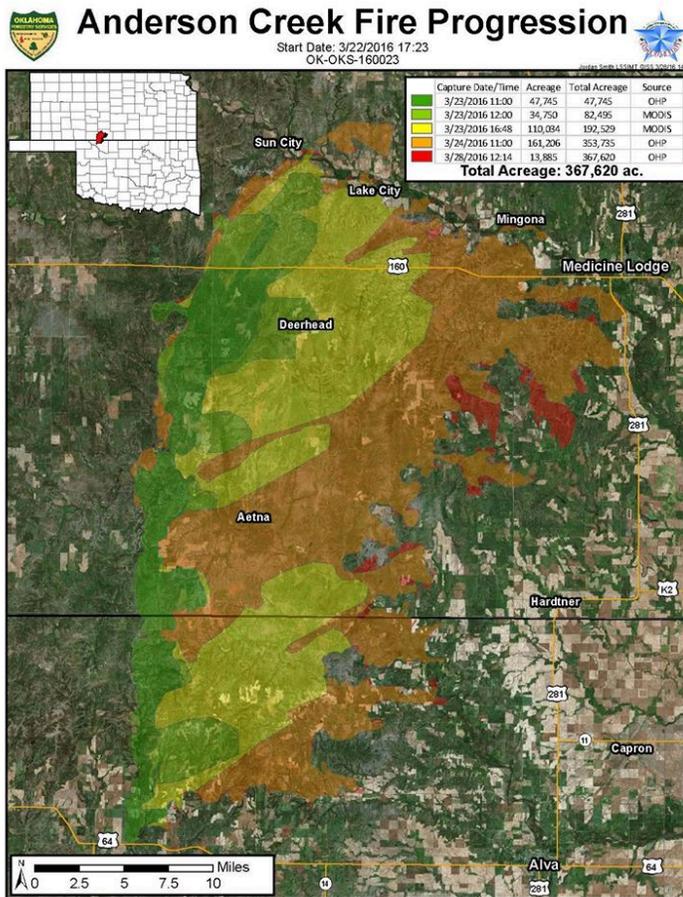




Anderson Creek Wildfire KS-TERT Deployment After Action Report



EVENT-

Anderson Creek Wildfire, Barber County, Kansas

DATES-

TERT activation - March 25, 26, 27, 2016



OPERATIONS SUMMARY-

The Anderson Creek fire started in northern Oklahoma on March 22 and proceeded to burn more than 620 square miles of prairie and cattle grazing land. No human deaths have been reported, approximately 600 cattle were killed by the fires. At least 16 homes and 25 structures were lost in Kansas and Oklahoma. The wildfire spread quickly due to dry conditions in the region; rainfall has been below normal this spring. By March 31, the fire was close to 90 percent contained, thanks to work by fire crews, the National Guard, and a few inches of snow.

The Kansas All Hazards Incident Management Team (KSIMT) established a command center in Medicine Lodge, Kansas along with the incident management team from Kansas Forestry Service. Fire department personnel and equipment from across Kansas was requested along with Forestry Service wildland firefighters. At the peak, over 200 personnel were operating during each operational period. Communications challenges quickly became apparent and the Barber County PSAP became overloaded with the volume of radio traffic. JL Ellis, KS-TERT State Coordinator, was notified of the request for assistance at 1100 on March 25 and sent notice to all KS-TERT members. KS-TERT Regional Coordinator Josh Michaelis responded to Barber County arriving later that afternoon to assess the situation and provide assistance. Josh was immediately put to work at the Barber County PSAP to alleviate the call load for the single dispatcher on duty. Further requests for additional PSAP assistance and support for the KSIMT Emergency Operations Center were received and filled by KS-TERT members Gina Schwein, Tammy Sherwood and State Coordinator JL Ellis. Josh and Gina worked three operational periods at the PSAP, Tammy and JL provided support at the EOC.

The Kansas National Guard deployed four Blackhawk helicopters to provide air drops in the suppression effort. KSIMT requested KS-TERT to provide communications support for the helibase at the Medicine Lodge airport. Working from the Pratt County Sheriff command vehicle at the helibase, Tammy and Gina established and supported communications for the air drops and documented all radio traffic. All KS-TERT members were demobilized by 1600 on Sunday, March 27.

Objectives-

- Support Barber County PSAP to alleviate overload situation
- Support KSIMT at the Emergency Operations Center to ensure responder and public safety
- Follow all Local, State, and National APCO/NENA ANS 1.105.1-2009 Standards for TERT Deployment.

