



VENTURA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT



ALASKA FLIGHT 261 AFTER ACTION REPORT



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Incident Summary

At 4:21 p.m. on January 31, 2000, Alaska Airlines Flight 261 crashed into the Pacific Ocean, approximately 10 miles off the coast, near Port Hueneme, California. Flight 261 was on a scheduled flight from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico to San Francisco, California and Seattle, Washington. The jetliner plummeted into the ocean and sank into approximately 650 feet of water in the Santa Barbara Channel. The McDonnell Douglas MD-83 (N963AS) carried 83 passengers and 5 crewmembers on board.

Based on the cockpit recording released on May 18, 2000, the crash was witnessed by two pilots from two separate planes that were in contact with the control tower. (See transcripts attached) In the final minutes before the crash, the pilot of Alaska 261 reported problems with airplane's stabilizer and received permission to conduct an emergency landing at LAX. In the process of returning south toward Los Angeles, the pilot reported losing vertical control of the plane. The witnessing pilot described the plane in a vertical dive before hitting the waters near Anacapa Island. The pilot noted a fishing boat in the water near the crash, which turned around heading toward the crash site.

A National Park Service Maintenance Worker also observed the crash from Anacapa Island, 3 miles south of the crash site. Park Service Dispatch at the Ventura Harbor was notified of the accident at 4:25 p.m., and immediately notified the U.S. Coast Guard. The Coast Guard responded with 3 small boats from the U.S. Coast Guard Station, Channel Islands Harbor to rescue survivors. Coast Guard Cutters Steadfast, Conifer, Long Island, Point Chico, Point Bridge and Point Carrew responded from Long Beach, San Diego and Portland, Oregon. Two helicopters from Los Angeles & Long Beach also responded. The first Coast Guard vessels arrived on scene at the crash site at 4:45 p.m. At 4:56 p.m. the Coast Guard requested response by Ventura County Fire Department Helicopters 5 and 6. Helicopter 6 arrived over the scene at 5:20 p.m. followed shortly by Helicopter 5. Three Bay Watch boats from Los Angeles County Fire Department responded at 5:46 p.m. . News crews aboard helicopters and private boats converged on the accident scene recording the search efforts. Many members of the press rented boats and crew from the local Port Hueneme and Channel Island Harbors.

The Sheriff's Communication Center was immediately inundated with phone call inquiries from the press. Based on information received from the media, the Communications Supervisor requested a patrol unit to Pt. Mugu to observe any activity from Pt. Mugu Rock. Sheriff's OES and Sheriff's Search and Rescue Unit (SAR) also received inquiry calls from the press. Simultaneously, Sheriff's Dispatch, SAR and OES attempted to contact the U.S. Coast Guard and F.A.A. Within minutes, the Sheriff's Department obtained confirmation of the crash.

At approximately 4:55 p.m. the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated. Within forty minutes, the EOC was fully staffed and functioning. The EOC was placed on 12-hour shifts with the operational periods running on a 24-hour basis from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. and 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. This schedule remained in place for the following two weeks. Many EOC and field command staff worked through the night. The EOC Plans Section prepared the Incident Action Plan for the first 12 hours, which included the follow Incident Objectives:

1. Establish coordination with primary federal, state and local agencies.
2. Establish jurisdictions/agencies involved.
3. Identify field support and resources needs for up coming operational periods.
4. Establish communications with all involved agencies.
5. Identify the impacts and issues that affect Ventura County resources and residents.
6. Work with appropriate agencies to develop a family visitation operational plan.

Other County EOC activities included meeting with the County Medical-Examiner and determining field support needs for Coroner Operations, reviewing the *Federal Family Assistance Plan for Aviation Disasters*, notifying beach cities and neighboring counties, requesting mutual aid, and identifying support facilities and venues. With the assistance of the City of Beverly Hills Emergency Services Coordinator, a conference call was also conducted with the former Operations Chief from the TWA 800 Aircraft Disaster.

The City Of Port Hueneme and the CBC Base also activated their respective EOCs.

The Coast Guard immediately established an Incident Command Post (ICP) at the U.S. Coast Guard Station Channel Islands Harbor on Victoria Avenue. The Sheriff's Command Post was co-located next to the Coast Guard Station. Information Officers representing the Ventura County Sheriff and Fire Departments set up a briefing area in the parking lot next to the station. Numerous federal, state and local agencies also converged at this location. The parking lots were filled with media satellite-dish trucks along with other representatives from the radio and newspapers.

At approximately 7:50 p.m., the Incident Command Post was notified that human remains and plane wreckage and were being brought to Dock 3 at the Naval Construction Battalion Center (CBC), Port Hueneme. With approval of the Commanding Base Officer, Dock 3 and a neighboring warehouse (Building 546) would be used for receiving human remains and debris. A request was made to Ventura Federal Fire at CBC to assist the Medical Examiner in moving bodies from the boats to shore. Federal Fire requested assistance from the Operational Area Coordinator (Ventura County), and received resources from Ventura County and Oxnard City Fire Departments.

The Navy Base provided building 543 for use as a Command Post, which housed various federal agencies. The Navy cleared warehouse buildings 546 and 548 (See Base Map in appendices) so they could be used for evidence storage and temporary morgue respectively. The Navy Public Works Department set about establishing communications into building 543, created workspace for the various agencies and put security fencing and screening in place. Ventura County Fire Department and the Sheriff's Department's Command Post trailers were

co-located next to Building 543. FOSS Environmental also arrived that evening and provided much logistical support. With the assistance of the Military and FOSS Environmental, Refrigeration trucks were also brought in to store human remains.

With the U.S. Coast Guard in charge of Search and Rescue Operations, media releases were referred to the USGS Headquarters in Long Beach. The U.S. Coast Guard Command Team from Long Beach later arrived at building 543 just before midnight, January 31. The Incident Commander introduced his team and provided three objectives for the search and rescue operations and a Joint Information Center (JIC) was established. (See U.S.C.G. Organization Chart in appendices)

Search teams worked through the night retrieving human remains, personal belongings and wreckage from the ocean surface to be brought to Dock 3, Port Hueneme CBC Base. Hazardous Material Decontamination was established by Ventura Federal Fire Department, utilizing mutual aid provided by Ventura County, Ventura City and Oxnard Fire Departments. Crews handling aircraft debris and human remains were rotated out every 4 hours. A Ventura County Coalition of CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) staff was on hand to defuse outgoing crews.

Upon notification, the National Transportation Safety Board launched a Go Team to Oxnard, California, to begin its investigation of the crash of Alaska Airlines Flight 261. A Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) was requested by the Coroner through State OES and dispatched from Washington, D.C. and a DMORT Portable Morgue Unit (DPMU) was transported from Dallas, Texas. These units arrived at various times throughout Day 2 on February 1, 2000. By Day 2, CBC Base Support agreed and affirmed that support and facilities would be provided for the duration of the incident. The US Coast Guard remained in charge of search and rescue operations.

