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## Greensburg, Kansas Tornado FEMA Assist Deployment, May 16, 2007

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The National Incident Management Organization (NIMO), Boise Incident Management Team (IMT), is a seven member team of professional incident managers tasked with building incident management capability and capacity for the future.

An essential component of the NIMO program is the availability of a strong core of full-time Command and General staff for complex incident management. The Boise IMT, with its ability to focus and place emphasis on learning, is expected to explore diverse ways to mentor and train future incident managers.



NIMO Boise IMT and San Juan Hotshots conducting planning session for tornado response base camp in Greensburg, Kansas

The Boise IMT developed a vision six months ago to integrate an Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) into our incident management organization. This program was designed as a means for orientation to incident and/or fire program management, which would enhance career goals. Team members reached out to the IHC community to determine their interest in a pilot program which would provide crewmembers on-the-job orientation and training in non-operations incident command functions. Several IHC's were enthusiastic to gain more knowledge of emergency management.

This opportunity was provided to the U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, San Juan Hotshots. It has been an overwhelming success that resulted in quality lessons learned. As you will see by the following ***“Final Thoughts and Comments”*** by the San Juan Hotshots, each individual received a variety of experiences in logistics, finance, planning, information, and safety functions.

The assignment of the San Juan Hotshots was two fold. First was to assist the incident in standing up and operating a base camp for emergency responders supporting the tornado relief efforts in Greensburg, Kansas. The second was to be exposed to and receive additional training in incident management.

**AARON GELOBTER**  
**Incident Commander**  
**NIMO Boise National Incident Management Team**

# San Juan Hotshots Final Thoughts and Comments on their “IMT Training Assignment” during Tornado Assist Response in Greensburg, Kansas

**SHAWNA LEGARZA**

**San Juan Hotshots Superintendent - Safety Officer Type 2 Trainee**



Previous to this assignment I volunteered my crew in several discussions to work with the NIMO Boise Team. I am passionate about training. This past assignment has quantified several ideas about the future development of our work force. I believe we, as an agency, can do a better job in training our employees for Incident Management Teams. With the lack of qualified people in some section units and the number of retirees in the system, what will we do?

Having our crew work directly with the NIMO Boise Team has been an invaluable experience for the crew. During this assignment the crew members worked in functional areas of which they have never previously been exposed to, i.e. logistics, planning, information, safety, and finance. Crew members with three to seven years of hotshot experience were exposed to learning about the cost elements associated with large natural disaster projects, worked on a 209's, incident action plan parts, participated in pre-planning meetings and observed the team building and developed interpersonal relationships with several people and agencies outside of their normal scope of operations.

Personally for me, working as a Safety Officer Type 2 trainee during the Greensburg Tornado FEMA Assist was an extremely valuable assignment. I was able to observe and participant in team building with not only the Boise IMT but other federal, state and local government employees working in and around the disaster site. I was able to observe different levels of organizational leadership and how this affects decision making at various levels.



San Juan Hotshots facilitating daily planning meeting at the Greensburg emergency responders base camp.

I think the success of NIMO and the future of our fire organization could greatly benefit from having a “trainee detailer” (1-2 people) from a hotshot crew. While this may be a “rare” opportunity, I do think it is possible.

I do believe we as an agency could help facilitate a more broad based approach to better utilize the NIMO/Hotshot training experience while working on assignments. I would be glad to offer up my thoughts and ideas for the future in a panel discussion with the necessary people.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the members of the NIMO Boise Team for taking the opportunity to make this possible. I have learned valuable leadership lessons from spending time with each and every one of them.

**JUSTIN CAVASSO**  
**Lead Sawyer, 7-year Hotshot**



Before being ordered to the Greensburg Tornado FEMA Assist response I had somewhat of an idea of what we would be doing. This knowledge was acquired from my previous experience working for hurricane recovery efforts in Beaumont, TX in 2005. After arriving I found out that we would be working directly under NIMO “shadowing” certain management units learning what Incident Management Teams do on assignment.

I started my assignment performing my normal duties on the hotshot crew, by cutting hazardous trees from the area designated as our base camp. This consisted of removing overhead hazards, clearing debris, preparing the future sleeping areas and making areas safe for all personnel.

After two days I was assigned to the Facilities Unit Leader. Being a hotshot my whole career, I really had no idea what the Facilities Unit did. My tasks ranged from supplying power, placing signs in appropriate locations, road traffic control and ensuring adequate safety facilities for emergency personnel workers.

This was an excellent training mission and made me really appreciate hot food, showers and portable toilet facilities. Next time I would like to take this task to the next level, such as learning about shift tickets, pay documents, etc. However, I see myself being in the hotshot community for many more years because I like the physical demands of the job. But, in the future, I would also like to take the opportunity to train in management roles again.

I would like to give a big thanks to the NIMO Boise Team and my superintendent for thinking outside of the box and making this training opportunity available and rewarding.

In conclusion, I would really like to thank the Facilities Unit Leader. He really made this assignment enjoyable for me, and was able to keep me busy all the time and I appreciate his energy and enthusiasm for making this a quality assignment for me, as he was a good leader, and taught me a lot about the Facilities Unit job.