Facilities-

Barber County PSAP is located in Medicine Lodge, Kansas featuring a single dispatch position. Facility staff include 3 full time dispatchers, one part time dispatcher and one dispatch supervisor. KS-TERT Regional Coordinator Josh Michaelis was the first to arrive in the afternoon of March 25 working until 2000. 12 hour operational periods set by the KSIMT were 0800 - 2000 and 2000 - 0800. Gina Schwein worked the 2000 - 0800 period and Josh returned for the 0800 – 2000 shift on March 26. Operational radio traffic was returned to the EOC at that point and no further PSAP assistance was needed.

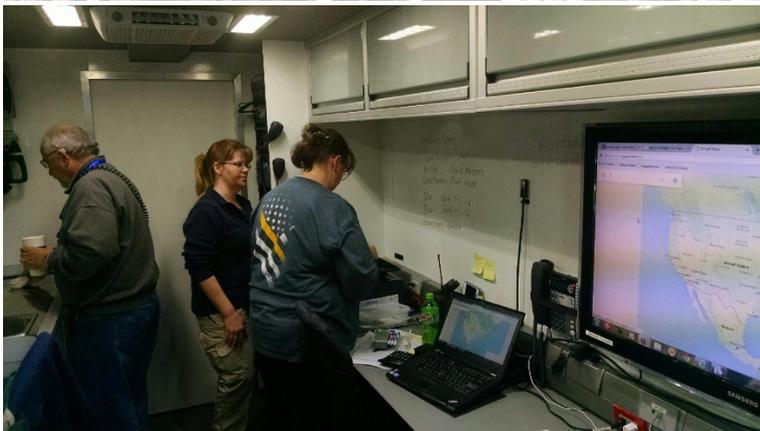


Barber County PSAP and back up dispatch position.

At the EOC, JL Ellis and Tammy Sherwood worked closely with KSIMT COML to establish and support operational radio traffic at the EOC. On Saturday, March 26 the Kansas National Guard deployed four Blackhawk helicopters and the KSIMT COML asked if KS-TERT could provide the communications support for the helibase. Pratt County Sheriff deployed their command truck to the Medicine Lodge airport for use by KS-TERT personnel to provide the service. Tammy Sherwood and Gina Schwein established communications and documented the flight times and water drops of the helicopters on Sunday, March 27. The helibase was demobilized at 1600 on Sunday and all TERT members were also demobilized at that time.



KSIMT and Kansas Forestry setting up EOC communications



Gina and Tammy working from the Pratt Co Command vehicle at the helibase.



Mapping the drops



KSIMT Communications unit support staff Tom Lee



Daily OPS briefing at the EOC

Impact to the Communications Center-

The communications plan for the response to the Anderson Creek fire directed all radio traffic through the one person PSAP at Barber County. This quickly inundated the PSAP with the constant radio traffic from upwards of 50 units and 200 personnel on the fire scene. Local services, 911 emergency calls and daily duties do not stop. KS-TERT personnel were able to handle the traffic generated by the fire response to allow PSAP personnel to continue normal services. The KSIMT EOC also realized that handling a volume of radio traffic without properly trained personnel is difficult at best. KS-TERT allowed KSIMT COML personnel to focus on managing the communications systems and provide a safer environment for the responders on scene.



Planning and Preparation-

KS-TERT has been inactive for a lengthy period of time. JL Ellis has been named the State Coordinator and has verified the KS-TERT membership and contact database in recent months. Currently Kansas has 38 trained TERT members with 3 Regional Coordinators and 8 Team Leaders.

The Barber county PSAP was not aware of TERT availability or capabilities. The request for assistance came from the KSIMT. When asked to fill out a PSAP post deployment survey, the PSAP Director stated "I don't think I can answer these questions. I had no hand in requesting or initiating TERT. The only contact we had was when one of your people showed up and said, "I'm from the government (EOC) and I'm here to help." We weren't given any options other than "here is this person and this is what they are going to do". The help was much appreciated and we would be thrilled to use TERT's services should we have need again." Better coordination from the State Coordinator should have been performed after the request for service. No contact with the PSAP was initiated prior to KS-TERT arrival.

KSIMT has been made aware of KS-TERT through the Kansas IMT Working Group and the efforts of the Kansas Office of Emergency Communications to enhance communications standards and credentialing state wide. KSIMT requested KS-TERT through proper and approved channels at the State EOC. A tasking number was generated for the response and all KS-TERT members were tracked and accounted for. KSIMT provided all lodging and meals for the response.

KS-TERT members deploying were briefed on the fly with best current information. No formal command structure was initiated. All KS-TERT members were kept up to date via email from the State Coordinator as information became available.