The National Transportation Safety Board advance team (Office of Family Affairs) arrived at Oxnard Airport at 6:00 am. By 8:00 p.m. on February 1, 2000 most responding agencies had representation at the ICP. The first NTSB briefing was held at the Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center, Building 1100 at 9:40 am. The "Parties to the Investigation" (See NTSB Organization Chart in appendices) were created at this meeting. Individuals present were advised against repeating information divulged during the meeting. The next NTSB meeting was established for 6:00 p.m. on February 2, 2000.

Various individuals from state and local government identified a need to organize the numerous organizations involved with the accident. A briefing/planning meeting was established for 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 1, 2000. Most of the cooperating agencies identified in the agency list (see appendices) were present at this meeting which evolved into a twice daily (10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.) Multi Agency Coordination System (MACS) meeting. The Ventura County Sheriff's Department agreed that the Governor's Office of Emergency Services Law Enforcement Branch would initially facilitate these meetings. The Sheriff's Department later assumed this role and in the final weeks these meetings were led by the Commanding officers of SupSalv.

The Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) was recovered on late Wednesday, February 2, 2000. The NTSB held their briefing at 6:00 p.m. in Building 1100. Each group provided current updates to their investigation. The Flight Data Recorder (FDR) was recovered just before noon on February 3, 2000. The NTSB briefing at 6:00 p.m. provided information on current activities which included mapping the debris field with side scan sonar and video taping using a Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV). Mapping of the debris field identified critical parts of the plane prior to any disturbance of wreckage or human remains. It required approximately 2 days to map a 1 square mile area around the crash site. The NTSB Investigator in Charge asked the Group Chairman to meet him at his motel room at 7:00 a.m. and the Coordinators to report at 7:15 a.m. Local and state agencies were asked to send two representatives each to the daily NTSB briefings.

At the February 4, 2000 6:00 p.m. briefing, NTSB Chairman Jim Hall spoke to and thanked the response agency representatives for their assistance. Several of the groups (Parties to the Investigation) reported their findings to date.

The NTSB held their last press briefing at Needham Theatre on February 5, 2000. All ensuing news releases concerning the investigation would be made from Washington, D.C. Any issues concerning human remains were considered local and left to the Medical Examiner.

Several private beach memorials were scheduled on February 5 for families of the crew and passengers. The families of the crewmembers chose not to attend memorials where passenger family members were present. The public memorial for victims of the crash was held at Pepperdine University in Malibu at 12:30 p.m. After the memorial services several dignitaries visited the ICP, including Senator Ted Stevens, FAA's Jane Garvey, Department of Transportation Inspector General Meade, and Chairman of the NTSB, Jim Hall. The California Highway Patrol and Ventura County Sheriff's Department provided transportation from Ventura County.

Staffing levels for all agencies began downscaling on February 6, 2000. Incident Action Plans were developed for 24-hour operational periods and an extensive phone list was developed to contact representatives who departed from the Command Post.

NTSB held their last briefing for family members on February 7, 2000. The Navy conducted another mapping of the debris field, which is less than 100 meters by 75 meters in size. It was that after collecting what they feel is the last of the human remains, specific sections of the airplane would be surgically removed and brought to the surface. The Ventura County Sheriffs Information Officers initiated daily news releases for the Medical Examiner's Office. Congressman Elton Gallegly visited the ICP and discussed with Alaska Airlines representatives his concerns about reimbursement for local government resources.

On Tuesday, February 1, 2000 Undersheriff Craig Husband provided a briefing to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors on county efforts toward Flight 261 search and recovery. Sheriff Brooks was out of town at the time returning from business in Colorado. Undersheriff Husband

stipulated that joint training between county agencies for Y2K issues and the recent Ranch Fire helped provide smooth coordination between agencies.

The first of daily meetings by SupSalv (Navy Supervisor of Diving and Salvage) was held at 1100 hours on February 8, 2000. Environment concerns about the bulk recovery of the aircraft were addressed at this meeting. The National Marine Sanctuary, NOAA identified thirteen other governmental agencies having jurisdictional or legislative responsibilities concerning the crash site. The National Marine Sanctuary agreed to contact each agency to identify any environmental issues they might have.

Commander Amphibious Group Three (COMPHIB3) U.S. Navy turned over much of their responsibilities to SupSalv at the end of the day in preparation for departure. Nine of the crash victims had been identified to date.

February 9, 2000, the twice a day MACS meetings continue, but the plan is to fold these briefings into the once a day SupSalv meeting at 1100 hours beginning on February 10, 2000. All agencies are in agreement. This will allow for Navy Public Works to continue meeting individual agency needs and provide personnel numbers to the Red Cross and Salvation Army for feeding purposes.

By Saturday, February 12, 2000 most agencies were down to minimum staffing levels in support of the recovery operation. Local, state and federal agencies provided local phone numbers for assistance as needed. The Ventura County Medical Examiner and DMORT continue to work at identifying human remains through traditional means.

On February 16, 2000 the decision was reached to continue with current recovery efforts and not attempt a bulk recovery of the debris. Navy SupSalv feels they can recover 65% of the wreckage (as requested by NTSB) in two weeks. Video taping of the debris field has allowed the NTSB to specify which parts of the aircraft are to be removed to the surface. The Coast Guard safety zone is now down to 1 mile around the crash site.

From February 17 to March 14, 2000 most of the work revolved around recovery of the aircraft debris and identification and release of crash victims. All state and local agencies shut down operations from the Port Hueneme CBC Base. The Sheriff's Department continued to maintain contact with the agencies remaining on the base and attended daily briefings, which were held at 11:00 am each day by the Base CDO and SupSalv. The Ventura American Red Cross continued lunch service.

By March 15, 2000, seven weeks after Alaska Airlines Flight 261 crashed into the Pacific off California's Channel Islands, federal investigators closed their operations. Salvaged debris was left to be stored for further inspection. Approximately 90% of the aircraft had been recovered, identified and cataloged as part of the ongoing investigation. A final report on the technical cause of the crash is not expected in the late fall of the year 2000.

Five forensic investigators continued to work at identifying the victims of Flight 261 until March 17. Kenyon International remained on site until Tuesday, March 21. The Ventura County

Medical Examiner with the assistance of the DMORT Team had identified the remains of 58 of the victims. The remaining 30 deceased victims would be identified through DNA analysis. On March 7, 2000 death certificates for the unidentified 30 victims were processed through the Courts with the assistance of Ventura County Counsel.

The community of Port Hueneme is moving ahead with plans to build a memorial to the 88 victims of Flight 261. Money has and continues to be donated for the building and maintenance of a monument. A large chunk of black granite has been donated and a master stone carver has volunteered to chisel the names on the monument. The City of Port Hueneme and the County of Ventura are anticipating the return of friends and families at the anniversary of the crash of Alaska Flight 261.

