

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 117 BY GARY SCHMIDT

### Rural Firefighting Used in Corn Drier Fire

It was a little after 2am, Tuesday morning December 1, 2009 when fire was discovered coming from a 70 foot tall corn bin and dryer in Menomonie Wisconsin. The fire was at the top and there were thousands of bushels of corn within the structure, adjacent to several silos. It would require a rural operation.

The Menomonie Fire Department responded and soon eight other agencies were used providing 11 tenders, 3 engines, 1 truck, 2 medic ambulances, and 2 support units pumping water to fill tenders with according to Quentin Popp, Sand Creek Fire Department and President of MABAS Division 117 (Dunn / Pepin Counties).

Firefighting in Wisconsin presents  
*(Continued on page 2)*

### MABAS Training Important in Fighting Corn Drier Fire

When Dunn and Pepin Counties formed MABAS Division 117 in Western Wisconsin, one of the first tasks was to have a joint training exercise. The value is to determine interoperability of radio systems, equipment, tactics, and terminology between departments, some of

*“The October (MABAS) training played into this call in that all the agencies knew what equipment needed to respond, how we needed to setup a consistent tender water shuttle, and how to sustain that shuttle” – Quentin Popp*

which rarely if ever have worked together before. Such an exercise also provides participants with firsthand experience in MABAS protocols. The Division 117 exercise occurred on October 17, 2009.

Per Quentin Popp, the corn dryer fire “was a great test of the October training and a work of art on the fire  
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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

This issue is intended to highlight the rural fire service community. The early MABAS growth has been primarily in the population centers of our state. As MABAS has grown, the majority of the new divisions are primarily from volunteer departments and EMS agencies. The water delivery challenge faced by rural fire departments at a fire is a major tactical consideration. Because MABAS is based on a standard set of operational procedures, we are looking to establish a “guideline” that addresses rural water supply operations.

The goal of this standard is to achieve interoperability during water movement operations at a MABAS incident. If nothing more, we would like to identify the necessary adapters and appliances MABAS divisions should consider. We need your input in a survey that explores the types of equipment used in water movement. Please take 5 minutes to complete this survey at:  
[http://www.kwiksurveys.com/online-survey.php?surveyID=NLMJN\\_1393233b](http://www.kwiksurveys.com/online-survey.php?surveyID=NLMJN_1393233b)

Thank you,  
Brian M. Satula  
MABAS-Wisconsin



December 1, 2009: Prochnow Farm Corn Drier Fire  
(Photo by Dunn County Sheriff Department)

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**MABAS-WISCONSIN IN ACTION**


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**DIVISION 109 — CITY OF MILWAUKEE — HAS ITS FIRST MABAS BOX** *BY GARY SCHMIDT*

The City of Milwaukee Fire Department experienced a historic milestone when nine suburban departments made a change of quarters to fill vacant Milwaukee firehouses during a large business/apartment fire in the city on January 19, 2010.

Known as the “Pizza Man” fire, after one of four businesses that were destroyed, the Milwaukee Fire Department had their hands full with water pressure problems, natural gas shut-off challenges, numerous power lines to deal with (the location was at the intersection of two main roadways), a partial building collapse, exposures being threatened, including a church and an apartment building, and street flooding with cold temperatures causing icy surfaces.

At its height, there were 21 engines and 9 trucks at the scene, all called within 2 hours due to the escalating conditions, creating an 8-alarm equivalent. Only seven other times in the last 40 years did Milwaukee have so much equipment at a fire, none as fast as this one.

The City of Milwaukee is the only MABAS Division in Wisconsin consisting of a single department, similar to how the City of Chicago is MABAS Illinois Division 9. Usually, both cities have the capacity to spread out remaining resources during large emergency events, however, Chicago used MABAS during a high rise fire where twenty-two suburban fire agencies filled in at City of Chicago fire stations to maintain continuity of emergency service to various Chicago neighborhoods.

Chicago also has used EMS MABAS boxes for mass casualty events related to marathons, Metra and subway train crashes (source: [www.mabas.org](http://www.mabas.org)).

At the Pizza Man fire, the City of Milwaukee had 16 of its 36 firehouses emptied. The first MABAS box brought Division 107 resources from Wauwatosa, South Milwaukee, West Allis, Division 106 Menomonee Falls, and Division 111 Germantown. Milwaukee escalated to a MABAS 2<sup>nd</sup> level box 83 minutes later which brought Division 107 resources from Cudahy, Greendale, North Shore, West Allis, and Oak Creek to Milwaukee firehouses as well as Division 106 Elm Grove and Division 119 Mequon. Soon thereafter, the fire began deescalating, allowing the return of Milwaukee equipment to the remaining empty Milwaukee houses.

