



Fire Watch

Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter

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Our Mission

“To preserve life and property, promote public safety, foster economic growth through leadership, management and actions, as an all-risk fire and life safety response provider.”

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Los Angeles Fire Department Urban Search and Rescue

The Los Angeles Fire Department's (LAFD) Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Program is a dynamic system which has evolved over the past decade and includes a variety of response levels. The first real step in a structured response system began on April 4, 1993. The Mayor and City Council authorized the Fire Department to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to become a sponsoring agency for one of the nation's 28 FEMA US&R Task Forces.

Concurrent to the development of a FEMA US&R Task Force in Los Angeles, efforts were made to enhance the Fire Department's US&R component to provide a 24-hour response capability.

These efforts have resulted in two distinctly separate, yet cohesive urban search and rescue components, capable of a unified response for local disasters or mobilization of the FEMA US&R Task Force for a federally declared disaster elsewhere. These components are:

FEMA US&R Task Force

This Task Force, designated CA-TF1, when activated would deploy a 70-member team staffed by Fire Department personnel, Structural Engineers from the Department of Building and Safety, canine search handlers from the Department and civilian ranks, and doctors from private industry. The US&R Unit coordinates the training and development of this multi-agency response system.

There are eight FEMA US&R Task Forces in the State with a total of 28 Task Forces nationwide. Each Task Force is required to have a minimum of 210 total members, using the "three-deep concept" this allows for the deployment of a 70-member team. The teams include command staff, medical staff and four functional specialist groups. The four functional groups are Search, Rescue, Medical and Technical specialists.





The operational concept for the activation of a FEMA Task Force is predicated on a request for a Presidential disaster declaration. The activation request is initiated by FEMA, through the State OES, to the sponsoring agency. For an out-of-area event, Task Forces are required to be mobilized at an assigned point of departure within six hours of accepting an activation request.

FEMA Task Forces are equipped to be totally self-sufficient for at least the first 72 hours and capable of 24-hour operation, for durations up to 10 days. This includes food, water, clothing, shelter, sanitation, communications, command, and of course, the tools and equipment necessary to perform technical search and rescue operations.

When CA-TF1 is mobilized to a disaster out of the area, there are two mobilization plans. The equipment can be loaded onto military pallets and secured for air transport or, if so ordered, the equipment and personnel can travel by ground. CA-TF1 has two-40' tractor/trailers, a 24' crewcab box van, and rental agreements with charter bus agencies to handle this type of deployment. These resources of staffing and equipment can also provide search and rescue capabilities to any localized event.

LAFD US&R Task Forces

The Fire Department's 24-hour on-duty US&R resources are geographically located, by Division,

for optimum coverage. Presently, there are three US&R Task Forces, one per Division, and three more Task Forces are being trained as additional US&R Task Forces, for a total of 6, two per Division.



CANINE CARRY - NEW YORK

FIRE STATION 80 CIRCA 1943

Each of the US&R Task Forces 3, 5, 27, 85, 88, and 89 have been trained in technical search and rescue techniques and each house a US&R apparatus. The apparatus are 1999 and 2005 specialized, technical rescue vehicles custom made for the LAFD by the Pierce Corporation.



CA-TF 1 TRANSPORT

These self-sufficient vehicles have the ability to power their own equipment and lighting; provide air and hydraulic supply for the variety of lifting, cutting and breaking tools and equipment; and carry items

such as fiber optic search devices for state-of-the-art searching. US&R apparatus are staffed by members regularly assigned to US&R Task Forces.

Northridge Earthquake

On, Monday, January 17, 1994, at 4:31 a.m., the most destructive earthquake in the history of Los Angeles struck as most of the City slept. Fifty-seven fatalities were attributed to this earthquake, with more than 25 percent of this total (16 people) killed as the result of a single structure collapse, the Northridge Meadows apartment building.

Initially, a five-member Search and Rescue Group formed with a mixture of off-duty Disaster Preparedness members and US&R instructors who loaded equipment onto a stake-bed truck and an 18' trailer. At 6:30 a.m. on that morning, "US&R One" coordinated and assisted search and recovery efforts at the Northridge Meadows apartments, the Northridge Mall parking structure collapse, and wherever else they were needed. Eventually, US&R 2, 3 and 4 would be formed and continue to operate until January 28, 1994.

As a result of the search and rescue activities experienced during the Northridge earthquake, US&R demonstrated that highly specialized, trained, well equipped, and self-sufficient urban search and rescue resources could be mobilized and quickly deployed to provide lifesaving expertise and equipment.