Mitigation-

- All Kansas PSAPs must be advised of KS-TERT availability and capabilities. Recruitment efforts are very dependent on the buy-in of Kansas PSAPs.
- Membership numbers must increase with more Regional Coordinators and Team Leaders identified and trained.
- All KS-TERT members must have on-going training and exercise to develop a cohesive team ready to deploy at a moment's notice.
- Develop and implement State Coordinator Training to include:
 - Timeline-time to wait between correspondence
 - Escalation process
 - Communications with requested agency
 - Communications with others in the state
 - Relationship building
 - Meeting the needs and following the standards of TERT deployment.



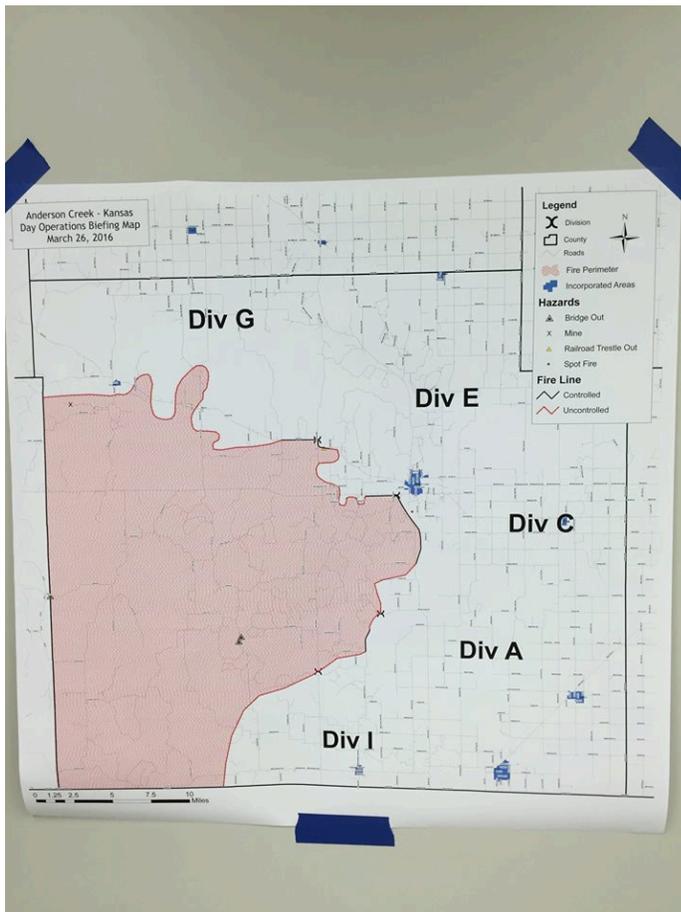
Conclusion-

The Anderson Creek Wildfire is the largest wildfire in Kansas history. This was also the first deployment of KS-TERT to support a Kansas PSAP. KS-TERT provided a much needed service to a very overworked PSAP and was able to step up to provide professional communications for the Kansas National Guard helicopters. Although never tried, the notification process worked well enough to get the required number of TERT members on scene in a timely manner. The lack of coordination with the Barber County PSAP was unfortunate but did not seem to delay or hinder the response. KS-TERT members Josh, Tammy and Gina performed in an exemplary manner and filled every needed task without question and with a high degree of professionalism. The lessons learned from this response will greatly enhance the next opportunity to provide needed services for Kansas PSAPs.

