

A quarterly report of MABAS WISCONSIN activities to underscore its value to the community and to foster growth and improvement through the sharing of actual experience

DIVISIONS IN ACTION: DIVISION 107 BY GARY SCHMIDT

In this issue's Divisions In Action section, we summarize the experiences of those who fought the Patrick Cudahy Meat Packing Plant fire in southeastern Milwaukee County. This was the largest deployment of fire departments to a structure fire in the history of the State of Wisconsin. At stake was the economic base to the local community and it tested the ability of the Wisconsin Fire Service to react in a cohesive and comprehensive manner to a disaster while maintaining safe operating levels in non-stricken areas. The MABAS system's interoperability standards were key to making this a very successful operation.

Initial size-up: Lt. Dean Nelson of Cudahy Engine 1463 called for a full first alarm assignment while en-route to the Patrick Cudahy plant. Within 15 minutes, a MABAS Structure Fire Box was called for and 4 minutes later, it was upgraded to a 2nd Level Box assignment.

The speed at which units responded was unprecedented in the Milwaukee County suburbs. Large scale incidents for a given municipality in this area are rare. In conversations with Cudahy Fire Chief Dan Mayer and several of his officers, several factors emerged.

Prior to MABAS, Cudahy had a greater alarm plan, but typically if something escalated beyond a first alarm, the on scene command staff would request the dispatching of specific units, such as "an

engine from West Allis". In many cases, if a general term such as "2nd alarm" would be used, there could be a delay because it was a once-in-a career situation for a dispatcher and there would be some confusion as to what should occur. Keep in mind, the local dispatch would be overwhelmed with coordinating police responses and handling calls from the curious public and media.

Also, prior to MABAS, first arriving officers are busy assessing the emergency at hand; to also have to stop and think about where to get additional help diverts from fire attack strategy. There would have been a tendency to wait for a formal

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Our goal with developing this and future newsletters is to provide our readers with an insiders view of the world of MABAS. Every issue will have an article on the exciting experience of having the first box alarm; we spotlight activities within a featured division; provide a Q-A section and; discuss growth in MABAS,

This first newsletter will be dominated by the Patrick Cudahy incident in July, both the incident itself and the deployment coordination. The Wisconsin Fire Service Emergency Response Plan (WFSERP) was barely two weeks from when it was approved at the State Fire Chiefs Conference when this incident occurred. Find out more about the WFSERP inside.

Enjoy the reading.

Brian M. Satula,
MABAS-WI President



July 6, 2009: Mid-afternoon on the second day of the Patrick Cudahy incident, the fire continued to rage out of control.

(Photo by Charles Liedtke, Milwaukee Fire Bell Club)

MABAS-WISCONSIN IN ACTION

MY FIRST MABAS BOX BY GARY SCHMIDT

Editor's note: being that this is the first issue of MABAS WISCONSIN IN ACTION, with no stories sent to us yet, we are going to cheat and talk about a "MABAS-like" experience of Randy Pickering. In the 1990's, an officer from a Northern Illinois department became a Fire Chief in Dane County. With a centralized dispatch already in place, that chief instituted in Dane County the MABAS structure that he worked with in Illinois. Since MABAS was years away from being formalized in Wisconsin, this is Randy's recollection of his first "MABAS-like" box.

"It was 1:30am on a snowy late January night", recalls then-Deputy Chief Pickering. "I responded with a full first alarm assignment to a 40-unit, 2-story occupied apartment building. Upon arrival, I saw flames rapidly moving across the attic. The fire was beginning to drop into the second floor. I recognized a huge life

"I recognized a huge life safety hazard. The snow was delaying the response of the first alarm. I had only minutes to clear the second floor of occupants"

safety hazard. The snow was delaying the response of the first alarm. I had only minutes to clear the second floor of occupants. I needed the first alarm companies to begin fire attack to hold off the fire so that additional help could perform the evacuation of residents".

"Instead of having to think about how many additional units I needed, where they were to come from, and then communicate all of that information *clearly* to Dispatch and ensure that they understood it, I simply had to ask for a second alarm (now called a MABAS Box). We had response (box) cards in place to not only specify next-due units, but also to provide for backfilling empty fire houses".

