Oklahoma LTAP and TTAP Help Road Workers Become Firefighters

In Oklahoma, wildfires are a perennial danger. Last Fall was particularly hard for Oklahoma firefighters. Drought conditions, combined with unseasonably warm winter weather and high winds, led to a surge in the number and intensity of fires.

Since November 2005, more than 500,000 acres have burned, and nearly 900 homes were damaged, with 300 destroyed.

Firefighters frequently call on road workers to operate equipment like bulldozers and motor graders, which are used to cut firebreaks and create roads for better access.

But road workers have little or no training in firefighting techniques, according to Mark Sharpton, a Logan County commissioner.

Sharpton asked Oklahoma LTAP Manager Doug Wright for help. The center worked with a certified fire instructor to create the “Wildfire Training for County and Tribal Personnel” class.

10 Days from Request to First Class

The first class, which came just 10 days after Sharpton contacted Wright, drew more than 300 equipment operators, foremen and county commissioners from around the state. The class covered fire terminology, safety, and technical aspects of fire fighting such as cutting firebreaks, cutting clear zones, and working within a chain of command.

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LTAP & TTAP RESPOND TO PRESENT DISASTERS; PREPARE FOR THE NEXT

by Gib Peaslee, FHWA LTAP/TTAP Program Manager

The fundamental focus of FHWA’s Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) and its sister program the Tribal Technical Assistance Program (TTAP) has been on building trust between the Federal Highway Administration, local and tribal road and bridge agencies, and state departments of transportation. While the heart and soul of these programs is to serve and support local and tribal road and bridge agencies by providing low-cost training and technical support, many communities are now turning to the program for guidance and support far outside normal road and bridge parameters. Today this bond of trust has become so strong that the LTAP/TTAP has become the “go to” resource for professional assistance.

In this issue of the “Times” you will experience exactly why the LTAP/TTAP has become so valued by America’s local and tribal communities. Our cover story illustrates how quickly the Oklahoma LTAP was able to react in a time of critical need. The New Hampshire LTAP, so well integrated with their local communities, actually created a program and had it in place before tragedy struck. The Colorado LTAP recognized their responsibility to help communities understand Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) programs - National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS). Look at the comprehensive approach the Louisiana LTAP Center is taking toward rebuilding Louisiana’s local infrastructure. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita affected their entire state.

Future issues of the LTAP & TTAP Times will contain more client service stories about this quiet but uniquely responsive Federal program.

Our LTAP Program Team would like to hear from you. Please send any comments or suggestions to us at: FHWA – Office of Professional and Corporate Development, 4600 N. Fairfax Dr., Suite 800, Arlington, VA 22203; Phone: 703.235.0532; Fax: 703.235.0593; or E-mail: gib.peaslee@fhwa.dot.gov
To comply with Department of Homeland Security requirements for public works personnel disaster training, the Colorado LTAP presented a course on two Federal Emergency Management (FEMA) programs: National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS).

FEMA's ICS is a standardized management tool for meeting the demands of small or large emergency or non-emergency situations and represents “best practices” for emergency management.

NIMS provides a consistent nationwide template to enable all government, private-sector, and nongovernmental organizations to work together during domestic incidents.

The class introduced both programs, their features and principles, and organizational structure. It also explained the relationship between ICS and NIMS and covered how these systems work during emergencies, the role of public works departments during emergencies, and how to best communicate and work with the public.

The Colorado LTAP offered the course four times in February and March.
NEW HAMPSHIRE LTAP BRINGS EQUIPMENT AND AGENCIES TOGETHER

On Columbus Day weekend, floods inundated many cities and counties in southwestern New Hampshire – the worst reported in 25 years. The natural disaster caused the deaths of two motorists when water forced their car off the road.

Local communities were able to quickly get needed equipment and staff through the New Hampshire Public Works Mutual Aid Program, managed by the New Hampshire LTAP program.

WHEN DISASTERS HIT LTAP PAGERS GO OFF

Kathy Des Roches, LTAP center assistant director, serves as coordinator of the mutual aid program. She and her staff wear pagers for such emergencies, and when the flood hit the state, “They all went off,” she said.

During the Columbus Day flooding, Des Roches called Jim Terrell, the public works director for the Town of Walpole, when she heard several of its roads had been washed out. “The floods caught us all by surprise,” Terrell said, noting that Walpole saw more than a foot of rain. The raging water washed out seven roads and damaged three bridges. In all, 14 miles of local roadways were damaged. “I started out trying to work with current resources until Kathy phoned me. She wanted to know what we were in need of and then prompted me to call on Mutual Aid.”

The towns in the program were more than willing to help, Terrell said. Through the mutual aid program, Walpole borrowed a compacting roller, which the town used to rebuild 300 feet of roadway that had been washed away by the floodwaters.

Terrell said Walpole’s ordeal would have been much tougher without the help it received. The mutual aid program will be his first call in future emergencies. “I felt this was very effective,” he said. “It actually brightened the depressing situation. The camaraderie between the men who came to help and my men helped a lot of spirits.”