There was one communication glitch for Milwaukee’s first box – the Division 109 Dispatch Center could not communicate with responding resources (possibly stemming from console changes made for an upcoming radio system upgrade). By the time of the second level box, Wauwatosa Deputy Chief Bill Rice, the Southeast Regional coordinator for MABAS Wisconsin, was on scene at Division 109 and he used Milwaukee County Division 107 to tone out the second level box. This worked due to the inherent redundancy in the MABAS system – all divisions in MABAS operate on the same radio frequency (called IFERN) in all states (Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Iowa and Missouri, with Ohio and Minnesota in development).

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**RURAL FIREFIGHTING USED IN CORN DRIER FIRE—CONTINUED**

*(Continued from page 1)*

many localized challenges but the goals are the same: save lives, save property, do it safely. Techniques change however when engaged in **rural firefighting**. When one thinks of “rural Wisconsin”, one envisions two-lane country roads, undeveloped areas, picturesque farm land, and sparse population. Rural *firefighting* generally means lack of a readily available water supply.

There are two components to rural firefighting: pumping water from a static source (stream, pond, reservoir) called *drafting* and managing the water supply, usually via a shuttle system. Getting enough water to the scene requires enough Water Tender trucks, which are fire trucks whose primary purpose is to transport water from a source to the scene of the fire.

The MABAS system aids the Incident Commander in that Tenders are identified in advance not only within a Division, but also in neighboring Divisions should an event escalate and demand an increasing volume of water. The MABAS system also balances out resources in the stricken and adjacent areas so that fire protection remains adequate during the emergency.

At the corn drier fire, agencies responded were from Menomonie, Boyceville, Glenwood City, Elk Mound, Sand Creek, Colfax, and Eau Claire Township Fire Departments, the Chippewa Fire District, and Boyceville Ambulance. Also, to maintain protection in the area, units stood by at the quarters of the Menomonie and Colfax Fire stations.

## RURAL OPERATIONS TRAINING BY GARY SCHMIDT

The formation of MABAS Division 117 in Western Wisconsin was the impetus for a rural firefighting training exercise of a scale never attempted before in the area. In rural firefighting, there is no pressurized water supply to draw from. Water Tender trucks are used to transport water to the scene.

The other aspect of a tender operation is *drafting*, which is the art of creating suction to draw from a static water supply. Hard hose lines must be used and the drafting operator must create the right amount of vacuum to make the operation successful. This takes practice to become skilled at it.



At left, shown is the hard suction (non-collapsible black hose) attached to the red strainer floating on the water, which keeps the suction near the surface (where the water is cleanest). The drafting rig then pumps water through the (yellow) large diameter hose (LDH) to fill the tank of the shuttle (water tender) rig.

Below, the tender delivers the water to a portable reservoir at the fire scene where a drafting engine is used to draw from the reservoir and supplies the hose lines used for the fire suppression.



(Photo: Glenwood City WI Tribune Press Reporter)

(Photo: Glenwood City WI Tribune Press Reporter)



At left, shown is the end result: the ability to use pressurized hose lines for fire attack.

Note the yellow LDH is coming from the drafting engine at the water source to the pumping engine that would be close to the fire.

(Photo: Glenwood City WI Tribune Press Reporter)

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**MABAS-WISCONSIN IN ACTION**


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**MABAS HANDLES THE UNEXPECTED—RURAL CONDITIONS IN URBAN SETTING**

By Gary Schmidt

South Milwaukee, WI, a community of around 21,000, is located just southeast of Milwaukee's Mitchell Airport. Like its neighbors to the north and south which also border Lake Michigan, South Milwaukee has its own water utility and is fully hydranted. It is home to Bucyrus International, a world renowned manufacturer of mining equipment.

On February 5, 2010, shortly after 8am, the fire department started to receive calls of low water pressure. **Chief Jay Behling of the South Milwaukee Fire Department relates:** " After a couple of calls to our department stating that some residents had NO water pressure I looked out my office window to see if the water tower was still standing and it was. Knowing that there was no water pressure, even in our station, I then knew we had a catastrophic failure in the system somewhere, meaning we had no fire protection in the City."

**The South Milwaukee Event Timeline**

Milwaukee County is over 90% hydranted. In fact, only 2 departments, Franklin on the far southwest and North Shore on the far northeast, have tenders, both of which would be needed for fire suppression in their own communities should a fire occur. The nearest available tender was across the Racine county line in Caledonia. Here is the timeline of events thanks to **Chief Behling** :

**2/5/10**

**0810 hrs** the fire department started to receive calls of low water pressure and we contacted the South Milwaukee Water Dept.

**0830 hrs** SMFD contacted the water department that our water pressure was to a trickle and they said they were still looking for a break.

**0845 hrs** I called Chief Roeder of Caledonia FD and requested an engine and 2 tenders be put on standby for our community and he approved

**0850 hrs** I sent an email informing all MABAS Division 107 Fire Chiefs of our water emergency, lack of fire protection and possible elevated MABAS request.