Incident Chronology

This timeline summary of activities is based on logs and reports supplied by various agencies that responded to the crash of Alaskan Airlines Flight 261. Some media accounts are also included.

Monday, January 31, 2000

At 3:55 p.m., Flight 261 was cleared by Air Traffic Control in Palmdale to head for San Francisco at an altitude of 31,000 feet.

At 4:10 p.m., the pilots of Flight 261 advised they were having problems with the horizontal stabilizer and dropped the plane to 26,000 feet along the Southern California coast.

At 4:15 p.m., Flight 261 is cleared for an emergency landing at LAX

In the next minutes, pilots of two separate planes witness the MD-80 going into a vertical dive. At 4:16 p.m., the plane sent its last transmission.

At 4:21 p.m., the plane disappeared off radar screens. Flight 261 was down in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California between Port Hueneme and the Anacapa Islands at Latitude 34.03.43N Longitude 119.20.91W

At 4:25 p.m., the National Park Service Dispatch in Ventura received a call from a maintenance worker for the Park Service on Anacapa Island who witnessed the aircraft go down. The National Park Service Dispatch immediately notified the U.S. Coast Guard.

At 4:30 pm. Point Mugu Control tower is notified of the crash.

At 4:44 p.m., the OES Warning center received a call from Lt. Porter of the AFRCC (Air Force Rescue Coordination Center) advising that an aircraft was down.

At 4:45 p.m., the OES Warning Center notified Sharri Carter, State Operations Center who was briefed on the situation.

At 4:45 p.m., the first Coast Guard vessels arrived on scene at the crash site. USCG take charge of Search and Rescue Operations

At 4:55 p.m. Sheriff's OES activated the County Emergency Operations Center.

At 4:56 p.m., the Coast Guard requested response by Ventura County Sheriff's Department helicopters 5 and 6.

At 5:20 p.m., Ventura County Sheriff's Department helicopter 6 arrived over the scene followed shortly by helicopter 5.

At 6:45,
a Incident Command Post is established at Cisco's Sport Fishing Parking Lot, 4151 S. Victoria Avenue.

At 7:50 p.m., the I.C.P. was notified that plane wreckage and bodies were being brought to Port Hueneme CBC Base, Dock 3.

At 9:00 p.m., The County EOC Command Staff conducted a conference call with Bradford Billet from New York to glean information learned from the TWA 800 incident.

Other activities and resources responding to scene:

- Navy opened Command Post to support Coast Guard Search and Rescue Mission
- Navy work boat 120 ft.
- Fishing boats, tugs, oiling supply vessels
- Coast Guard plane, helicopters, and cutters
- National Guard rescue helicopters from San Francisco
- L.A. Co. Lifeguard
- Four bodies recovered. No survivors.

Tuesday, February 1, 2000

At 8:30 a.m., Undersheriff Craig Husband provided a briefing before the Ventura County Board of Supervisors

At 9:40 a.m., the NTSB held their first planning/briefing meeting.

At 4:00 p.m. the first MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 7:30 p.m., State OES conference call.

Other activities and resources on scene:

- Search and Rescue Operations continue
- 300 or more Coast Guard on scene
- 500 Navy Personnel on scene
- Dozens of boats sweeping ocean for wreckage
- 5 bags of human remains and hundreds of pounds of debris found before noon.
- 10 Investigators from NTSB arrive at Point Mugu and take lead as of 12 noon
- FBI on-scene
- Ventura County Sheriff's Department assumes responsibility for shoreline patrols and debris recovery.

- Grief counselors arrive
- On-site warehouse converted to storage room/debris
- Makeshift morgue established by Ventura County Medical Examiner
- Press Conference at Port Hueneme Base Camp, Needham Center
- Salvation Army and American Red Cross provides mass care and grief counseling
- Heavy surf advisory until 9 p.m. Small craft advisory for hazardous seas
- Debris field moved 1 mile south from original area
- Community affected and memorials begin appearing along beaches including Port Hueneme and Silverstrand
- Families of victims begin to arrive
- Hotels block out rooms for families, rescue workers and safety officials
- Ring found by Kevin Marquiss and Scott Jarvis

Wednesday, February 2, 2000

At 10:00 a.m., a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 4:00 p.m., a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 6:00 p.m. the NTSB held their first significant planning/briefing meeting where the parties to the investigation gave their initial reports. This meeting was attended by most, if not all, of the cooperating agencies involved in the incident.

At 7:30 p.m., State OES conferences call.

Other response activities:

- Operation turns to Search and Recovery
- 30 minute cockpit voice recorder found
- County Fire Engine 51 (3-man crew) takes over dock operations
- Updated passenger count received at 10:40 am. 83 passengers, 5 crew members at
- State Parks will take jurisdiction of the beaches from 5th Street to Surfer's Point
- Ventura Public Health available for personnel debriefings
- East Valley Command Post up and running (1:18 pm)
- Critical Incident Stress Management Coordinators Meeting held at County Fire Headquarters
- Briefing held in Ventura Co. Sheriff's EOC
- Ventura County sets up DOC operations at Point Mugu NCBC
- First visit to the wreckage site by families of victims
- Debris washed up North and South of Mugu Rock
- Human remains located at East Jetty/Hueneme Rock
- Body parts found at Zuma Beach

- City of Port Hueneme announces pier is open but beach is closed.
- Dep. Coroner Brees storing bodies and parts in refrigerated building #546
- Coroner confirms recovery of 5 bodies
- Ventura County Medical Examiner provided 2,000 bio-bags
- Coroner holds Procedures meeting; remains continue to be found at beaches
- Updated directive on how to handle body parts and debris distributed to Planning and other agencies (Search Advisory) (12:20 pm)

Thursday, February 3, 2000

At 10:00 a.m. a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 11:00 a.m., State OES conference call.

At 4:00 p.m., a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 7:30 p.m., State OES conference call.

At 6:00 p.m. the NTSB held a planning/briefing meeting.

- Search and Recovery Operations Continue
- Underwater robot sends images of wreckage
- Black box and flight data recorder recovered. NTSB requests VC Sheriff escort.
- Security around the area is base police, tactical response
- Water security by Coast Guard/Ventura Sheriff
- Air Security by NTSB; requests “no fly zone”
- Ventura County Sheriff’s combines Operations and Planning Sections into one
- California Highway Patrol, American Red Cross, and Alaska Airlines personnel escorts family members to Point Mugu Naval Air Base
- 200 family and friends gather for private Seaside Memorial
- Family and friends bused from LAX to the crash site
- Alaska Airlines employees hold a “Minute of Silence” across the country at 4:36 p.m.

