

OPERATIONS

(September 1991)

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In general, Information Centers involve four elements of service:

- Gather factual information from the scene at a central point, organize and assemble it into a usable format, and distribute it promptly to the media, the public, and through internal channels.
- Maintain a chronology and photographic record of the incident (fire behavior, losses, and control efforts).
- Maintain a map of the incident area showing access roads, landmarks, special interest points, progressive fire perimeter, specific control actions, and proximity to nearby major cities (map should be available from the situation unit).
- Arrange for appropriate contact between the Incident Commander and officials, dignitaries, and others who warrant personal attention.

Once the Information Center supplies initial information to the media, the center staff faces the task of gathering current facts and human-interest items to keep the incident news current. The center must stay constantly informed regarding incident developments and control progress. However, incident facts alone seldom make good news stories. Every information officer should be alert for unusual incidents or sidebars and specific details that will increase public interest or attraction to significant prevention issues.

A scanner monitoring the fire frequencies of the various participating agencies can greatly assist in identifying current incident developments. A scanner allows personnel to keep up with the incident and recognize newsworthy items as they are happening. However, the Field Information Manager must verify everything heard over the scanner.

Information personnel should monitor their media exposure. Information officers should study news broadcasts and printed articles for accuracy and content. Centers should listen to local radio stations whenever possible to determine if broadcast reporting accurately reflects the current situation. They should ask reporters, local citizens, and incident personnel for their opinions of media coverage.

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