"It wasn't until afterwards that I realized how the MABAS-like system, with all of the preplanning of resources, prevented a tragedy. Due to the speed of communicating to Dispatch what I needed with a simple command: **'Give me a second alarm (box)'**, it made a huge difference in the outcome of the incident". Pickering went on to explain that the new MABAS-like

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WHAT IS MABAS (MUTUAL AID BOX ALARM SYSTEM)? BY GARY SCHMIDT

MABAS is a system that preplans the resources needed when an incident exhausts local resources. The activation of MABAS may differ depending on the area of the State, but an example could be when an incident escalates beyond a full first alarm assignment. A full assignment (as it is often called) generally consists of 2-3 pumper engines, 1-2 aerial ladder trucks, 1-2 water tenders (tanker trucks), a BLS and/or ALS unit, and 1 or more chiefs. Note: BLS is basic life support, such as EMT-staffed ambulance; ALS is advanced life support, such as a paramedic staffed ambulance unit.

At the full assignment or initial response level, the local dispatch handles the communication of obtaining mutual aid resources (except for the larger cities, most departments require mutual aid from other departments at the first alarm level).

When a MABAS box is requested, the local Dispatch Center is relieved of the dispatching of additional resources. Instead, the MABAS Division's central dispatch center takes over. This prevents the stricken dispatch center from becoming overloaded as they will continue to have a lot of activity coordinating local services, such as police, DPW, callbacks, etc.

Because the MABAS Dispatch Center gets all of the MABAS alarms in its division, it becomes experienced and efficient at the communications required. Also, a single radio frequency is used that is common to all Fire Service agencies in the MABAS system. This allows for very quick dispatching of many units from multiple jurisdictions. The MABAS system also handles the staffing of firehouses in the stricken community by outlying departments.

MABAS also dictates the minimum staffing and certification of the resources requested so that an Incident Commander always knows what resources will be available. Common terminology and radio frequencies are used throughout the MABAS Wisconsin system, enabling interoperability between agencies.

The preplanning of resources ensures that no community will be depleted of resources should another incident occur.

Besides structure fires, MABAS has box cards for grass fires, mass casualty incidents, hazardous materials, trench rescue and other types of emergencies.

MABAS DIVISION SPOTLIGHT BY GARY SCHMIDT

MABAS Division 119 (Ozaukee County) was approved for membership into MABAS Wisconsin on February 12, 2009. Upon completing the first version of their MABAS Box cards, a training event was held to test the activation of a MABAS box. The drill consisted of a Mass Casualty Incident—a fire at Cedarburg High School.

Division 119 is close to full implementation—they are waiting on communications equipment to be installed, dispatcher training and a couple other loose ends.

Even though the Division is not in full use yet, the training and education received from MABAS Wisconsin staff was enough to allow the Division to be used in an interdivisional request at the Patrick Cudahy plant fire.

MABAS WISCONSIN IN ACTION asked the Training Officer for the Mass Casualty Drill, **Captain Mike La Rosa of the Cedarburg Fire Department** about Division 119:

MWIA: What was different about this training event under MABAS than similar events held previously?

La Rosa: In the past we never used "Staging" to the degree it is used with MABAS. MABAS also pushed us to use departments we normally don't work with, following the 80/20 rule. In the past we would have depleted the immediate neighboring departments. Radio communications were different then we normally use -

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ANNOUNCEMENTS, REMINDERS & DEADLINES

- January 1, 2010 is the deadline for all fire fighters who will respond on Interdivisional Box Alarms to be CERTIFIED as State Fire Fighter I.
- Send completed MABAS Box cards to Dean Nelson at dnelson94@wi.rr.com
- If anyone knows of organizations that may donate or support MABAS Wisconsin, let Mark Pierce know.
- The Training and Education Committee of MABAS Wisconsin is looking for trainers to help the committee.
- Division 106 (Waukesha County) is now active and recently had their first Box alarm in Elm Grove.