Friday, February 4, 2000

At 10:00 a.m. a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 11:00 a.m., State OES conference call.

At 4:00 p.m., a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 7:30 p.m., State OES conference call.

At 6:00 p.m. the NTSB held a planning/briefing meeting.

- Search and Recovery Operations Continue
- After-Action Plan disseminated by Ventura Sheriff
- More debris delivered to Building 546
- OES requests vehicle transportation for black box (data)
- CHP delivers box via helicopter to LAX Coast guard with NTSB escort.
- Search and Rescue evening shift cancelled (12 midnight). Helicopters back on regular shifts
- Shift B personnel downsized
- NTSB requests deputy at dock when Navy ship arrived with recovered wreckage
- Ventura County Sheriff attempts to collect evidence from Scott Jarvis (ring)
- 200-300 partial remains collected, catalogued, and shipped for DNA testing
- Families arrive at Pt. Mugu (1:30 pm)
- Coast Guard helicopter to handle flower drop memorial
- Candlelight vigil at Hueneme Pier (7:00 pm)
- Public vigil at Silver Strand Beach (4 pm)
- Media reports victim's Masonic ring mailed to family
- Ventura Co. Sheriff's attempt to pick up debris from Scott Jarvis and are unsuccessful

Saturday, February 5, 2000

At 10:00 a.m. a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 11:00 a.m., State OES conferences call.

At 4:00 p.m., a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 7:30 p.m., State OES conferences call.

- Search and Recovery Operations Continue
- Navy Recovery Team has found wreckage, over one football field size area. The wreck has been videotaped.
- 18 body bags arrive at the dock.
- Protocol clarified: remains are bagged on the recovery ships then placed in Conex Boxes, placed in the morgue
- Night crew downsized by I/C Godfrey (4:30 pm)
- Ventura Sheriff unable to provide security for DMORT, Navy base personnel will handle
- Service at Port Hueneme for Response Personnel at Base Camp Pier
- Memorial Service at Port Hueneme Beach, Seaside
- Memorial Service at Port Hueneme Beach for Alaska Airlines crews – families
- Port Hueneme Surfer Club holds Kayaking Memorial Service at crash site

- Pepperdine, Malibu, Memorial Service held at 2:00 pm, Governor Davis attends

Sunday, February 6, 2000

At 10:00 a.m. a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 11:00 a.m., State OES conferences call.

At 4:00 p.m., a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 7:30 p.m., State OES conferences call.

Monday, February 7, 2000

At 10:00 a.m. a MAC planning/briefing meeting was held at the ICP.

At 11:00 a.m., OES conferences call

At 4:00 p.m., State OES conferences call.

At 5:00 p.m., Two surfboards from cargo hold of Flight 261 found on the beach at Cayucas, over two hundred miles north of the crash sight.

Cooperating Agencies

Key Agencies – Roles and Responsibilities

Federal

U.S. Coast Guard: The U.S. Coast Guard was responsible for the coordination of the off shore surface search and for maintaining a safety/security zone around the crash site. All of the local, state and federal efforts aimed at the recovery of the victims from the crash of Alaska Air Flight 262 were initially coordinated from the Channel Islands Coast Guard Station.

Immediately after the crash it was not clear if there were any survivors. The Coast Guard closed down the shipping lanes through the Santa Barbara Channel. Eventually this closure was dropped to a one square mile area around the crash site. Initial efforts of the response focused on the location and rescue of survivors and then focused on the recovery of victims from the ocean surface. The Coast Guard Incident Management Team from the Marine Safety Office in Long Beach arrived at Port Hueneme before midnight on January 31, 2000 and provided objectives for the ongoing rescue effort.

NTSB: The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), which has overall responsibility for the investigation of the crash was responsible for documenting wreckage for the aircraft reconstruction effort and conducting and coordinating the technical aspects of the crash investigation. Investigation efforts were focused on determining the probable cause of the accident. The NTSB also was responsible for providing recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the air industry. NTSB Family Affairs Office coordinated family briefings and updates relative to the progress of the recovery and investigation.

FAA: The Office of Accident Investigation (OAI) of the Federal Aviation Administration is the principal organization within the FAA with respect to aircraft accident investigation and all activities related to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). The FAA was a party to the investigation and as such had Accident Investigators assigned to several groups of the investigation. OAI's mission is to investigate aviation accidents and incidents to detect unsafe conditions and trends and to coordinate the corrective action process.

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS): In accordance with the National Transportation Safety Board's Federal Family Assistance Plan, the Department of Health and Human Services provides assistance in victim identification, forensic and medical services. In response to the crash, DHHS activated the Disaster Mortuary Response Team from Arizona and the East Coast. DMORT members consist of a collection of private citizens with expertise in a range of fields including odontologists, anthropologists, funeral directors, fingerprint experts, forensic pathologists and other

skilled technicians Additional aid was provided by the U.S. Armed Forces Pathology Unit and the National Transportation Safety Board.

FBI: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) oversaw the collection and documentation of wreckage and debris and insured maintenance of a chain of custody. The FBI coordinated the inspection for explosives by explosive technicians and coordinated the release of wreckage and debris to the NTSB. NTSB tasked the FBI to provide on-site security by issuing photo badges to authorized incident personnel. The FBI also managed the collection and release of personal effects and assisted in the forensic investigation of the crash.

U.S. Navy:

Sea Operations: The U.S. Navy coordinated all of the underwater recovery efforts. Its responsibilities were divided into three phases of operation:

1. Recovery of the crash victims;
2. Search for and survey of the wreckage and debris fields; and
3. Recovery of the airplane wreckage.

Crews aboard the M/V Independence, owned by the Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center in Port Hueneme, and operating the Deep Drone ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle), recovered pieces of the aircraft's tail section and the aircraft's jackscrew, which may shed light on the cause of the crash for the NTSB.

The Deep Drone is owned by Navy Supervisor of Diving and Salvage, and operated under contract by Oceaneering, Inc. The crews, using Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) and side-scanning sonar mapped the debris field to provide the NTSB with as complete a picture of the debris field as possible before any salvage efforts began. The wreckage is located in about 650 feet of water.

Navy personnel from the Navy's Deep Submergence Unit (DSU), working aboard the motor vessel Kellie Chouest, a civilian research and salvage ship based at the Naval Air Station North Island, recovered the cockpit voice recorder February 2, 2000 and the flight data recorder February 3, using the ROV Scorpio I. The recorders were transported to the NTSB headquarters in Washington, D.C., for analysis.

The amphibious transport dock ship USS Cleveland (LPD 7), homeport San Diego, provided on scene support for small boats and aircraft from Helicopter Combat Support Squadron 11 at Naval Air Station North Island. The first Navy units on the scene were a P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft from the Naval Air Station, Point Mugu; an HH-60 Seahawk from Helicopter Combat Support Special Squadron 5, also from Point Mugu; and an S-3B Viking patrol aircraft from the Naval Air Station, North Island, Calif.