MUTUAL AID PROGRAM HELPS SPARE TOWN’S WATER SUPPLY

When flooding threatened to contaminate Keene’s water supply, public works director Kurt Blomquist turned to the mutual aid pro-
If a nearby town had not loaned one of its heavy trucks, which the city used to cart away dirt and grit that threatened its sewage system, as many as 15,000 people might have been forced to boil their water.

“It sounds like a small thing, but it saved a lot of trouble for the residents of that town,” Des Roches explained.

**Mutual Aid Program: Communities Working Together for Rescue, Safety and Repairs**

New Hampshire was the first state to implement a statewide program among public works departments. In an emergency, local officials contact the LTAP center, which coordinates the dispatching of necessary equipment from other towns to the emergency site. Heavy equipment is not the only resource the mutual aid program provides. Des Roches and other members of the LTAP program staff also offer advice, referrals and information.

Overall, 84 towns, cities and counties around the state participate in the program. There is no cost - it is based on an age-old concept of neighbors helping neighbors.

The New Hampshire Mutual Aid Program as founded in 1998 by Leighton “Chum” Cleverly, public works director for the town of Bow. He got the idea after seeing work crews from other states help several New Hampshire communities dig out from an ice storm. To put his idea into practice, Cleverly needed an organization that had connections with public works agencies throughout the state. He found a receptive ear in Des Roches, who feels that “Emergency management is part of our business.”

You can find more information on the New Hampshire Mutual Aid Program on the LTAP Center’s Web site at www.t2.unh.edu/ma/index.html.

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*Flooding in New Hampshire resulted in mountains of debris.*

*Dumping debris in the aftermath of the Columbus Day flooding in Walpole, NH.*
LOUISIANA LTAP PROVIDES LOCAL SUPPORT FOR REBUILDING

Months after hurricanes Katrina and Rita ravaged the Gulf Coast, Louisiana is still feeling the impact of the storms. The Louisiana LTAP Center is also adjusting to the current realities in the state. They cancelled most classes and conferences and have refocused their efforts in assisting Louisiana's storm-devastated local governments recover and be prepared for future disasters.

LOUISIANA LTAP TRAINS LOCALS TO CLEAN UP FROM DISASTERS SAFELY

Marie Walsh, the director of the Louisiana LTAP Center, said that LTAP is providing just-in-time training and services to storm-ravaged local communities. LTAP has beefed up its emergency response and preparedness training.

• Starting in January, the center offered “Chain Saw Safety, Precision Felling and Hazardous Cutting Situations After Storms,” which teaches chainsaw safety and how to operate heavy equipment safely while performing routine and emergency maintenance starting.

• Another class, “Operational Safety for Public Works Responders,” helps public works staff work safer by teaching them about the hazards and dangers involved in working in the field following disasters.

• The center also offered a National Highway Institute course on bridge inspection refresher training in February.

• The center organized an Environmental Regulatory Compliance Conference in February.

• Currently the center is offering courses on performing basic maintenance: leveling and grading preparation and pipe installation and inspection.

INFORMATION AND BEST PRACTICES PART OF THE RECOVERY AND PREPAREDNESS PROCESS

The LTAP Center has been active in helping local and state agencies not only recover from the current disaster, but also make sure they are prepared for the next.

• The LTAP Center has also been active in facilitating an after-action review of the role of local public works and transportation agencies in response and recovery efforts. In cooperation with the municipal and parish associations, they are planning a workshop to collect best practices and enhance local planning efforts.

• The LTAP Center worked with officials at the Louisiana Department of Transportation to help distribute federal funds earmarked for the rebuilding of Louisiana's roadways.

• The LTAP Center has provided agencies around the state with information about
resources available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other government agencies.

STORMS HAD AN IMPACT ON THE STATE AND THE LTAP CENTER

Walsh said the LTAP Center has also tried to resume its normal training activities, but has encountered difficulties, since conditions still have not returned to normal in Louisiana.

“The storm had a significant impact on the entire state,” she said. “Most importantly has been the impact on the communities themselves. Many areas are still in the cleanup and recovery stage while attempting to plan for the 2006 storm season.

“There was a great burden in all the communities. There were no hotel rooms, no travel for trainers and no workshops because there wasn’t anywhere for anyone to stay. This still remains a problem for some parts of the state,” said Walsh.

Making matters worse, three of the center’s training sites have been severely damaged. Illustrating the less-than-perfect working conditions facing the LTAP Center, Walsh recounted a recent meeting with three other public works directors from South Louisiana. Months after the storm, she said one was living in a FEMA trailer, another was commuting 90 miles a day to work and the third was staying in a garage apartment.

To make sure everyone has the opportunity to attend training, the LTAP Center has waived its normal fees for agencies in the areas hit worst by the hurricanes.

“We will continue to respond to the training needs throughout the rebuilding process,” Walsh said. “We will continue to encourage agencies to be proactive and assist as we can to build this capacity and plan for the future.”

For more Information

The Louisiana LTAP Center Web site includes information on training and recovery resources at www.ltrc.lsu.edu/ltap/index.html.

The LTAP Center Web site provides information on recovery efforts to local agencies.
NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORTATION PRACTITIONERS WILL MEET TO EXPLORE INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO TRANSFERRING TRANSPORTATION

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