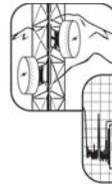


Talk Group



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Staffing - The Most Important Resource

—Dave Magnenat

Ask a communications center manager what the biggest challenge in the field today is and chances are the answer will be “staffing.” In 2001, APCO created Project 40 – known as Project RETAINS– to create a national standard for staffing emergency communications centers.

APCO teamed with University of Colorado Research Institute (UCRI) to derive that standard. Following an extensive survey process, the team created an online staffing calculation tool, an effective practices guide, and an employee satisfaction survey tool. The tools are available on the web at <http://www.apcointl.org/about/911/retains/>.

The online staffing calculator starts with basic information about the communications center, then focuses on positions, schedule, and time utilization. Applying a common methodology, the tool produces a one-page recommendation of staffing needs suitable for presentation to decisionmakers. The summary page includes APCO and UCRI logos, adding to the report’s credibility. For those interested in a deeper understanding of the numbers behind the report, explanations of the methodology, data, and workload division are easily available.

Basic information about staff time, coverage requirements, annual leave, sick leave, training and other elements are required to get started with the online tool. It is equally important to fully understand the inner workings of the center before using the tool in order to get the best results. Managers should understand the effects of scheduling and policy on available time. It is important to understand the difference between paid time and available time, and to know the effects of different schedules on both the center and the employees’ quality of life. Also, positions that open and close during the day to account for variations in call load impact staffing requirements.

The RETAINS committee did not focus on just the numbers and budget of staffing. The Effective Practices Guide provides a broad view of communications center staffing and retention methods. Experienced managers will see much that is familiar, but having all of the information in a single place is useful. Keeping good people is absolutely critical, and the RETAINS Committee materials gather together some of the very best strategies for doing so.

The employee satisfaction survey tool is the hidden gem of the RETAINS project. Managers log in to the web site, post questions, and provide the link to their employees. An access code is generated and distributed to each employee, who uses the key to access the survey. The code is not directly attributable to an individual employee and each employee has only one code, so the tool enables a controlled response that preserves the employee’s anonymity. This results in excellent feedback to the manager about work conditions, communication, and other satisfaction issues.

ADCOMM’s Dave Magnenat is a member of the RETAINS Committee and has worked with staffing and scheduling for many years. ADCOMM offers clients a wide range of technical and operational expertise including staffing and scheduling policy, budget management and communication, workload assessments, leadership selection, project management and business process analysis.

Thinking About ...

A Consultant's Real-Life Experience

—Submitted by Dean Hane

Over the course of my time spent in public safety, I've had several real-life experiences that have reinforced my perspective in the value of first responders. I remember the first time I heard a dispatcher giving CPR instructions over the phone to save a life, I've listened to the call of a mother crying as her kids were in their burning house, and last fall I got to see first-hand what a real fire line is like.

It was early last August and it was hot. A fire erupted in southeastern Washington that was labeled as the School Fire. On the second day of the fire it had scorched over 37,000 acres and was only 20 percent contained. At the time, I was working with Columbia County on a project to improve their radio communications. Sheriff Mike Berglund and Captain Bill Peters, who also is the Emergency Manager, were managing resources for Columbia County when it became apparent that there were serious problems communicating between local fire personnel and the incoming state and federal firefighters. The Sheriff called to see if I could program some of their new radios for interoperability and deliver them. I was flattered they thought about ADCOMM in a crisis. I delivered radios to the field about 2 hours after the call and returned to the county later that afternoon to assist in communications. I was extremely fortunate to be working with Captain

Peters who took me to the fire line that night for a first hand view of what was going on. It was incredible and I learned a lot. I always thought I knew what happened during a large wild land fire, but actually being there was a whole different experience.

The first thing I really noticed were all of the roadblocks that were put up and continuously manned, and there were several layers of the blockages. I was also surprised to find a Federal Fish and Wildlife "roadblocker" being relieved by a Washington State trooper. Normally, I would never connect these two agencies. We stopped to speak with a trooper who was complaining about the lack of communications between themselves and DNR and I found there are very limited interoperable communications between the state agencies who operate in the same band.

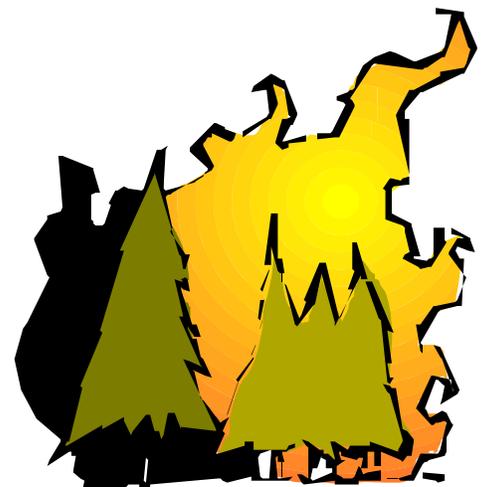
It was really impressive to actually speak with several of the strike teams and mop-up teams. Those guys are amazing - no sleep and still knocking down the fire line. I always figured one of my jobs was to support the first responders, but now I know what it really means.