Security: The CBC Police Department provided security for the ICP. Using as many as four checkpoints, access to the ICP, Dock 3, debris storage and morgue was effectively controlled. Site access control was established immediately after the crash when it was determined that CBC Dock 3 would be the base of operations.

Public Works: The CBC Department of Public Works provided engineering assistance to the site including the clearing of storage warehouse to be used for aircraft debris storage and temporary morgue. Phone lines and additional security fencing were put in place as requested. All necessary electrical hookups were installed and electrical safety assured. Public Works also provided fuel for emergency vehicles and on-site generators.

NOAA: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) personnel on site provided underwater mapping of the wreckage, trajectory analysis of the surface debris field, display maps, and weather forecasts for the operations. As the lead agency on environmental concerns in the Santa Barbara Channel, NOAA solicited input from other agencies with jurisdictional or legislative responsibilities around the crash site. NOAA provided all appropriate permits to NTSB for salvage operations.

Ventura Federal Fire: Ventura Federal Fire Department was initially tasked to remove aircraft debris and human remains from the numerous vessels involved in the search and rescue effort during the crucial hours following the crash. Due to the gruesome nature of the task, and the need to rotate personnel out every four hours, mutual aid was requested from Ventura County, Ventura City and Oxnard Fire Departments.

(Add information on DOD and DOS)

State

Governor's Office of Emergency Services: The Governor's Office of Emergency Services coordinates overall state agency response to major disasters in support of local government. The office is responsible for assuring the state's readiness to respond to and recover from natural, manmade, and war-caused emergencies, and for assisting local governments in their emergency preparedness, response and recovery efforts. During major emergencies, OES may call upon all state agencies to help provide support. OES may also call on its own response resources to assist local government. For example, four communications vans are available to send to disaster sites. Portable satellite units are available to provide voice and data transmission from remote locations. OES also maintains caches of specialized equipment, principally for use by local law enforcement agencies.

Law Branch: The OES Law Branch representatives provided much needed coordination of the local Law Enforcement and Coroner's Mutual Aid. A great

deal of coordination also occurred around the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) functions during the recovery and identification of deceased victims. The Law Branch also contributed to coordinating the movement of dignitaries and accident investigation personnel. Personnel from the Law Branch played a significant role in developing and facilitating inter-agency coordination, in a Multi-Agency Coordination System (MACS) type environment at the Local Government ICP.

Fire and Rescue Branch: The primary function of the OES Fire Branch is to provide coordination among local and state government fire and rescue agencies and to support the Fire and Rescue Mutual Aid System. In the case of the Alaska Airlines Flight 261 crash, the Fire Branch representatives at the scene actively gathered and shared intelligence information with other agencies, and State OES HQ.

Southern Region: The OES Southern Region coordinators played a significant role in coordinating the new Emergency Managers Mutual Aid (EMMA) System within their local government contacts. The on scene Emergency Services Coordinator attended daily meetings/briefings, facilitated OES conference calls and updated RIMS as needed.

IT/Telecomm: The IT/Telecomm function supported the (Information Technology) needs of the OES Law/Fire/Southern Region at the incident. An OASIS (Operational Area Satellite Information System) trailer was dispatched on the first day and provided essential communication capability at the Ventura County Fire/Law command posts. The IT representatives set up the OASIS trailer quickly and phone lines were placed where necessary without any significant issues or problems. A Law Enforcement Branch Communications Unit was also on scene and set up by IT for all OES units to use. As the command post expanded, additional lines were provided. Nina Barrett (OES IT) arrived on the afternoon of the second day and provided technical assistance in configuring all of the OES personnel laptops. This provided the capability for OES employees to connect to the Lotus Notes Server, which made possible the following:

- a. Internet capability (Weather, NYEMSO site, NTSB site)
- b. E-Mail capability through Lotus Notes
- c. Connectivity to the OES FTP site (for downloading files/images)
- d. Connectivity for updating Situation Reports
- e. Electronic paging capability

California Highway Patrol: The California Highway Patrol provided VIP transport and coordinated escort of the families of the victims of Flight 261. Namely, CHP provided escort of 21 buses and 40 cars from LAX to Pepperdine University and return. Additionally, they provided escort from LAX to Pt. Mugu and back for the beach memorial. CHP also provided vehicle and air transportation needs to NTSB personnel

conducting the investigation. VIP escort included the head of the FAA, Jane Garvey, head of the Federal DOT, Inspector General Meade, Alaska Senator Ted Stevens, and Chairman of the NTSB, Jim Hall.

CHP also assigned 4 additional patrol units to the Pacific Coast Hwy from Pt. Mugu to the Mugu Rock, 24 hours a day to handle spectators who might find remains along the coast. A supervisor was at the Incident Command Post 24 hours a day for the first 6 days of the incident.

County

Ventura County Sheriff's Department: The Sheriff's Office (SO) was responsible for the overall coordination of Ventura County and local agency response to the crash. SO personnel coordinated site activities from a command vehicle at Port Hueneme ICP and also activated and staffed the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC). SO officials were on the scene soon after the crash to establish an Incident Command System and coordinate the crash response from local government during the critical first hours. SO personnel maintained 24-hour operations and coordinated requests for assistance of Ventura County, local agencies, and agency resources from neighboring jurisdictions. SO staff worked closely with State Office of Emergency Services (OES) personnel to ensure coordinated use of resources in filling mission requests. The Sheriff's Department coordinated the multi-agency beach patrol effort to recover aircraft debris.

The Ventura County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services is responsible for overseeing the County's Disaster Management Program. In response to the crash, OES staff activated the County EOC, provided liaison representatives to other local EOCs and Command Posts and worked around the clock to ensure the smooth running of the County emergency operations. Sheriff OES staff also served as the Liaison Officer at the field Command Post. Additional assistance to County OES was provided through the Emergency Management Mutual Aid System.

Ventura County Medical Examiner: The Medical Examiner is required by law to identify the victims in such an accident; to determine the cause of death; to locate and notify next of kin about the death and to release personal effects of the descendant to the family. The Ventura County Medical Examiner's received mutual aid assistance from coroners' offices in the counties of Los Angeles, Alameda, Marin and Santa Barbara. Coroner Operations were housed in a temporary morgue at the Naval Construction Battalion Center in Port Hueneme in a large secure building with portable refrigeration units parked against the building. See photo below



As of March 23, 2000 , 49 of the 88 victims of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 were identified through common methods like appearance, clothing, dental records or tattoos. As of May 23, 2000, 58 victims had been identified by conventional means. The remaining 30 victims will be identified through a complex and time-consuming DNA testing process.. Ventura County Medical Examiner has 200 to 300 partial remains collected so far during the recovery effort. The remains were cataloged and packaged for shipment to a DNA testing facility where the identification processes can be applied. On April 6, 2000 the DNA samples were turned over to the NTSB and the Armed Forces Institute Pathology to handle the process of analysis

The DNA test to be used, called "short tandem repeat testing," was first employed after the fatal crash of TWA Flight 800 in 1996. The process, which was about 75 percent accurate for the TWA crash, relies on matching tissue samples from victims to those of family members, or to DNA found on a victim's personal items, such as blood on a razor. In some cases, the DNA may have to be extracted from teeth and bones, which is lengthy and difficult. The procedure and its resulting identifications could take months.