MABAS QUESTION CENTER

Do you have a question about MABAS? If so, there probably are others with the same question. Send your questions to newsletter@mabaswisconsin.org and we will publish the answer in the next issue. If we don't have an answer, we'll ask the MABAS community to assist.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Your contributions to the various columns will make this newsletter a success. Send all ideas and feedback to: newsletter@mabaswisconsin.org. We will contact you upon receipt to formulate the newsletter article.

GENEROUS DONATION RECEIVED

By Gary Schmidt

American Family Insurance donated \$2,500 to MABAS Wisconsin to be used for administrative and equipment costs (such as liability insurance), and computer and presentation equipment.

MABAS Wisconsin needs funding for development, presentation and sustainment of the member services provided, i.e. communication and box card development training, and support of on-going planning and resource development for the Wisconsin Fire Service Emergency Response Plan.

Suggestions for funding sources may be sent to newsletter@mabaswisconsin.org



Judy Lowell, American Family Insurance, presents the check to Brian Satula, President, MABAS Wisconsin

(Photo by Chief Rod Smith, Elkhorn Fire Department)

MABAS-WISCONSIN IN ACTION

DIVISIONS IN ACTION—CONTINUED

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command staff to arrive to take over such logistical planning in order to focus on the fire attack. In the case of the Patrick Cudahy plant fire, any delay in getting enough resources to the scene more than likely would have allowed the fire to get completely out of control and consume a majority of the plant.

With MABAS, all it took was a simple instruction to the local dispatch center: **“Give me a (MABAS) box”**. All the local dispatch had to do was relay that information to the Division Dispatch Center. The firefighters were able to remain focused on locating the fire and the Cudahy dispatchers were able to concentrate on off-duty callbacks and other notifications. The experienced MABAS Division 107 Dispatch center immediately knew what had to be done with **“Give me a box”**. This no longer was a once-in-a-career situation. There were no delays in dispatching resources from numerous communities as all it took was a **single radio transmission that was heard by all fire departments in the area**. Prior to MABAS, the Cudahy dispatch center would have had to call each fire department separately, repeating the same instructions over and over again. The time that would have taken may have made the difference in saving the Patrick Cudahy plant from total destruction.

The magnitude of the Patrick Cudahy plant fire required that MABAS be used beyond its preplanned limits. A MABAS response card typically plans for six alarms: the initial full first alarm assignment plus five levels of MABAS box alarms. For extreme cases, three additional interdivisional requests are preplanned for, which brings in resources from neighboring divisions (counties) to prevent the stricken county from having fire and EMS protection depleted. The Patrick Cudahy fire utilized **nine** interdivisional requests. Included was one for water tenders, which brought six tanker trucks from outlying areas when the Cudahy municipal water system was on the brink of collapse due to the extraordinary strain on the system.

Because all of these resources came from the preplanned MABAS system, 64 fire departments worked seamlessly together. It not only saved the local community from economic devastation, but the MABAS system also kept a stable, safe level of fire protection in Southeastern Wisconsin during the multiple day incident. Next are some comments from some individuals involved in the event.

Division 107 Dispatch (in Wauwatosa): Most Division 107 MABAS alarms to date were only to the Box level, with a few going to a 2nd Alarm level.

From **Deputy Chief Bill Rice**: “I think by having the Wauwatosa Duty Chief respond to the dispatch center early on, it helped clear-up many small issues. It also gave some back-up support to the Wauwatosa Dispatcher that was still handling Wauwatosa Fire needs at the same time. For the most part, things went very smoothly. If the responding companies use good radio discipline, it has a tremendous positive effect on the Division Dispatch.”

“I will need to address communications between Divisions. This worked well but I don’t think we are all on the same track. Fortunately, there was very smooth communication between Division Dispatch. I plan a future meeting between Division Leaders and their Chief Dispatchers so we can share ideas and improve communications.”

As the event escalated, Rice acted as a Regional Coordinator (now a formal appointment), working with **Keith Tveit** of WEM (Wisconsin Emergency Management) and the Incident Commanders. “Most of the communications were by phone not on IFERN (Interagency Fire Emergency Radio Network); This was also very helpful.”

Interdivisional Requests: What was it like to respond over 50 miles to the Patrick Cudahy plant fire? **MABAS WISCONSIN IN ACTION** asked **Johnson Creek Fire Chief Tim Whitham** of Jefferson County Division 118:

MWIA: What stood out as being most helpful to your response?

