

Session title and Presenters' Contact Information

Constructing Models as a Communications Exercise in ICS, Hazardous Materials Operations, and Emergency Response Trainings

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Workshop Summary

This workshop considers the critical role of communication during hazardous waste operations and emergency response activities, and in particular in the Incident Command System. In any good safety management system, the way tasks are communicated between team members is critical. Breakdowns in communication could have catastrophic results. Communication challenges can arise from the physical limitations of communication equipment or PPE, as well as from language, educational or cultural barriers, among other things. In this workshop, participants will construct/reconstruct models, such as Legos and Tinkertoys, using direct communication or walkie-talkies, to experience first-hand some of the challenges inherent in communicating information during a response activity. Participants will then share ideas about how to improve communication systems in real-life hazmat and emergency response situations, as well as where and how trainers might use these model construction activities in trainings.

Methods

A brief introduction of the Tinkertoy activity (called "Dilemmasaurus") was given, including the rules of the game. This was followed by a brief overview of the Incident Command System. Participants were then divided up into two groups – those using Tinkertoys and those using Legos. In each of the two groups, participants were tasked with replicating already constructed models. Participants then spent about 30 minutes attempting to replicate the already constructed Lego or Tinkertoy model. This was followed by a 15 minute "lessons learned" discussion.

Main Points/Key Points Raised by Participants

- 1) Deciding on a functional language of coordinates was important. Participants had to determine how to describe verbally how to construct their model by using some system of coordinates such as north/south/east/west.
- 2) Communication is key. Observers (runners) need to communicate clearly to builders, and builders need to ask the right questions of the runners.

- 3) Rotating new people into the observer/runner role is helpful, as it brings a new set of eyes to task.
- 4) Having a coordinator (incident commander) is helpful, although not essential.
- 5) Success is a result of a team effort.

Workshop Handouts/Resources

The following materials were shared during the workshop and are attached:

- 1) Dilemmasaurus Description
- 2) Managing the Incident Activity
- 3) Lesson Plan
- 4) Rules of the Game