Captain Peters drove me deep through the fire line to see the hills glowing orange. I saw trees that had caught fire and fell over onto the roadway, and then the strike teams had carved them up with chain saws to open the roads back up. They just piled the limbs on the side of the road. The smoke was so thick and heavy it looked like dense fog at night. The smell of the burning trees and fire was very strong and my clothes smelled all the way home. I was able to get out

and take a couple of photos and heard the crackling and snapping of the trees burning. There were many small fires and embers burning close - this was just amazing to experience from a "consultant's" view.

The terrain was so steep that the trees and rocks rolled down the hill and littered the roadways so we really had to watch where we were driving in order not to run into any of this road debris. We were right in the campgrounds of Camp Wooten and, although the area was burned to a crisp right up to the edge, there was no damage to any of the structures - thanks to the firefighters.

Some days I grouse about being behind in my work, and even though that day was about 20 hours, it was worth every second of it because I'm sure I'll never get another chance to experience it. I'm also proud to say that we came through when they needed us - that was very satisfying.



Part 2 -- Do You Want To Keep Your FCC License?

—Submitted by Joel Harrington

In the last issue of the *Talk Group* newsletter, I wrote about the importance of filing a construction deadline FCC Form 601 Schedule K no later than 15 days after the construction deadline due date. Beginning in early 2006, when a licensee does not file the Required Notification or Request for Extension of Time, the Universal Licensing System (ULS) will presume that the license, location, or frequency has not been constructed, or the coverage requirement has not been met, and place the license, location, or frequency in “termination pending” status for 30 days. If, by the end of that 30-day period the licensee does not file a petition to rebut the presumption, then ULS will change the status of the license, location, or frequency to “Terminated,” effective the date of the construction or coverage deadline. This new feature within ULS is called automated termination process or “Auto Term.” An FCC construction filing is required when a new license is granted or an existing license is modified. In the past, the FCC did not act on missed filings until a licensee wanted to modify or renew a license. The FCC is now putting the wheels in motion to begin the process of automatically terminating licenses. They are in the process of displaying a Termination Pending (TP) icon when you perform a license search using the FCC ULS. Will your mobile or microwave license be one of the soon to be TERMINATED licenses? You really need to audit

ALL of your mobile or microwave FCC licenses to verify that the construction deadline due date(s) were met. Avoid the pain and expense of dealing with a terminated license. It could take a year or more to receive a new license, if any. This is especially critical for licenses above Line A. You may even run the risk of being unable to operate on your existing channels from your existing sites! Also, if you are granted a “replacement” license, your transmitter power levels and service area may be much different than it was with your old license due to the FCC Safe Harbor rules. The clock is ticking. Complete Schedule K filing details can be found at <http://wireless.fcc.gov/licensing/const-req/>. Contact ADCOMM Engineering Company regarding our FCC licensing services.



The Lighter Side

Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint.

—Mark Twain

Don't go around saying the world owes you a living. The world owes you nothing. It was here first.

—Mark Twain

We could certainly slow the aging process down if it had to work its way through Congress.

—Will Rogers

By the time a man is wise enough to watch his step, he's too old to go anywhere.

—Billy Crystal

Wiley Words of Witty Wisdom

Two Wolves

One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, “My son, the battle is between two “wolves” inside us all.

One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf wins?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

THE LAST BYTE

Touche Cliche

At the end of the day, the solutions will need to be vetted, as they represent a new paradigm in disruptive technologies in order to effect interoperability. Like man, one of my biggest whines is how cliches take over common usage. The word interoperability is starting to, if it already hasn't, reach cliche status. Every communications problem in a disaster is a failure of

“interoperability,” usually solved by spending more money on equipment or getting more spectrum. How about just a failure to plan? A failure to train? A failure to implement? A failure to cooperate? Or just plain someone screwed up. Most interoperability problems are people problems. Simply buying more equipment and writing fancy plans will add to the problem not fix it. So, jump off the bandwagon on the train to nowhere, and see the dawn of a new age where we all communicate face-to-face before we need the PTT.

—Joe Blaschka, Jr., P.E.

MAILING LIST OR EMAIL?

Is your address correct? Do you know someone who may be interested in receiving this newsletter? If so, send us any additions or deletions.

Would you rather receive this newsletter electronically?

We can now email you a PDF of our newsletter. Please contact Susan Seefeld at s.seefeld@adcomm911.com with your request.

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