Ventura County Fire Protection District: Ventura County Fire Department became aware of the accident on January 31, 2000, at 4:56 p.m., when the United States Coast Guard requested two helicopters from the Ventura County Sheriff's Aviation unit. At 1900 hours, Ventura County Fire Department was requested to respond an Information Officer to the incident. In addition Ventura County Fire Department responded an agency representative to coordinate any fire mutual aid requests. Ventura County Fire Department assisted Ventura Federal Fire Department in moving bodies from the

rescue boats to shore. Ventura County Fire Department also provided water rescue personnel for three Los Angeles County Fire Department Rescue Boats. It was determined that County Fire had no jurisdictional involvement, but it would be necessary to stay attached to the incident to support mutual aid to Federal Fire, maintain the role of Fire Operation Area Coordinator and support the Sheriff's Incident Management Team with overhead personnel and resources.

City

Port Hueneme: The City EOC was activated and the Police Department went on 12 hour shifts from February 2, 2000 and returned to normal staffing on Sunday February 6, 2000. A Police Commander was assigned to attend the twice-daily briefings at the ICP which facilitated updating the city at their thrice daily briefings.

Port Hueneme Police Department coordinated visits from family and friends of the crash victims as well as family and friends of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 flight crew. Several groups visited the beach area on several different days.

The Police Department restricted access to the beach area in anticipation of the potential for debris to wash up on shore. This allowed the city to have greater control of media and the public, which made it much easier to facilitate family visits and private memorials. The Police Department utilized ATV's for beach patrol/security and was supplemented by members of the Ventura County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Team. In addition Ventura County Sheriff's Department provided assistance on February 5, 2000, when over 100 family members conducted private memorials on the City of Port Hueneme beaches.

Oxnard: Oxnard City Fire Department provided mutual aid resources to Ventura Federal Fire Department to staff the DECON Unit at Dock 3.

Volunteer and Private

Red Cross: The Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act, enacted in 1996, assigns responsibility for family care and mental health to the National Transportation Safety Board, which, in turn, has designated the American Red Cross to provide these services. The families care and mental health component included all support services that help family members deal with the trauma and activities that occur following an aviation disaster.

Initial response by the American Red Cross of Greater Los Angeles was four people, who rushed to the Alaska Airlines area of LAX. This team included two Disaster Mental Health counselors, who were ready to begin grief counseling for Alaska Airlines personnel and any families who came to the airport. The chapter also opened its

Emergency Operations Center to monitor events and provide support for on-scene workers.

At the request of the Ventura County Chapter, the American Red Cross of Greater Los Angeles also immediately sent two Emergency Response Vehicles (ERVs) to Port Hueneme to provide mobile feeding for the hundreds of emergency workers, including those on search boats. Each ERV was staffed with three workers, including a Disaster Mental Health worker to provide counseling for the search and rescue workers.

Salvation Army: Immediately following news of the tragic crash of Alaska Airlines Flight 261, the Salvation Army dispatched disaster services personnel to Port Hueneme Naval Base, near the crash site, and grief counselors to the San Francisco and Seattle / Tacoma airports. The Salvation Army's three mobile kitchen teams commenced serving 350 meals, four times per day, to all recovery workers and officials of all participating agencies. Also, Salvation Army officers and staff assisted local critical incident stress management teams in providing counseling for all disaster responders, including Coast Guard, Navy, Fire and Sheriff's Department personnel, plus the numerous civilian boat crews volunteering their assistance in the search efforts.

Kenyon International Emergency Services (KIES): Kenyon specializes in disaster response to include recovery, identification/association, processing, and disposition of remains and personal effects. Accountability of personal effects is of paramount importance. To this end, personal effects are photographed and definitively inventoried. Additionally, to effect disposition of unassociated personal effects, a photographic catalogue, cross referenced to an inventory, can be produced and offered to families. A subsequent interactive process generally results in the association and disposition of additional items. Contact with family members is on a personal basis and all actions taken are in accordance with their instructions.

FOSS Environmental & Infrastructure Services (FE&I) the evening following the crash and began to provide support to the recovery effort. FE&I provided supplies and personal protective equipment for decontamination efforts provides hazardous and non-hazardous waste management services to a wide variety of private industrial and government clients. FE&I offers a combination of skilled personnel, equipment, and technical expertise to serve any special Hazardous Waste Management need.

Oceaneering Technologies, Inc.: Provided charting and computer expertise to the NTSB for salvage operations.

AT&T: Provided cell phones for site personnel and established a temporary cell site to support communications.

The Renaissance Hotel: The Renaissance Hotel located adjacent to Los Angeles International Airport was chosen to serve as the gathering place for arriving friends and relatives of the passengers and crew of Alaska Air Flight 261. The hotel was chosen because of its proximity to LAX. The facility transitioned to become the Family

Assistance Center for the incident. The facility was the focal point for family interaction with NTSB and the Ventura County Medical Examiner.

Incident Venues

By their nature, accidents involving large commercial aircraft will probably result in numerous activities being conducted at locations away from the actual crash site. This was well documented in the TWA Flight 800 crash in New York, and certainly proved to be the case with Alaska Airlines Flight 261. Again, like TWA Flight 800, organizationally it was very beneficial to have a military base adjacent to the crash scene. In this case, the military base was the Port Hueneme Navy Base.

Port Hueneme includes a deep-water port, docks, fuel, helicopter pads, base security, storage, electricity, parking, communications links, etc. All things necessary for offshore Search and Rescue (which transitioned into Search and Recovery).

The Incident venues or key locations resulting from the crash of Flight 261 were spread out over several sites and locations around, and adjacent to the Port Hueneme Navy Base. Most sites functioned from buildings located within the Construction Battalion Center, (CBC) on Base (see appendices). They included:

- The crash site itself off of Anacapa Island, in the waters of the Santa Barbara Channel
- Two Incident Command Posts (ICP's):
 - State and local government ICP at CBC Building # 543
 - NTSB ICP at CBC Building # 1100
- DEMORT (morgue) and evidence collection and storage at CBC Building # 548
- NTSB PIO media briefings at the Needham Theater CBC Building #1173
- Several local beaches
- Pepperdine University

The Crash Site: The crash site was approximately ten miles offshore. Because the crash occurred during daylight hours, and was observed by a reliable eyewitness, the actual crash site was well recorded. Some aircraft debris was observed on the surface of the water immediately after the crash and for at least several hours later. Coast Guard, and local law enforcement and fire department helicopters were on scene within minutes. Numerous boats, including U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy and privately owned boats, merged at the scene to provide a preliminary search of the site for survivors. There were no survivors. Three bodies and assorted aircraft debris and personal belongings were recovered in the first few hours.