Prepared by: JL Ellis, Kansas State TERT Coordinator

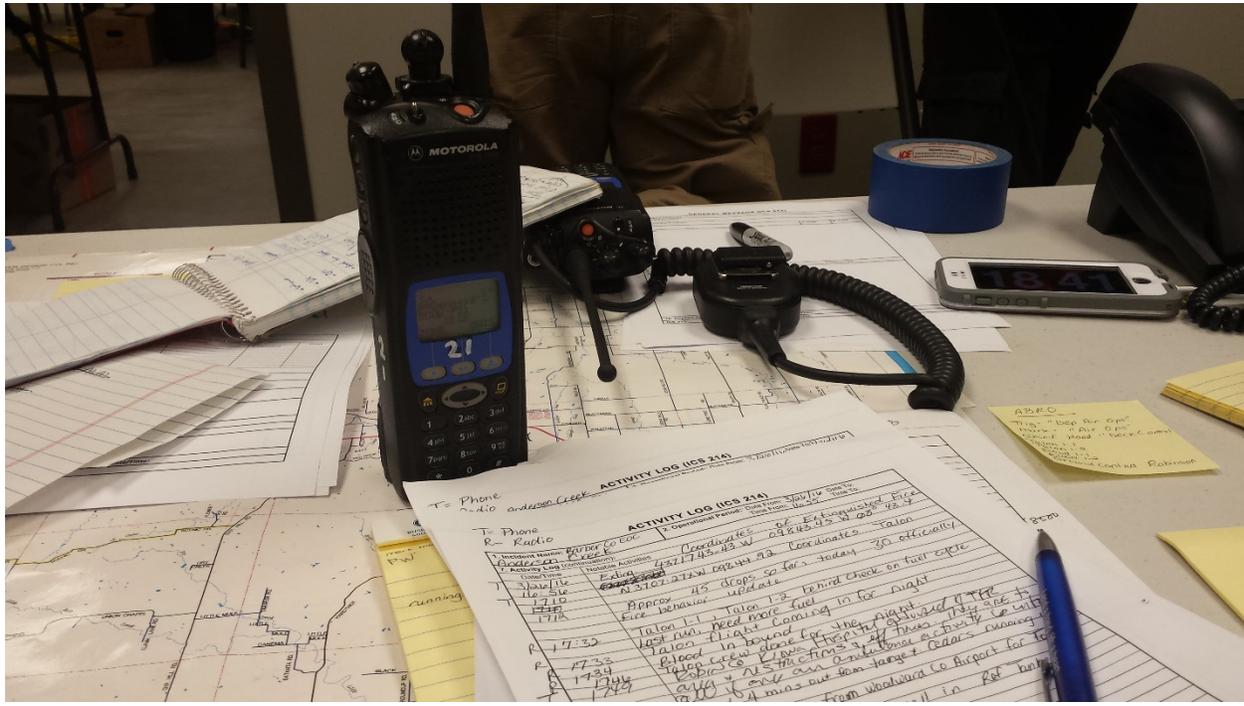
Date: April 7, 2016

Maps-



Area affected by the fire – fire line 67 miles long.

Photos-



KS-TERT Team Testimonies-

I also think everything went pretty well. I had a good understanding of what was expected on Friday night in the dispatch center after getting in touch with Josh who was already in Barber County. The staff was very accommodating and welcomed the help.

Things really slowed down after about 1 am but that was expected and the midnight dispatcher on duty was still happy to have the company.

As far as Sunday monitoring air ops, I have to say I was pretty excited and a little nervous. Tammy did a wonderful job passing along info and lots of great advice. Everyone on scene was helpful and worked very well together, one would have thought that we already knew each other before this incident. Everyone had the same goals in mind and did what was needed to get there.

Gina Schwein
Stafford County

This is Tammy Sherwood with Coffey Co. Sheriffs Office, I was contacted as everyone was on Friday by J.L. 3/25/2016 for possible TERT deployment to Barber Co.. My 3.5 hour travel time caused some limitations on how quickly and when I could respond. I am originally from the South Central KS area and was on days off and was quite passionate about lending a hand. JL called early Saturday morning and I was able to respond to Medicine Lodge at approx. 13:00 hrs. I had assumed I would be put immediately



into the PSAP and was surprised when JL told me I would be assisting with communications for Air Ops. My job was to assist with communications with the Deck Control and Air Ops personnel on radio and telephone. We facilitated communications with the FAA and hospitals about air ambulance traffic and the Temporary Flight I also maintained paper logs and filled out necessary forms for Incident Command. On Saturday, we moved our Air Ops command to the Barber County Airport and continued support from that position. I had a seasoned and knowledgeable partner in Tom Lee from Barber County who had volumes of aviation background. His expertise was a huge blessing. My dispatch/telecommunication skills were (I hope) helpful in by monitoring radio traffic, maintaining logs, and assisting with telephone calls until I was relieved by Gina Schwein of Stafford Co. I was privileged to work with such fine responders and fellow TERT members. While my heart is broken for the residents adversely affected by the Anderson Creek fires, I found this to be an amazing learning experience. I have attached a couple of pictures of the mobile command unit we worked from. (Pratt County should be proud of such a fine resource), as well as the 4 Blackhawk helicopters we assisted during this mission. I attached a couple of cool pics from the mission.

Tammy Sherwood
Coffey County

Hidden Voices

I've read several post about the awesome work done firefighters in Barber County. No doubt they've done excellent work. But I want to focus on the Emergency Dispatchers. They have answered countless telephone & radio transmissions, wondering is my home going to be standing when my shift ends. After helping everybody else and their shift has come to an end they are now able to check on their homes, pastures, & livestock. As I've sat side by side with those fine individuals they recounted stories and events that started on Tuesday March 22nd.

Following is just one of those stories. A Barber County Emergency Dispatcher after working their shift returned home grabbed their animals as their home was being threatened by fire. Loaded up their pets, went on to check pastures, and then to one of their green wheat fields. They parked their vehicle in the middle of the wheat field spent the night in their vehicle so the next day they could return to the dispatch center putting their lives on hold; helping those they serve. Unsure if their home would be standing in the morning.

I hope I've provided just a little insight on the life an emergency dispatcher. So the next time a major event occurs and we thank the Emergency Responders take some time to Remember the hidden voices.

Josh Michaelis
Rice County