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FIRE-RESCUE
RAPID RESPONSE PLAN
FOR THE
PORT OF HUNTINGTON, WV

By
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OVERVIEW

The Port of Huntington, WV, including the expanse of the Ohio River known as the Greenup Pool, is one of the busiest inland water ports in terms of tonnage and traffic. Commercial shippers transport millions of tons of coal, chemicals and other commodities through the port each year. Recreational use of the Port increases dramatically in the summer months and with them brings their own set of unique challenges to fire and rescue responders.

Large recreational vessels also pass through the Port occasionally. These large passenger vessels such as the "Delta Queen" and others carry several hundred passengers. The life-safety risks and the potential for mass rescues and casualties perhaps pose some of the greatest challenges.

Before the attacks of 9/11, 2001 the Port of Huntington was in desperate need of a plan to provide adequate firefighting and rescue capabilities to commercial and recreational vessels as well as marinas and other river facilities. Since the attacks the need is even greater to ensure the Port of Huntington, WV the proper and adequate fire-rescue response it deserves.

CURRENT FIRE-RESCUE CAPABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

Currently, the capabilities of responders on the Ohio River are very limited. Virtually no dedicated marine firefighting capabilities exist at the Port of Huntington or anywhere on the expanse of the Ohio River between the Gallipolis Locks and Dam and the Greenup Locks and Dam, also known as the Greenup Pool. Additionally, there is no concerted effort to regionalize the fire and rescue capabilities on the Greenup Pool of the Ohio River.

The City of Huntington Fire Department provides the Port with a fiberglass, open bow vessel. This vessel is limited to rescue only and is not suited for a swift and swollen river. It has no climate controlled pilot area or cabin and can only be launched in fair weather. Inclement weather sometimes prohibits the launching of this boat. Additionally, the small vessel must be hauled by trailer eight city blocks to the launch site which requires additional crews to assist with the launch. Obviously, the need to haul by trailer and launch at a public ramp costs valuable time.

Most other fire and rescue agencies on the river have similar vessels and operations. Many are also volunteer organizations which require more time than the career city departments to haul and launch their vessels due to the nature of volunteer organizations.

However, three full-time, professional fire departments are located along the Ohio River in the Greenup Pool providing well-trained, career personnel 24 hours a day, seven days a week to their respective jurisdictions.

These three agencies should be the catalyst for a regional and rapid approach to fire and rescue emergencies along the Greenup Pool expanse.

They are: The City of Huntington, WV Fire Department, the City of Ashland, KY Fire Department and the City of Ironton, OH Fire Department.

The various volunteer fire organizations shall provide important support roles as needed by the incident commanders.

THE PLAN (Phase One)

The Vessels

A suitable vessel must be acquired for each of the three city fire departments. These vessels must have durable hulls, enclosed and climate controlled pilot, crew and patient areas. The patient area must accommodate at least one supine patient and be equipped with the required advanced life support devices.

They must be equipped with the proper navigational, radar and sonar, electrical, lighting and signaling devices. They must be equipped with at least two gasoline or diesel powered engines of appropriate displacement for redundancy and safety. They must be equipped with windshield wipers and window defrosting capabilities. They must be equipped with the US Coast Guard approved safety equipment.

They must be equipped with a firefighting pump which delivers at least 500 gallons per minute from at least one stationary and remote controlled piped monitor nozzle. They must be equipped with firefighting pump plumbing and valve controls which allows at least one additional 2 ½ " discharge opening suitable for connecting an additional monitor nozzle or manifold for handlines.

They must be equipped with the required bilge pump(s) and discharges.

They shall be no larger than 39 feet 11 inches in length. Vessels 40 feet in length or larger require a pilot's license.

They shall be conspicuously and uniformly marked with city, fire department and respective logos. They shall be readily identifiable as firefighting and rescue vessels.

Other capabilities of the vessels should be determined by experts in the field of marine firefighting and specifically designed for Ohio River operations, conditions and climate.