Ultimately the crash site posed two problems for the Coast Guard and the Navy. One problem was to secure the site from both private and news media aircraft and boats. The second issue would eventually be the recovery of bodies and aircraft parts from around 650 + feet of water.

State & Local Government ICP: Initially, local government first responders established an Incident Command Post at the U. S. Coast Guard Station, Channel Islands Harbor. As the scope of the disaster became known, activities were moved to the Navy Base at Port Hueneme. The County Fire Department representatives and County Sheriff Department representatives co-located outside of Building 543 at the Base. They set up available agency owned and operated portable trailers to provide ICP functions. The Coast Guard set up their

ICP inside Building 543. The Federal Bureau of Investigation also set up an operation inside Building 543, after re-locating from the Channel Islands Harbor Coast Guard site. The American Red Cross and Salvation Army arrived to support the search mission and also co-located at this site. They both set up feeding locations for all agency personnel at the ICP. OES Fire, Law and I.T. Branches, as well as Southern Region representatives, also worked from this area.

Organizationally, the County Sheriff's Department produced Incident Action Plans for each 12 hour Operational Period, with Planning/Intelligence support from the County Fire Department. By mid day on Tuesday February 1st, an OES Law Branch Communications Unit and an OASIS Trailer unit were on hand to enhance and support this ICP. The OASIS unit (satellite communication) proved especially helpful when cellular telephone sites became unusable due to overloading of the sites by users from the private and public sectors.

Ultimately the following agencies or units worked out of this ICP:

- Sheriff's Department, Ventura County Fire Department, Medical Examiner
- City of Port Hueneme Police Department
- California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
 - Fire & Rescue Branch
 - Law Enforcement Branch
 - Southern Region
 - Information Technology Branch
- California Highway Patrol
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. Navy
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- American Red Cross
- Salvation Army

As the role of the Coast Guard was reduced to providing support for the NTSB investigation and the U. S. Navy Search and Recovery phase, they (the Coast Guard) relocated most of their activities to CBC Building 1000, which was close to the NTSB Incident Command Post at Building 1100. The Coast Guard maintained an Incident Information Officer site at the Building 543 ICP. The entire area was off-limits to the public and the news media.

NTSB ICP: The bulk of the NTSB Investigation Team came from the eastern part of the United States. They began arriving in the early morning hours of February 1. By mid-day, roughly 18 + hours after the crash, they set up their Command Post in a CBC Building ¼ to ½ mile away from the local government ICP. Since NTSB does not utilize the same organizational structure as the Incident Command System, their ICP was organized differently. This was addressed through organizational meetings that were held by the NTSB in which two representatives from each agency were allowed to attend. These meetings began at 6:00 p.m. on February 2, 2000. The NTSB used Building 1100 as a briefing/planning location for their investigation purposes. Other agencies and or groups, i.e. Airline Pilots Association, Boeing Aircraft representatives, and local agencies attended these meetings.

The NTSB also assigned Eric Grosf, the Family Liaison Chair to interface with the local agencies. Mr. Grosf worked closely with the County Command Staff and attended the daily briefings where NTSB reports were provided.

DEMORT (Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team): A disaster of this scale instantly overwhelms the abilities of the local government agencies responsible for the collection, storage and identification of human remains. The DEMORT Team was set up to provide professional personnel, and technical support and assistance to the Ventura County Medical Examiner. The Team consisted of forensic pathologists, forensic anthropologists, forensic dentists, medical investigators, funeral directors and other technical support staff that have been pre-screened by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Soon after the relocation of the ICP from the Coast Guard facility at Channel Islands Harbor, to Port Hueneme, the Navy removed the contents of Building 546 (a Navy warehouse building) near the Building 543 ICP. The purpose was to provide necessary, secure, space for both the mortuary function and the storage of other items recovered from the crash site, including personal belongings and pieces of the aircraft. The DEMORT Team set up their temporary morgue in CBC Building 548.

After the recovery of some debris and a few bodies, in the first few hours after the crash of Flight 261, most of the remaining bodies and other evidence was collected from beneath the surface of the water and gathered aboard ships and boats in the Santa Barbara Channel. The human remains, and all other material were brought to Building 548 for identification and storage.

The Federal Fire Department from Port Hueneme provided the necessary hazardous materials decontamination of all evidence brought to Building 546.

NTSB Media Briefings: The NTSB news media briefings were conducted at the Needham Theater (CBC Building 1173) just inside a controlled, public gate to the Navy Base. There was intense media interest in this incident. Control of the news personnel, was greatly enhanced by limiting their access to this single point of information sharing. Early on, NTSB provided clear direction to all participants in the crash response and recovery, establishing that all information related to the crash investigation was to be released only by one single NTSB person. No other agencies were permitted to address the media at the Needham Theater. This insured consistency in public information releases regarding the crash investigation. The Sheriff's PIO was requested to obtain approval from the NTSB prior to making any press releases. After a few days, this was no longer necessary.

Other entities and agencies did have Incident Information Officers working at the scene, but no other media contacts were made inside the Navy Base.

Local Beaches: Several local beaches were initially patrolled beginning soon after the crash to assist in the search for survivors, bodies, wreckage or any other physical evidence from the crash. Ultimately, while some aircraft parts were recovered, no bodies were ever found on

local beaches. However the need for law enforcement agencies to patrol the areas and provide scene control, added to the workload of local law enforcement agencies.

Beginning a few days after the crash, several memorial services, some planned and others impromptu, occurred on local beaches. Again these events primarily affected the local law enforcement organizations with respect to securing the sites and providing for the privacy of family members of victims.

Pepperdine University: On Saturday February 5th a formal memorial service was conducted for the family and friends of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 on the Campus of Pepperdine University. This site is located south of the crash location along the Los Angeles County coastline in the Malibu area. The Campus offers spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean. Logistical support for this event impacted local law enforcement and fire service agencies.