September 11, 2001

The World Trade Center terrorist attack was CA-TF1's first real trial-



NORTHRIDGE EARTHQUAKE 1994
NORTHRIDGE MEADOWS APARTMENTS

by-fire. Although the City was taking actions to prepare for additional attacks, it soon became clear that the World Trade Center and the Pentagon incidents would require massive search and rescue efforts.

Prior to the official notification of activation from FEMA, the US&R Unit began a call-out of the qualified personnel to staff CA-TF1. A verbal activation order was received at 1200 hours followed by the official order at 1412 hours. A total of 70 members were "rostered" and were soon aboard three military C-130 aircraft.

For the next 9 days, CA-TF1 conducted search, rescue and recovery missions in, under, and around the South Tower. "Live alerts" by CA-TF1's search canines occurred during the first four days of operation. CA-TF1 participated in the recovery of 30 – 35 bodies. Unfortunately, no live rescues were made.

On September 21, 2001, CA-TF1 returned home and was met by a cheering crowd of family and friends. The men and women of CA-TF1 used a combination of knowledge, experience, advanced equipment

and, most of all, courage in the time of national crisis to help the people of New York.

appreciation of our Southern California climate.

2002 Winter Olympics

From February 3-10, 2002, CA-TF1 was deployed to Salt Lake City, Utah, to provide standby during the 2002 Winter Olympics.

This was the first deployment of CA-TF1 as a

"Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)" US&R Task Force. The mission was to remain prepared for deployment for any WMD or US&R incident that might have occurred during the Olympics.

Although CA-TF1 did not respond to any incidents, each day was filled with preparedness duties and training exercises. A Rapid Response Team concept was developed and refined. The below-freezing temperatures gave the firefighters a deeper

La Conchita Landslide

When the hills above La Conchita suddenly buried people and homes during January 2005's heavy rainstorms, LAFD US&R resources responded to the incident. Members of the Ventura County Fire Department were on scene to witness the event and immediately called for US&R resources. US&R 88 and US&R Task Force 85 were on scene within one hour.

US&R 88 used its powerful rooftop lighting system to light up the mountainside. This allowed rescuers to work safely and continue rescue efforts while safety officers kept a watchful vigil for further land movement. For the next four days, search canines, tractors, and manual labor kept hopes alive for the families of the missing victims.

Metro Rail Train Derailment

The most recent US&R dispatch came when two Metro Link commuter trains derailed along the Glendale and City of Los Angeles borders. USAR 88 and US&R Task Forces 27 and 88 were dispatched to the incident.



WORLD TRADE CENTER RUBBLE
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001



WORLD TRADE CENTER SKELETON-2001

During this deadly incident, US&R members assisted with search, rescue, cutting, and stabilizing leaning passenger cars. This valuable combined resource of staffing and equipment assisted both Departments in speeding up rescue and recovery efforts.

The Future of US&R

The mission of saving lives and property has always been the mission of the fire service. US&R is a relatively new and modern approach to this mission when compared to traditional firefighting. What used to be done with manila rope and a myriad of knots has been replaced by multi-ply rope, webbing, and hardware to eliminate those knots. New technology has

improved our gas detection monitors to eliminate the guesswork of working in hazardous atmospheres. In addition, extrications in collapsed structures and remote areas can be made with cordless power tools.

Apparatus and Equipment

The six LAFD US&R Task Forces are well on their way to meeting the demands of this changing mission. Three new state-of-the-art US&R rigs, designed by Department members, are under construction and will be added to the three already in service. The US&R apparatus are equipped with pneumatic, hydraulic, and generating systems to supply power to the many specialized tools. New equipment has been added to the existing inventories for more efficient and faster searches, rescues, and overall member/victim safety.

Operations

Tactical concepts are being developed to enhance US&R operational capabilities. The airborne US&R Company can be quickly delivered anywhere in the region to assist neighboring cities in times of need. When a structure fire breaks out, US&R Task Forces will become dedicated rapid intervention companies. These companies will monitor the dangerous deteriorating condition of a structure, keep a watchful eye on the interior fire attack companies, and launch an all-out rescue of a downed firefighter if the unfortunate need should arise.

Conclusion

LAFD's Urban Search and Rescue component is taking the art of protecting life and property to new levels. Where homeland security is a daily part of our lives and an earthquake can shake us out of our senses, the demands of keeping up with new skills and technologies are being met.

LAFD firefighters responding to emergencies have always brought along with them their superior knowledge, skills, and abilities that are a hallmark of the Department. Now, and in the not-so-distant future, they will be able to take with them state-of-the-art equipment and technologies to provide faster, safer, and smarter protection for the firefighters and citizens of Southern California.



WORLD TRADE CENTER-2001

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