Locations and Vessel Housing

Each of the three vessels shall have a storage facility located directly on the Ohio River or an appropriate tributary located in each of the three jurisdictions. Each location shall be suitable keeping in mind the rapid response approach.

The facilities should rise and fall with the river and maintain continuity with the marina or shore. Personnel should never be cut off from the facilities or vessels by floodwaters or by security measures.

The boat houses as well as the vessels themselves shall be capable of climate control in extreme cold conditions. They may have capabilities of raising the vessels out of the water. They shall be secure and provide electric, shoreline, lighting, heat and fresh water. They shall provide battery conditioning of the vessels' power sources and supply an electrical power backup, such as solar electricity, in the event of a power failure. They shall have remote controlled rollup bay doors for convenience and security. The doors shall have a manual override and the boat houses shall have a secondary and secure entrance. Platforms shall surround the vessels and facilities and provide proper mooring and winching capabilities.

The rollup bay doors should face down stream to facilitate docking during difficult and swift river conditions. This also lessens the accumulation of debris near the entrances.

The facilities shall be monitored by burglar and fire alarm systems. Television surveillance may be appropriate to ensure proper security.

They shall be conspicuously and uniformly decorated and appropriately marked with each city's name, fire department and respective logos.

Communications

Currently, each of the three city fire departments operates their own radio communications and rarely if ever communicates with each other. The regional approach to the response plan must address the need for an adequate way to simultaneously alert the three departments of a port emergency and then maintain communications throughout the duration of the operation.

The large expanse, 61.8 miles, that must be covered creates a unique challenge to communications. However, it is essential that the three primary vessels be able to communicate regardless of their location on the Ohio River as well as support vessels which may respond at a later time.

Currently, no such communications system exists. Two-way radio communications experts should be consulted to devise and implement an adequate system for the Port of Huntington and the expanse between the Gallipolis Locks and Dam and the Greenup Locks and Dam.

Additionally, the system should be compatible with the systems currently in operation within their respective jurisdictions. Vessels to shore communications as well as emergency vessel to other vessel communications are also essential. Marine radios will not adequately address most of these needs nor do the current public safety radios used in each jurisdiction. A customized system is needed and careful, thoughtful design is imperative.

How the Plan Works

Each vessel in the three designated jurisdictions is located on or just out of the water and equipped and ready to respond. The three primary departments are simultaneously alerted by radio to respond to a river fire or rescue emergency and given details about the emergency and the location. All three will respond with crews of at least three.

On-duty, predetermined, trained crews of at least three marine firefighters for each of the three vessels, total of at least nine crew members, respond from their quarters to their respective facilities and launch their vessels. Three firefighting and rescue vessels, with at least three crew members each, rapidly respond to the designated location and begin communications with each other and their dispatch centers and the primary dispatch center and receive detailed information about the emergency.

Each vessel safely but rapidly navigates the expanse headed toward the emergency location. The first arriving vessel assumes command and uses the radio system to notify each vessel and each dispatch center and the primary dispatch center they have assumed command and relays the situation found to all simultaneously.

(Plain-talk is used to eliminate confusion. If radio security is determined to be necessary by the US Department of Homeland Security while designing the communication system, an encrypted system may be employed. Nevertheless, the system must be compatible and feasible.)

The command vessel's officer in charge is now in charge of the entire emergency incident from beginning to end. The incident commander now instructs the other vessels by radio of their assignments. The commander also relays any instructions to the dispatch centers as well. The incident now works with one incident commander and the other two vessels take their orders from the incident commander. The integrity of the incident management system is maintained throughout the emergency operation. Vessels are only released from duties by the incident commander.

Note: All three departments use the incident management system and much of the details of the ICS will come natural to response personnel during the operations. This part of the plan should not be an obstacle to the proper function of the system.

Adequate two-way radio dispatching and communications is essential to the proper function of the plan.

Symbiosis of the Plan

The regional approach to the rapid response plan enhances the capabilities of the emergency operations threefold. By primarily utilizing the three career fire departments, and all departments in a support role, the Port of Huntington and the entire expanse between the Gallipolis Locks and Dam and the Greenup Locks and Dam will receive full-time, professional fire-rescue protection at all times acting in concert as if they were of the same organization.

