



Interagency Dispatch Implementation Project (IDIP)

Dispatch Computer Management and Support IDIP IT Team Response to Joint CIO Inquiry

September 28, 2015

IDIP IT Team Problem Statement

Dispatchers on average spend 20 percent or more of their time providing information technology (IT) support in local and geographical dispatch and coordination centers (FS or BLM, NPS, BIA, FWS, States and Local Government).

The IT support role (by non-CIO personnel) performed include routine and non-routine PC operational and maintenance duties across multiple agency IT infrastructures, computer systems and fire applications; and numerous user account management systems. While this is sometimes manageable during non-peak incident activity this non-core workload detracts from the primary dispatch mission of supporting wildland fire activities during periods of high activity and increases risk exposure to field operations.

When IT problems do arise, it is reported by the users and is not unusual to wait up to four days for a response to a helpdesk request. Work-arounds (such as sharing passwords) while inappropriate, are a common business practice as a result of the delays in receiving timely IT support to keep the Centers operational. The IDIP Team determined that the inability to be functional during initial and extended attack impacted the field operations which may potentially contribute to larger fire sizes, endanger firefighters and be a risk to civilian life and property.

Key Issues

- Dispatch staff are not trained in IT support creating potential (serious) security and hardware compromises.
 - Minimum hardware standards for optimal performance (such as memory requirements for Windows 7 upgrade) are often left to dispatch staff to figure out.
- Each dispatch center is unique and often has a combination of agency computers and networks (DOI and FS or DOI / State / FS) that need to be used by multiple users. Often, multiple agency personnel share a single computer. Users are often transient and can be Federal, State, contract or short-term employees.
- When centers fall behind on managed account administration and application/system maintenance (due to lack of dedicated IT support), getting caught up can take days or weeks while working with various agency IT support methods. Application and system updates can require daily, weekly and monthly user interaction on each computer in the dispatch pool. This amount of time is unacceptable when computers must be available year round on short (two hours or less) notice to support incident activity.
- Inconsistent computer life-cycle management affects the reliability and performance of this pool of computers and has led to catastrophic failure at critical points (usually during the periods of heavy incident activity).
- If agency computers are not available, additional computers must be leased to support expanded dispatch. This often requires using non-agency internet connectivity which may or may not exist within the expanded dispatch facility.

Potential Alternatives

The combination of solutions below resolves the problems identified in the background and problem statement above. No one solution alone provides comprehensive resolution.

1. Using appropriate Service First agreements address IT support processes, security protocol issues and human resource management (HRM) concerns between and within federal agencies at department levels:
 - a. Allow qualified technicians to reciprocally work on either agency computers.
 - b. Allow for inter-departmental IT personnel in supporting incident management and dispatch operations.
2. Agree upon a DOI and USDA protocol to exchange help desk problem request ticket information between agencies and to create access to a shared knowledge management (KM) database of fire & dispatch problems and resolutions. NOTE: This has been initiated by Daniel Ialenti of the BLM National Operations Center (NOC) at request of IDIP team but has not been vetted through Leadership.
3. **Pre-season Support** – Establish a team of DOI and USDA IT support personnel to travel to Tier 2 and Tier 3 dispatch centers to prepare initial attack and expanded dispatch computers for upcoming season operations for each geographic area (GACC) as part of pre-season preparation. NOTE: this model has been used in the large helicopter inspection process for the last decade, has been highly successful though interagency cooperation.
4. **Fire Season Support** – Utilize existing interagency IT support personnel to support initial attack and expanded dispatch operations during high activity and incident management teams as needed. Mobilize according to preparedness levels and/or incident activity in each geographic area as is currently done with incident management teams and other fire resources.
5. Using the existing pool of cached computers at local dispatch offices throughout the nation, establish IT support “kits” of laptops, printers, routers and networking/wireless infrastructure which are pre-configured with managed user accounts/profiles and fire applications.
 - Once established the IDIP team will work with Dispatch Efficiency Working Group (DEW) to develop standard operating procedures for repositioning according to national/regional and local preparedness levels as is currently done with cache vans, smokejumpers, radio kits and large air tankers. This methodology will be incorporated into the Redbook / Interagency Dispatch Operations Guide (IDOG).

Benefits

This combined set of solutions will:

- Save significant funds through interagency cooperation and joint cost aversion.
- Reduce IT workload on dispatch center staff allowing dispatchers to focus on primary mission core duties.
- Reduce numbers of priority calls to agency helpdesks.
- Ensure adherence to agency IT standards and security policies.
- Reduce costs to agencies through shared interagency IT support processes.
- Increase efficiencies and reducing hardware failures and system downtime.
- Improve overall lifecycle management agency-wide.

Additional Information

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