**0900 hrs** a valve was opened to allow the City of Oak Creek Water Utility to supply the City of South Milwaukee with water

**0926 hrs** I sent another email to the Chiefs updating them that we had low water pressure and an unknown volume for fire protection

**0940 hrs** I was informed by the Water Superintendent and City Administrator that the water tower was almost empty due to a 20" water main break at the water plant

**1000 hrs** Wauwatosa Deputy Chief Bill Rice completed contacts with MABAS Divisions 102 (Racine) and 106 (Waukesha) for Tender Strike Teams

**1330 hrs** the fire department tested an outlying hydrant and recorded adequate pressure and volume for a residential fire scene. Strike Teams remained on Stand-by.

**2/6/10**

**1000 hrs** DNR verified water samples were all negative for contamination and water was declared safe for normal use. Strike Teams stood down.

**How MABAS Helped in South Milwaukee**

**MABAS Wisconsin In Action:** When did the Fire Department develop a backup plan for water - what was the plan and how did your department proceed in putting the stand-by plan into action?

**Behling:** The MABAS plan was organized by Chief Rice when he was notified by our department of the water emergency. His knowledge of the MABAS system and the availability of the "Tender Strike Teams" put into play the notification.

**MWIA:** How long did you have the special stand-by in place?

**Behling:** Until 1000 hrs on February 6, 2010

**MWIA:** What was your plan of action if there would have been a fire?

**Behling:** The Strike Teams would have been called in with the appropriate Box Alarm

**MWIA:** This was an interesting situation - had a fire broken out, you suddenly would have had an urban fire department placed into a rural situation (needing tenders). Is it a correct assumption that having departments experienced in tender operations is something MABAS brings to the table?

**Behling:** Yes, especially in this case. It was also nice to know I was going to receive 4 chief officers with extensive drafting experience also

**MWIA:** Were there any lessons learned, things that you might have done differently?

**Behling:** As in most cases our department could have notified the MABAS 107 dispatcher sooner for the "Tender Strike Teams".

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**MABAS WISCONSIN IN ACTION STAFF**

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## INTERDIVISIONAL RESPONSE PLANS TO THE SOUTH MILWAUKEE WATER CRISIS

### Division 102 (Racine County)

By Bill Bouma, Chief, South Shore Fire Department

I was called by S.E. Wisconsin MABAS Coordinator Bill Rice at 10:15 am on Feb. 5, 2010 and told of the situation in South Milwaukee and asked to put together a Tender Strike Team with an Engine capable of drafting and a Chief with an Aid. I was told this was not a situation where they had to respond immediately, unless South Milwaukee requested us to do so because Caledonia Fire Department was able to Automatically respond as a first due company with their tanker.

I called the following department chiefs and asked if they could provide the needed equipment. No one turned me down.

**Engine w/drafting abilities:** Union Grove/Yorkville

**Tenders:** Rochester, Raymond, Wind Lake, Town of Burlington & Kansasville

**Chiefs:** South Shore & City of Burlington

This response was in place by 10:30 hours. They were told that they may have to muster at the Racine County Sheriff's Sub-Station at I-94 and State HWY 20, in a non-emergency mode, or they may have to respond with lights and sirens to a fire scene, if requested to do so by dispatch.

All departments, with the exception of South Shore Fire Department are volunteer departments and would have to first respond to their stations to get on the rigs. All of these departments normally respond in a very timely fashion with people who work close to their stations. These departments would have been

dispatched by MABAS Division #102 over IFERN and one announcement if this was an emergency situation. We also simulcast the announcement over their dispatch radio frequency for their department.

These units were on standby for 24 hours. If these resources were called in to a fire scene they bring together the best of both worlds (urban and rural firefighting). They are very capable of normal firefighting by using fire hydrants but also very skilled at being able to operate where there are no hydrants, bringing 2,000 to 3,000 gals of water with them. The addition of Chiefs that are knowledgeable in non-hydranted water supply would have been a very valuable addition. Needless to say, working off of hydrants would make their job much easier.

### Division 106 (Waukesha County)

By Charlie Myers, Chief, City of Brookfield Fire Department

Division 106 Chiefs Charlie Myers and Bill Selzer put an adhoc strike team together because Division 106 has not developed interdivisional cards yet. The departments were on standby from approximately 10:00 on 2/5/10 to 10:00 on 2/6/10. The plan was for the departments to be notified through Division 106-Waukesha County if requested by South Milwaukee as follows:

**Tenders:** Menomonee Falls, New Berlin, Lisbon, Tess Corners, Town of Waukesha

**Engine (Pumper/Tender):** Elm Grove

**Chiefs:** Menomonee Falls, City of Brookfield

**Mustering Point:** Brookfield Square Shopping Mall.

All Waukesha County chiefs were made aware of the situation via email.

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## MABAS TRAINING IMPORTANT IN FIGHTING CORN DRIER FIRE — CONTINUED

*(Continued from page 1)*

scene. Division 117 was able to keep the snorkel truck that was setup flowing with the tender shuttle for more than two hours straight and that is hard to do." Without a sustained water flow, the fire would have spiraled out of control.

Division 117 was formed in October, 2008. That was the first step. Departments then began box card planning, used to implement the system. At the time of the December 1, 2009 fire, "We (Division 117) have not gone online with the cards just yet. However because of the designing and developing of the Cards, the Menomonie Fire Department was able to request the appropriate units and still keep everyone in service for

their own calls for 6 hours. So it was a very good dry run for the system, and it certainly gave everyone a lot of energy for the MABAS system" Popp reported.

"The October training played into this call in that all the agencies knew what equipment needed to respond, how we needed to setup a consistent tender water shuttle, and how to sustain that shuttle. Also because of the training we knew all our equipment was compatible. We also had trained on radio communication and after I arrived on scene, Incident Command decided to have me move all water supply operation to FG (fireground) Blue to free up the fire scene channel for fire operations. We knew this would work because of the October training and our radio communication practice."

**MABAS-WISCONSIN IN ACTION**

**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.

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.

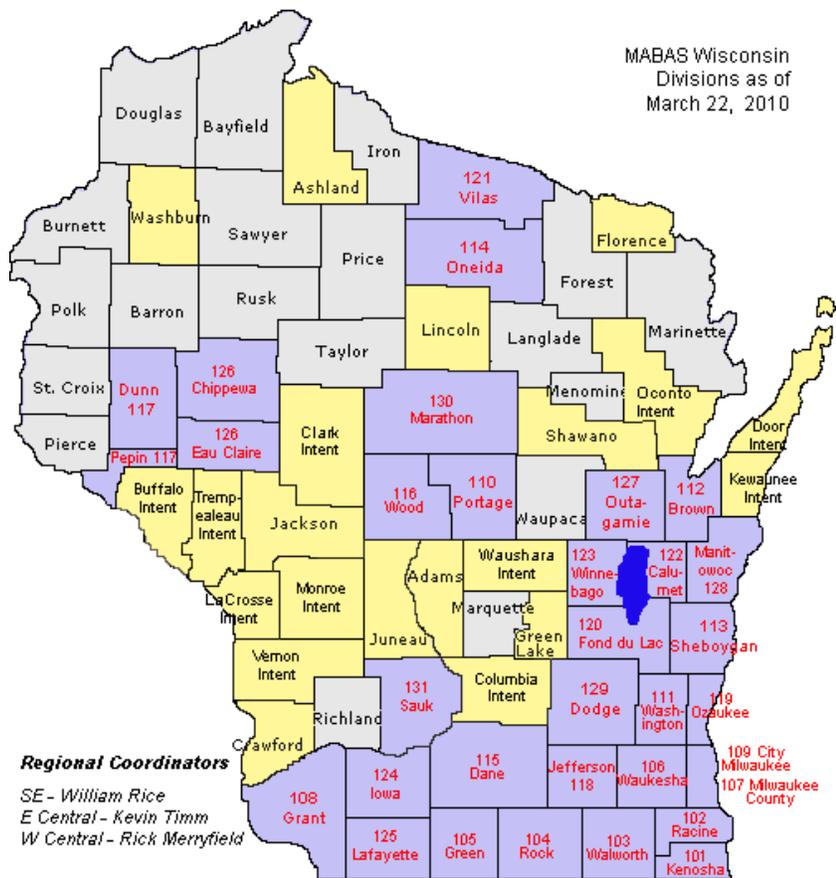
The preplanning of resources ensures that no community will be depleted of resources should another incident occur. Besides structure fires, MABAS has box cards for grass fires, mass casualty incidents, hazardous materials, trench rescue and other types of emergencies.

**MABAS USED FOR GRAIN ENTRAPMENT**

*BY GARY SCHMIDT*

Shortly after noon on February 9, 2010, a worker became trapped inside a grain bin. Burlington (Racine County) Fire Department rushed to the scene. After a few hours of entrapment, Burlington called Racine Fire for their Technical Rescue team to further assist.

Because there was no direct Mutual Aid agreement, there would have been a liability/insurance risk on Racine's part. However, because both departments are members of MABAS, a MABAS Haz Mat box was requested, special calling for the Racine Tech Rescue Team. That covered all parties under the MABAS agreement.



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

[www.mabaswisconsin.org](http://www.mabaswisconsin.org)

**MABAS WISCONSIN continues to grow. There are 31 active divisions and other counties are at various stages of formation.**