**RIAN REAM**  
**Crewmember, 3-year Hotshot**



Training in Plans has been an invaluable experience for my career. The opportunity has given me experience working within all areas of the planning section, tools to utilize later in my career, knowledge of how a Type 1 Incident Management Team operates, and the overall picture of the whole incident response versus my experience solely in fire suppression operations.

I have been in fire for five years. During that time I have had no direct contact with any of the Incident Management Teams (IMT). Having worked and spoken with the entire NIMO Command and General Staff,

I have come to the conclusion that there are many benefits to both the Hotshots and the IMT's working together.

In my opinion, IMT's need to train experienced firefighters to fill upcoming personnel needs in all sections. I feel the knowledge of these teams is best taught in the fire environment, and the knowledge base within the current teams should be passed along. Training experiences like this one give Hotshots increased options later in their career. I had not considered planning as an option prior to working on this incident. Second, hotshots can help in staffing when resource needs are lacking. Hotshots are highly motivated, intelligent individuals whom can easily be taught to fill staffing needs. Third, IMT's can gain a better understanding of the experience on the ground and reestablish the connection with the people on the line by working directly with the hotshots. Further, the hotshots can gain an understanding of how the whole fire organization works by detail assignments such as these. I had little knowledge of what the planning section did prior to working in it.

I came into the planning section on the second day of the incident with no knowledge of planning. On that first day the Plans Section Chief and I were able to successfully complete all of the necessary tasks while dealing with facilities and technological challenges. If this had been a more complex incident this would not have been possible, however; I am certain that training could be done within one of the units successfully. For the benefit of both IMT's and the Hotshot community I highly recommend their partnership. Training opportunities like this should be implemented regularly.

## **TRAVIS THIEL**

### **Lead Sawyer, 6-year Hotshot**



It was a very interesting experience to be able to assist the Finance Unit Leader with different tasks. As a hotshot sawyer, I am rarely exposed to the record keeping aspect of incidents. Usually, all I am concerned with is whether or not my direct deposit goes through every pay period. Now I understand more of what needs to happen in order for me to get paid. Almost as important, I learned how everyone else gets paid.

Inputting Crew Time Reports (CTRs) on I-Suite was fairly easy to learn with minor computer skills and a little common sense. In addition to learning about CTRs, I also learned how Equipment Shift Tickets and logistical equipment payment records are kept track of and reported.

At the start of this incident, the Finance Section was given the task of checking resources in as they arrived. After learning to use the "Check In" function of I-Suite, I was able to train the Plans THSP in that function, which is traditionally a Planning Section task.

Fortunately for me, there were a small number of resources at the incident. This allowed me to observe and learn the different aspects of incident finance and other I-Suite functions in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Additionally, I assisted the Planning Section Chief by inputting a prior Incident Action Plan (IAP) into the I-Suite IAP building software to find shortcomings and other problems with the

program. As of this point, the Plans Chief is using MS Word to create forms for the 203, 204, and 220. All I-Suite versions of these forms were either lacking in some way, or were impossible to utilize in drafting a copy of the IAP as already written. I printed hard copies noting examples of limitations and other problems for the Plans Chief so that she could bring them to the attention of the software's programmers and try to enhance them.

If my hotshot crew had the opportunity to be assigned to a NIMO Team again, I could easily fill a position as a Personnel Time Keeper, or just as easily train another hotshot in the job. I would like the chance to train in the Planning Section as well.

This was an excellent training opportunity for me. I learned valuable information on how Incident Management Teams operate. It will help me interact with IMT's in the future in a more productive way. Hopefully this will help them meet their objectives.

### **PATRICK MOORE** **Saw / Squad Boss**

The experience provided to me this week as a Safety Technical Specialist has been very enlightening. The problems a Safety Officer (SOFR) faces during a normal work day presented me with several opportunities to utilize new skills and try to problem solve from unique perspectives. I take some pride in the work accomplished in Greensburg to help with the tornado recovery efforts.

During my time as SOFR-THSP (T), I not only dealt with several safety hazards associated with disaster clean-up, but also participated in the daily IMT process. I benefited from becoming completely immersed in the SOFR routine and will take much of what I learned back to my normal job (IHC Saw/Squad Boss). Perhaps the most important facet of the SOFR position is that of constant vigilance.



Planning Section Chief and San Juan Hotshot trainee preparing the daily ICS-209 Incident Status Summary.

I found this training opportunity to be both challenging and valuable. I would recommend making this an option for other Hotshot crews as a form of broadening their understanding of functional areas outside of operations. I do not, however, feel that this should be a long term commitment for a crew. IHC's are operational groups. If we truly wish to diversify the skill set of our IHC's, we need to look into exploring operational options such as SAR and USAR. Training in the use of bucket trucks and arborist ropes would further increase our disaster response operational diversity.

### **LANCE MARTIN** **Squad Boss, 6-year Hotshot**



During my time shadowing ground support, I learned a few things about day to day operations. I learned the right avenues for ordering equipment and supplies that are associated with ground support. I also learned about maintaining and tracking equipment. The shadowing experience was excellent. I did understand that we were not on a fire and just supporting the camp, and that we did not require a lot of equipment.