The plan allows for incorporation of support vessels as needed. However, the nucleus of the plan centers on rapid response by adequate crews with adequate vessels, equipment and communications.

Another example of the symbiotic relationship needed to implement the plan is between the local entities which agree to provide adequate numbers of trained personnel and the federal government which must provide the initial capital to begin and maintenance funds to continue it well into the future.

Identification of need and planning has begun. Funding is the missing link and only the federal government has the resources to ensure the plan can go forward.

The plan incorporates entities from three cities located in three different states. Regional thinking provides regional solutions to regional problems. In many instances borders are barriers to progress. In this case, we must strive to overcome those barriers to ensure the safety of our port and our homeland.

What the Plan does not do

The rapid response plan is not a plan for law enforcement or military operations. The vessels shall not be used for security operations. The vessels and crews are designed for fire and rescue operations only.

The local fire-rescue entities agree to respond to waterways emergencies that do not include law enforcement or military operations. The vessels and their crews will assist law enforcement and military only when and if the area is safe and secure and there is an urgent need for their legitimate fire and rescue use.

Law enforcement and military shall not command the vessels and crews designated in this plan. The fire officers and incident commanders shall be in complete command of their vessels and the emergency incidents to which they respond. Only the commanders of the vessels and incidents shall direct the safe use of the vessels and crews.

Law enforcement entities may include this plan in an overall plan to ensure the security of the port. However, the use of the vessels and crews must lie entirely with the fire officers and commanders trained to utilize them.

Fire officers and commanders may refuse any operation deemed unsafe and illegitimate which not only include law enforcement and military operations but could include unsafe river and hydraulic conditions near dams.

Fire-rescue crews shall be trained in marine firefighting operations and basic life support. Crews and vessels may carry advanced life support personnel as part of their regular crews or in addition to them.

Vessels and crews may assist in the protection of the environment. However, immediate life-safety and fire emergencies are the primary missions.

THE PLAN (Phase Two)

Volunteer Organizations

The Port's volunteer organizations should play a vital support role. Phase Two of the Rapid Response Plan should include vessels and facilities purchased and designated to the various volunteer fire and rescue organizations with Ohio River or tributary access.

Phase One ensures a guaranteed professional rapid response and is the nucleus of Port's firefighting and rescue capabilities. Phase Two would begin the process of filling the support roles needed to increase, even further, the Port's capabilities.

The vessels should be similar in capabilities but the Phase One vessels should be the flagships and retain the largest of the vessels of the overall plan. Familiarity and operational piloting and crew skills are large factors regarding the size and differences in the vessels.

Phase One crews will operate the larger vessels on a day in and day out basis. Phase Two vessels should be firefighting capable but keeping in mind that crew continuity won't be ensured. Therefore, the Phase Two vessels should be designed with ease of operation in mind. Smaller, less cumbersome vessels should be designated to Phase Two volunteer organizations.

Additionally, speedier vessels for volunteer organizations would help offset the time elements required for volunteer organizations to muster crews and begin river operations.

Conclusion

The time has come to initiate a rapid response fire and rescue plan for the Port of Huntington, WV and the expanse of Ohio River between the Gallipolis Locks and Dam and the Greenup Locks and Dam, also known as the Greenup Pool. A regional solution is the rational and prudent course necessary to ensure commercial and recreational entities receive the best possible firefighting and rescue services.

Additionally, creating a nucleus of professional service surrounded by volunteer support services is the rational solution as well. Phase One will guarantee the Port's emergency capabilities and Phase Two will combine the regional concept and enhance the overall response.

It is now up to political entities to make the plan a reality. The needs and solutions are identified. The regional concept is initiated into a workable, rational way to ensure all marine interests receive the best possible firefighting and rescue capabilities along the expanse. Only the funding and detailed hardware schematics are needed.

Three flagship firefighting and rescue vessels supported by compatible but smaller and speedier vessels will ensure the Port of Huntington, WV is a safe as possible.

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