Whitham: The amount of information given to the division before deploying, however, we were supposed to leave that night and got moved up some 8 hours earlier which effected the amount of resources available to respond. We ended up short one ladder and one engine, but overall we felt it went very well.

MWIA: How did you coordinate with other units responding as an Interdivisional Request?

Whitham: Originally we were to leave that night, and got moved up, however, I contacted all the chiefs in our division by contact telephone numbers within our county fire chiefs association. We had all units confirmed and then called our dispatch center to have the requested units dispatched. Then all units meet at a rally point to depart (from) the county to head to division 107.

MWIA: How was the response over such a long distance (anything noteworthy)?

Whitham: Uneventful trip

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DIVISIONS IN ACTION—CONTINUED

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MWIA: Any issues encountered at the scene, particularly working with departments you have never worked with ever before?

Whitham: No everything operated very well, the use of ICS (Incident Command System), designated radio channels and the application of an incident of this size, and the contract requirements with MABAS, helps operations go seamlessly well as everyone has expected certifications, standards and performances.

MWIA: What was the impact to your community or department during the response?

Whitham: There was not much of an impact as we got commitments from various departments in the county so that we did not deplete any one organization, or area of the county, to the point that agencies that were left behind could assist agencies that deployed to the incident scene.

MWIA: How long were units out-of-service during the incident (including travel time)?

Whitham: Our location is one hour from the incident site, so including travel time we were out of the county for 12 hours.

MWIA: Any suggestions for future Interdivisional Responses by any MABAS Wisconsin agency?

Whitham: When you have any type of advanced notice, pack along some items that might be needed for the call. We packed coolers with ice and water, Gatorade and so forth, extra hoods, gloves and a few sweatshirts. Take advantage of the advanced notice to get the extra items that might be needed by members of your organization, particularly in the winter and summer months. Those times of year need extra precautions to keep your members warm, dry, hydrated, etc.

MABAS WISCONSIN IN ACTION STAFF

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A MABAS MOMENT BY GARY SCHMIDT

By Gary Schmidt

During a post incident critique, then-Deputy Chief Pickering felt good about how his first MABAS-like box went. At the end of the review, the officer of a rescue engine company asked why they sat in staging for seven hours.

Pickering forgot to appoint a chief as a Staging Officer during the event and did not realize until then that the crew was even at the fire. A lesson learned that was never repeated.

DIVISION SPOTLIGHT—CONTINUED

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working on IFERN and RED, WHITE, and BLUE.

MWIA: What went well?

La Rosa: Procedures in FIRE and EMS response went exceptionally well.

MWIA: What needs improvement?

La Rosa: Radio communications and working within the definitions of MABAS.

MWIA: How critical is it to conduct such an event prior to going live with MABAS?

La Rosa: I wouldn't say it's mandatory, I think it helps smooth out the response in real life.

MWIA: Given Division 119 is so new, what did that mean to the response made to the Patrick Cudahy fire - did MABAS come into play at all or was it just business as usual?

La Rosa: It served as an excellent example to how the system needs to work, have the massive number of departments called upon provided an up close experience everyone could learn from. In other words, it made sense on paper, seeing it in action drove it home.

MY FIRST MABAS BOX—CONTINUED

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system brought additional chiefs to the scene. What needed improvement was a good understanding of how to use these chiefs (for things like logistical support, fireground operations, and safety). Another important item from that first MABAS-like box was to include Dispatch Communications as part of the post-incident critiques.

MABAS-Wisconsin Goal:

Intrastate Mutual Aid System (IMAS) *By Brian Satula*

Since the very beginning of planning and development of MABAS in Wisconsin, the goal has been to have a state-wide mutual aid plan and system of coordinating fire service resources for providing assistance during a disaster. That goal took one major step closer to becoming a reality. At the October Wisconsin Homeland Security Council meeting, the Wisconsin Fire Service Emergency Response Plan (WFSERP) was approved.