I would have liked more time looking at and doing more paper work associated with the position. Also more tasks' that are related to ground support, this would help me understand the position better if I was shadowing ground support again. I do believe shadowing the IMT and integrating Hotshots in the system is a great idea for the future of the agency.

**JAMES CORNELIUS**  
**Assistant Superintendent**



I think it may be easier to access the quality of the training experience with the NIMO Boise Team in my position as IHC Assistant Superintendent than my particular division (DIVS) trainee assignment. I feel that the opportunities provided to my crew to experience the ICS system first hand were instructive. Never again will I hear individuals wondering what all of the overhead in camp do while they are engaged in operations. Ultimately I think the crew, as well as myself, have gained an appreciation for the incredible amount of work that is involved in setting up and running a large fire camp.

The assignment as a DIVS (t) in a non-operations setting was difficult to execute. I think we should strive to make trainee assignments realistic and not just training for training's sake. I was more than happy to do the job but I am convinced that it was not a trainee assignment. I would like to reiterate my support of the concept of exposing IHC's to team functions. A deeper understanding of all functional areas only serves to make my crew stronger. My only concern is the creation of a functional area when it is not needed.

**MATTHEW RINGER**  
**Crewmember, Detailer from Rifle BLM Engine Captain**

I had the opportunity to train as facilities during the Greensburg Tornado Relief effort. It was a valuable learning experience for me due to the fact that the Facilities Unit Leader provided hands on training. Shadowing the Facilities Unit Leader for shift ticket transactions and paperwork for contractors made the duties of facilities manager a little less murky for me. The logistic team meetings revealed the importance of the communication link between each entity for the smoothest and most efficient operation.

Being a part of facilities from yurt installation to camp management helped me realize the large effort involved in supporting and maintaining an incident with 300 plus people. Taking a part in the original sign up process for contractors, closing out an incident, as well as being in the training position long enough to learn the computerized shift tickets would be some tasks I would like to be more involved with next time. Even though I prefer my primary job in the field for the near future, I have a new found respect and interest of the work that goes into the details and overall responsibilities of managing camp facilities.

**SAM PARSONS**  
**Crewmember, Detailer from Fairmont Fire Protection District**

I was asked to assist Planning Section Chief in performing the daily duties of the Plans Section during the Greensburg Tornado Response in Greensburg, Kansas. I worked for four

days with two San Juan IHC members to produce four Incident Action Plans and submit ICS 209 forms to Pueblo Interagency Dispatch twice daily. We facilitated three morning briefings, tracked meals and bedding statistics daily, and documented all information with appropriate ICS forms. We also attended daily planning meetings and a command and general staff meeting.

This has been an invaluable experience for my career. I was able to practice team-building and time management skills. I have a new understanding of the planning process and now feel comfortable building an IAP on my own. I built relationships with incident personnel from across the country, and acquired an experience to bring to my agency and utilize on future incidents. As the incident management world slowly shifts from wildfire to all-risk, this type of experience becomes vitally important. Continuing to offer this type of training opportunity to crews and personnel in the future will undoubtedly build the leadership capacity of our future managers. I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in this experience.

**TOM KELSEA**  
**Crewmember / EMT, 3-year Hotshot**

I worked as a Base Camp EMT and did a Medical Unit Leader Trainee assignment for the NIMO Boise Team. My training assignment covered three days, and duties included: setting up a first aid station; orienting myself with the medical operation already in place; and updating the daily Medical Plan (ICS-206).

I learned a few very good lessons including: 1) it is difficult to enter into an organized, self-sufficient organization that isn't part of the Incident Command System; 2) it is very important to make a good first impression; 3) do not assume other organizations are on the same page; and 4) it may be difficult to organize and maintain an effective medical unit.

I thought my experience in the medical unit was excellent. I enjoyed my time there and learned a great deal. In the future I will remember what I did right as well as what I did wrong. The most important lesson I learned was that I would rather work in the field with our crew than in a medical tent all day.



San Juan Hotshots setting up sleeping tents for emergency responder's base camp in Greensburg, Kansas

**JACOB BIRDSELL**  
**Senior Firefighter, 6-year Hotshot**

Throughout the past two days, I have been the crew boss for the San Juan Hotshots. During this training, the crew has been involved in a variety of assignments, ranging from laying down carpet and setting up cots in yurts, to mitigating safety hazards.

I have learned a few of the key components of what is expected of a crew boss during this assignment. First component is the ability to split your forces to complete different objectives. The second component I came across was communication. Due to the fact we were normally working in small group it was important to maintain that every group had a radio to

ensure effective communication with everyone in my span of control. The third component that I will take from this assignment is flexibility. This was my first training opportunity on an all-risk assignment. In the future, hotshot crews will be taking on new roles in the emergency response community.

I could only offer one suggestion to improve this training opportunity. When the situation arises in the future, it is important to let the trainee find work for his crew when the crew has completed their assignments. In situations as this, I think it is important to keep the crew active so passing community can see you are doing everything possible to help them. This was an excellent training opportunity and I will carry my experience with me for the rest of my career.

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