Roles and Expectations for Computer Technical Specialist (CTSP) working with the Minnesota Incident Command System (MNICS)

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Background:

Minnesota Incident Management Teams (IMT) have traditional IT needs while responding to wildfires and other all-risk incidents. After the 2011 wildfire season, a concentrated effort was made to identify, train and commit IT staff to serve on incident as CTSPs with the MNICS IMTs. In 2012, CTSPs supported five incidents in Minnesota committing 44 CTSP person-days. Two out-of-state incidents committing 19 CTSP person-days were also supported by Minnesota CTSPs.

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) is a national organization that coordinates programs, policies, standards and training of wildfire management agencies. All the MNICS IMT positions (including the CTSPs) follow the standards, qualifications and guidance as established by the NWCG.

The MNICS IT Working Team is a collection of Minnesota Interagency Fire Center (MIFC), DNR, MNIT@DNR, and MNICS partner agency staff providing the guidance and development of incident IT support and of the CTSP position. Some of the IT Working Team members are CTSP qualified.

Roles and duties on incident:

The CTSP role is to provide traditional IT support on site to IMT staff. This includes finding and establishing internet connectivity, cabling and building an incident network, configuring printers, trouble shooting MNICS kit computers and basic user support with operating systems and Microsoft Office.

MNICS IMTs use the NWCG's ISuite software package to manage incident resources. CTSPs configure the ISuite server and clients, ensure backups are scheduled and transfer data to a national repository. The CTSP *may* serve as ISuite database administrator; others on the team can also fill this role. ISuite end user proficiency is NOT expected nor required of CTSPs.

Commitments and Expectations:

As with any weather dependant activity, it is difficult to know exactly when and exactly how much time is needed to fulfill commitments. On average, Minnesota has two incidents per year requiring on site IMTs deployment. Due to the drought of 2011 – 2012, MNICS had five team assignments last year.

Team assigned and Alternate pool:

MNICS operates with three IMTs on weekly rotation throughout the calendar year. Six CTSPs are needed to have a full complement of two CTSPs on each of these three MNICS teams. An additional pool of three to six alternates is desirable to mitigate scheduling conflicts and build experience. The CTSP pool draws from all the MNICS agencies but is primarily filled by MN.IT@DNR staff. Currently, we are short of full complement.

The six CTSPs assigned to IMT rotations are expected to be available and ready to deploy during their scheduled week. The expectation during normal (no snow cover) rotation is to begin travel within 4 hours. When scheduling conflicts arise, team CTSPs contact the alternates for replacement and notify team Plans Section Chief and MIFC dispatch of the replacement.

During elevated fire planning levels, IMTS and CTSPs are placed in ALERT status with paid on-call. The expectation with ALERT status is to begin travel in 2 hours.

Minnesota incidents:

Duration: 2 to 3 days for one CTSP and 5 to 14 days for the second CTSP

Costs: MN DNR Fire Fund or Incident

Providing incident IT support is our top commitment and number one priority. Two CTPS arrive with the team and build the network, establish internet, and connect PC and printers. Typically after 2 to 3 operational periods, the CTSP workload drops and teams reduce to one CTSP. When applicable, teams may even drop to no on-site CTSP and rely on established DNR's computer support network.

Annual Workshop (Required):

Duration: 1 day session in Grand Rapids.

Costs: MN DNR Forestry Fire Preparedness

In late winter, a "Prep and Readiness Workshop" is held in Grand Rapids to inspect, test, and assemble the network in a mock incident environment. PC images and standard operating procedures for the upcoming year are discussed and agreed to by the CTSP pool.

MNICS IT Working Team (optional):

Duration: 1 to 10 days per year.

Costs: MN DNR Forestry Fire Preparedness

MNICS IT Working Team meets during the MNICS Annual meeting typically held in Duluth. This late fall meeting addresses after incident reviews, improvements needed, and scheduling for the next season. Team membership may involve follow up tasks as needed.

Out-of-state incidents (Optional):

Duration: 7 to 14 days.

Costs: hosting Agency or hosting State

Out-of-state assignments are optional and at the discretion of the IT Supervisor. These assignments can be very beneficial to keep current with qualifications or as training opportunities. These are also very beneficial to State of MN budgets, as all costs are reimbursed by the host. It should be reiterated that out-of-state assignments are at the discretion of the IT supervisor.

NWCG National CTSP training (optional):

Duration: Week long session in out-of-state locations.

Costs: MN DNR Forestry Fire Preparedness, as available

The NWCG as qualifying agency does NOT require completion of this class for CTSP certification. Beneficial yes, but it is optional. Most of the class focuses on ISUITE administration issues.