threats to structures and communities.

Area for Improvement (clearly state what was the problem or the gap): Assess current situation and surrounding environment of the incident, specifically fire fuels and topography, to ensure objectives and plans to manage and suppress the wildfire are appropriate. Although fuel mitigation projects have been occurring, there is a need to evaluate if these projects are occurring in priority areas, and if more should be implemented.

Analysis (provide the root cause of why this area did not go well): It's not an unheard-of situation to have wildfires in Carbon County. Some of the firefighting systems utilized during the 2021 fire season were of the past, which were not fully applicable to the fire fuels and fire behavior Carbon County is seeing currently.

Core Capability: Interdiction and Disruption (Prevention and Protection)

Strength 1: The Incident Management Teams identified early in the major wildfires that extra resources were needed to intercept the movement of the fire and prevent threats and damages.

Strength 2: Having a diverse group of responders associated with the 2021 wildfires allowed for a wide variety of knowledge and experience, which was critical with the fires seen in Carbon County over the 2021 fire season.

Area for Improvement (clearly state what was the problem or the gap): It is vital that when several agencies are involved in an incident, all plans, strategies, and tactics are approved by the incident command.

Analysis (provide the root cause of why this area did not go well:) At times during the 2021 fire season, fire management tactics were used that had not been approved by the Incident Commander. Although no injuries occurred from this, all fires were wind-driven with outstanding fuels to feed the fires. The tactics used could have easily resulted in property damage and injury or death to responders.

APPENDIX A: IMPROVEMENT PLAN

This IP has been developed specifically for Carbon County as a result of the Carbon County Fire Season TTX conducted on November 9, 2021 at Red Lodge, Montana.

Core Capability	Issue/Area for Improvement	Corrective Action	Capability Element	Primary Responsible Organization	Organization POC	Start Date	Completion Date
Operational Coordination	To lessen the confusion of who has authority and decision-making powers within the change of incident command and/or IMT.	Training and exercising on incident command structure and duties for those who may fulfill those duties or work with those in the structure.	Training, and Exercise	DES All Fire Response Agencies	DES-Cyrina Allen. Fire Warden- Tom Kohley	February 2022	Ongoing
	To coordinating a quicker response between IC and those implementing evacuations.	Develop a procedure for communicating between the IC and Sheriff, and coordination between the Sheriff and SAR to implement evacuation plans.	Planning, Organization, Training, and Exercise	DES SAR Carbon County Sheriff's Office (CCSO)	DES-Cyrina Allen, SAR-Frank Pelli, CCSO Sheriff McQuillan	March 2022	May 2022
Public Information and Warning	To continue promoting and education the public on CodeRed.	Build out the avenues used to promote and educate on CodeRed and the services it can provide.	Planning, Organization	DES RLFR (PIO) CCSO	DES-Cyrina Allen RLFR-Amy Hyfield CCSO-Sheriff McQuillan	February 2022	May 2022
	To share public information in a timely manner, and avoid delay in sharing information between resources.	Develop a process for consistent messaging/sharing of information, information is coming from and approved by the IC. Build a local PIO team that is trained and able to respond with the same local goals and resources.	Planning, Organization, Training, and Exercise	DES RLFR (PIO) CCSO	DES-Cyrina Allen RLFR-Amy Hyfield CCSO-Sheriff McQuillan	February 2022	May 2022

Core Capability	Issue/Area for Improvement	Corrective Action	Capability Element	Primary Responsible Organization	Organization POC	Start Date	Completion Date
Planning	To protect resources, mitigate impacts to property and people, and be able to recover from the incident.	Develop and build out contingency plans, ensure major agencies and stakeholders are knowledgeable of them, and regularly update the plans.	Planning, Organization, and Training	DES	DES-Cyrina Allen	March 2022	December 2022
Operational Communication	Improve on communication within the IC or IMT structure.	Continue to train on incident command structure and educated on duties within the structure to lessen confusion on who has authority, and what is expected of each position.	Organization, Training, and Exercise	DES All Fire Response Agencies	DES-Cyrina Allen Fire Warden-Tom Kohley	January 2022	December 2022
	Getting resources ordered in a timely manner by the designated team member.	Establish within command and follow procedure in who will be ordering resources approved from IC.	Organization, Training, and Exercise	DES All Fire Response Agencies	DES-Cyrina Allen Fire Warden-Tom Kohley	January 2022	December 2022
Fire Management and Suppression	To evaluate current fire conditions to help determine response strategies and tactics.	Continue to educate on fire behavior, fire weather conditions, and the appropriate resources and strategies for those conditions.	Training and Exercise	Fire Departments and other Fire Management agencies.	Fire Warden-Tom Kohley	February 2022	Ongoing
Interdiction and Disruption	Strategies and tactics used in intercepting or securing the fire need to be approved by the IC before implementation.	When several agencies are involved, all plans strategies, and tactics need to be approved by the IC, and those involved should be educated and informed on this process within the IC structure.	Training and Exercise	Fire Departments and other Fire Management agencies.	Fire Warden-Tom Kohley	February 2022	Ongoing

APPENDIX B: EXERCISE PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Federal:

Custer Gallatin National Forest
Northern Rockies Incident Management Team

Tribal:

State:

MT DES
MT DNRC

County:

Carbon County DES/Fire Warden/GIS
Carbon County Commission/Road Department
Carbon County Sheriff's Office and 911 Dispatch
Red Lodge Fire/EMS/SAR, Fromberg, Roberts, Joliet, Edgar, Bridger, and Belfry Fire
Departments
Carbon County Public Health Department

Other: