

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PRESIDENT

August 30, 2013

Dear Friend,

The ABC's of Safety

ERT, EMT, IC, ICS, MOD, ACM, .22, DART., IR, IA, .30.06, SOP, SAMPLE. The list goes on and on and on. Are you feeling safe yet?

I get asked all the time, "What would the Zoo do if...?" Although my normal Behind the Scenes letters can be funny or insightful or emotional, this one won't even get close. It will be informational. But, if you hang on and stay with me, you will have a good sense of what we do every day to keep you and the animals safe.

First, let me start with the qualifications of the team that is responsible for this task. For the most part, the Emergency Response Team is led by myself, Randy Barker, and Mike Sukel. As many of you know, I have been at the Zoo for 18 years. During that time, I have personally written or modified nearly every emergency protocol used by the Zoo.

As a young horticulturist, I managed the Emergency Response Team and trained the Firearms Team until about eight years ago when I became President. During that time, I spent ten years as a fireman in Woodland Park, where I learned the Incident Command System, fought in the Hayman Fire and responded to countless other medical calls, structure fires, and traffic accidents. And, oh yeah...a few parades.

Randy Barker is a retired Major in the US Marines with several tours of duty. He currently runs the Zoo's firearms and Emergency Response Teams. After 17 years at the Zoo, he has reviewed and updated all the policies as well as written some new ones. He has managed these teams for the last eight years.

Mike Sukel is new to Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and has been here a little less than two years. He came from San Diego Wild Animal Park and lived through the Witch Creek fire that came through that zoo. He is currently on the Broadmoor Fire Handcrew and is certified as a sawyer with the National Forest Service. As Director of Operations, part of his job is to ensure the safety of the entire Zoo.

Since we're talking about incidents that might occur on Zoo grounds, I think it would be helpful to define the scope a bit. While this is not a complete list, it will give you a broader view of the types of things the Zoo is prepared to deal with: wildland fire, flood, power outage, structure fire, bomb threat, active shooter, employee injuries, guest injuries, dangerous animal escapes, lost children, and many more.

All incidents involve, to some degree, the implementation of our Emergency Response Team and the Incident Command System. The Emergency Response Team is broken up in four ways: Incident Commanders, Firearms Team, Immobilization Team, and Manager on Duty. During the summer, this team is supplemented by an EMT that is on grounds every day.

Often, people are surprised by the fact that the Zoo has a firearms team. As an accredited zoo, and because of our moral obligation, we are required to have a plan in place and the skills necessary to contain a dangerous animal that has escaped. Our firearms team is made up of Zoo staff from a variety of departments and the team trains year-round in the National Forest outside of Woodland Park and at other gun ranges. Each member is required to pass a yearly qualification and all are skilled at responding to dangerous situations.

All of our Emergency Response Teams operate within our Incident Command System, which I'd like to tell you a little more about. The Incident Command System is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazards incident management approach that is used by all levels of government. After 9/11, the federal government got really serious about utilizing first responders quickly and being able to link them up into an integrated system. While it is far from perfect, this system effectively recognizes that during the initial attack phase of an emergency, people are acting somewhat independently to resolve the crisis, and that system must continually evolve. The system is small and loose in this beginning phase, but is scalable based on the emergency and the skills and resources needed to resolve it. As things really get going, there is a formal process to hand off leadership to someone with more and more qualifications and experience. Imagine a traffic accident. By way of this system, the first good Samaritan that shows up and calls 911 is in charge. Typically, another person with first-aid training would arrive and start systematically helping the victims. In a small town, the volunteer fire department would show up with some supplies and hopefully an EMT. Soon, the ambulance would arrive with a paramedic. The paramedic would deliver the patient to the hospital, where a nurse would admit the patient and prepare them for a doctor. You can clearly see the chain of care and how more and more qualified people take leadership of the incident.

Now let's use the Black Forest fire as a recent real-world example. (Disclaimer: this is my professional understanding of how that event scaled up, but is in no way a report on what actually happened.) Once the fire was reported, the Black Forest Fire Department responded as they normally would to a wildland fire. This initial attack phase started as all fires do with first responders trying to put it out; what fire departments call a direct attack. At some point, weather conditions and fire behavior became more aggressive and erratic, and the response most likely got a little more defensive in an effort to proactively defend homes vs. put the wildfire out. More than likely, this happened within the first hour. A call to outside departments was made and other departments began to show up to fight the fire and protect structures. Even with additional resources, the fire continued to grow and the strategy needed to change again. The basics of a formal plan began to come together and a line in the sand was drawn. Resources were assigned to hold the fire at a hand-cut line or road. Leadership for the incident changed to El Paso County and the Incident Commander from the county-wide wildland crew took over. The fire had grown from a Type 5 to a Type 4 and was now considered a Type 3 (Incident Types range from Type 5- least significant to Type 1- most significant.) As the fire continued to grow and homes were lost, the fire jumped directly to a Type 1 incident. As that call was made, a Federal Type 1 Incident Commander, Rich Harvey, began his second trip in a year to Colorado Springs. As many of you know, he was the Type 1 Commander for Waldo Canyon as well.

So why is this important? It's important because your hometown Zoo uses this same system to manage our emergencies and we have an assigned team everyday of the year. More importantly, this team is trained and has the relationships necessary to integrate into a larger Type 1, Type 2, or Type 3 system as the emergency grows. Imagine if you can, using the Black Forest fire as an example, the complexity that grows from the initial phase (two men and a brush truck) to an event where you need to figure out road closures, massive evacuations, meals and bathrooms for fire fighters, police protecting houses, and on and on. The Incident Commander quarterbacks this all, but uses all kinds of resources to get it done. The same is true here on Zoo grounds.

In the next letter I will tell you a little bit more about how this system looks at the Zoo and how this team makes our Zoo a little safer every day.

Warmly,

Bob Chastain
President & CEO