The genesis of the WFSERP was an initiative developed by the International Fire Chiefs Association (IAFC) called the IMAS Project. The original concept began in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks and the fire service response to it; and fully developed after the lessons-learned from the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita response. The IMAS Project was a recommendation put forth by the IAFC's Mutual Aid System Task Force to address all major fire service responses within the National Response Framework (NRF). To make the NRF a reality for the fire service, each state would need an effective and efficient system to activate and deploy resources in place on which to build.

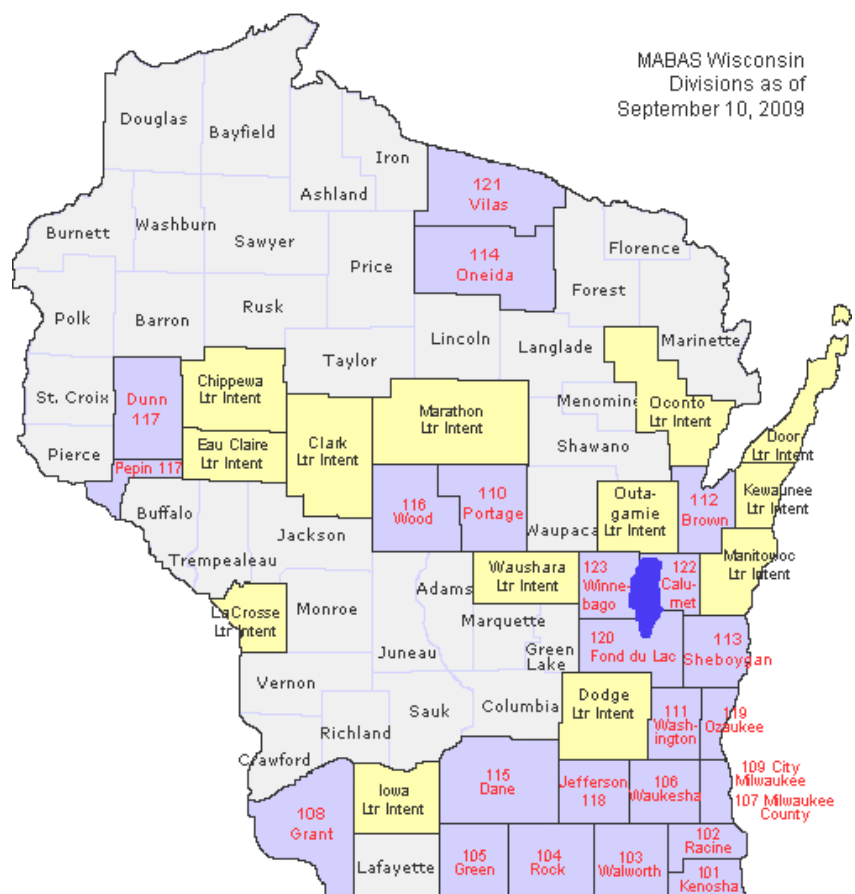
The WFSERP was put to the test for Wisconsin at the Patrick Cudahy fire this past July, when the state's fire activated the plan for the first time. Not more than two weeks after its approval from the Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association, was the plan put into operation. It passed with flying colors and displayed the true value that MABAS and the WFSERP brings to the emergency management table. It worked because MABAS was fully developed in the Southeast Region and coordination was seamless at the local, regional and the state levels.

With the WFSERP approvals, a Field Operations Guide (FOG) will be developed. The FOG will serve as a training tool and a resource guide for fire departments and local incident commanders. In early 2010, the IAFC will assist in planning and evaluating a tabletop exercise, and in the following year, a functional/full scale exercise will be planned.

The WFSERP utilizes the MABAS organizational structure and SOP's as the basis of the plan. In the months following the Patrick Cudahy fire, there has been plenty of interest and development of the MABAS and it continues to grow.

The WFSERP uses the Five Key Principles of HSPD 5:

1. **Engaged partnerships**
2. **Tiered response**
3. **Scalable, flexible, and adaptable operational capabilities**
4. **Unity of effort through unified command**
5. **Readiness to act**



For more information about becoming a member of MABAS-WI, visit:

www.mabaswisconsin.org

MABAS WISCONSIN continues to grow. There are 23 active divisions and other counties are at various stages of formation.