Lessons Learned

Positive:

- 1.) The early implementation of the Incident Command System and the development of a useable variation of a Multi-Agency Coordination System, at a common Incident Command Post, by Ventura County proved to be very efficient. For the most part, the MACS operation included the and Sheriff's Departments, Ventura County Fire the California Highway Patrol, the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services, some other assisting local fire and law enforcement agencies, as well the American Red Cross and Salvation Army. Essentially, all first responders, including the U. S. Coast Guard were well trained in the use and application of the Incident Command System. Their natural reaction was to use ICS from both an individual agency, as well as a unified or common, inter-agency incident management standpoint.
- 2.) Twice daily MACS briefing/planning meetings held by and for the participating state and local government agencies provided a primary coordination mechanism. These meetings were facilitated by State OES. It's interesting to note that OES fit very well as the choice to conduct these briefings for at least two reasons. First, OES did not have a jurisdiction responsibility, and thus was always perceived as neutral on turf issues. Secondly, OES as a state agency seemed an appropriate organization to facilitate SEMS ICS among the local agencies in this particular incident. In addition, OES, as a state agency, seemed to work well as a "buffer" between local government agencies and the federal government.
- 3.) The ICS/MACS local government briefings occurred in mid-morning and late afternoon. The federal agencies (NTSB, FBI, USN and USCG) were always invited. These briefings were an expected by-product of the ICS experience of the state and local agencies. They proved to be the most efficient method of verbal information sharing and coordination of activities outside of the federal agencies.
- 4.) The Ventura County Sheriff's Department Planning Section produced Incident Action Plans daily for both the Day and Night Operational Periods. These IAP's proved to be the only written planning documents created and shared with all participating agencies.
- 5.) The use of the Incident Command System by local and state agencies under SEMS proved to be a valuable asset.

6.) Early in the afternoon of Tuesday February 1st, the day after the accident, a teleconference was held between the New York State Emergency Management Office and California OES personnel. The telephone briefing highlighted numerous 'lessons learned' by the New York emergency management officials during their operations with the TWA Flight 800 crash in 1996. The identification and discussion of several issues that were covered by the New York EMO representatives proved helpful to the OES people as the Alaska Airlines Incident unfolded.

7.) The first night, an OES OASIS Transportable Unit was sent to the ICP to facilitate communications needs. The unit arrived at mid-morning the next day. An OES handi-talkie radio cache was distributed to lead people from the various agencies and organizations to provide a communications link around the ICP. These radios were used on the Cal-Cord frequency as a Command Net. This effort worked very well.

8.) It appeared that various governmental agencies in Ventura County were very comfortable with using the Incident Command System. That made it easy for other assisting state and local government entities to blend into the local government ICS organization that the original first responders established.

9.) Beginning early on in the incident, Critical Incident Stress Management became available through local agencies. As the incident continued and expanded, additional CISM resources were available from various agency chaplains and other local and federal sources.

Issues

1.) The NTSB began arriving 12-14 hours after the local government first responders had set up an Incident Command Post and had begun functioning under the Incident Command System. NTSB located at a separate building approximately ½ mile away. Other means of communication were developed to overcome the distance between the two locations.

2.) At the first multi-agency briefing, NTSB was informed by an OES representative that California used the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), which is based on the Incident Command System. The Lead Investigator from NTSB stated that the NTSB does not use ICS. The Family Assistance Group Chair was assigned to Liaison with state and local agencies.

3.)The Coast Guard set up a "Joint Information Center" in a building immediately adjacent to the local government Incident Command Post. Not all agencies participated in this.

4.). There are sensitive issues that must be passed on over radios. These conversations must be protected from being monitored by outsiders. Obviously the news media learns a lot at emergency incidents by listening to unprotected radio frequencies. DMORT is one example of a topic requiring privacy.

5.) The Sheriff's Command Post cellular telephones and fax machines did not function. This problem was also experienced during the Ranch Fire Incident. Due to the the number of cell-phones in use by public safety organizations, news media and private citizens overwhelms the local cellular sites to the point that none of the cell phones or fax machines worked. AT & T was brought in to upgrade the system from analog to digital. They also provided new phones and additional cell sites at no cost to the County.

Standardized Emergency Management System Analysis

This section of the report analyzes the incident management from an Incident Command System (ICS) and Multi-Agency Coordination System (MACS) points of view, as ICS and MACS are the recognized incident organization systems of the state-mandated Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). Analysis will begin with the ICS Command and General Staff positional responsibilities, then conclude with the MACS components.

Command Staff

Incident Commander

Position Description:

The Incident Commander (IC) is responsible for overall management of the incident. Key responsibilities include:

- Determine Incident Objectives and strategy
- Establish priorities
- Establish an appropriate ICS organization
- Coordinate with key people and officials

Incident Application:

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) initially established an ICS organization to manage the Search and Rescue (SAR) phase of the incident, which ran for approximately the first 40 hours following the accident. Their focus was primarily limited to their at-sea operations. There was only one initial briefing wherein the incident objectives were defined, and there was no IAP document generated.

As the incident transitioned into a search and recovery phase, the NTSB assumed jurisdictional control of the incident, but did not “assume command” of the USCG-established ICS organization, as the NTSB does not utilize ICS. The USCG ICS structure was in large measure demobilized at that point consistent with their reduced mission responsibility.

State OES along with the County Command Staff facilitated what was called a “Collaborative Command” with all agencies respecting each others role and jurisdiction. The objective of this Collaborative Command was to encapsulate the incident as much as possible. This provided local jurisdictional agencies with a familiar management/coordination system to operate under. The County Sheriff’s Department filled the role of Incident Commander in coordinating the various agencies on scene at the Command Post.

Information Officer

Position Description:

The Information Officer is responsible for developing and releasing incident information to the news media, to incident personnel, and to other appropriate agencies and organizations. This position reports directly to the IC. Key responsibilities include:

- Conduct media briefings
- Arrange interviews
- Arrange VIP tours, briefings
- Develop press releases
- Maintain current information summaries and displays on the incident

Incident Application:

Information Officer duties were handled variously by the NTSB, USCG, and the Ventura County Sheriffs Office. The Ventura County Sheriffs Office in conjunction with the USCG handled initial press briefings from a Joint Information Center (JIC). Once the NTSB assumed control of the incident however, a lack of information sharing/coordination by the NTSB, together with a directive from the NTSB that identified one of their 'Members' as the only authorized spokesperson for the incident, combined to functionally eliminate the JIC. A lack of physical access to the JIC by the media also interfered with the dissemination of public information.

Further exacerbating this problem was the fact that the NTSB press briefings were frequently either not on time, or apparently cancelled without notice, and did not include hardcopy press releases.

Once the local ICS/MACS organization was developed, the Information Officer position was filled with Ventura County Sheriffs Office personnel. As their public information role was so restricted by the NTSB, the focus was placed on internal information provision. Displays were erected at the ICP that contained current newspaper articles, photos, etc. Once the NTSB spokesperson departed the incident on February 5, the overall responsibility for local public information management reverted to Ventura County.

Liaison Officer

Position Description:

The Liaison Officer is the contact for representatives of assisting and/or cooperating agencies involved in multi-jurisdictional incidents and/or incidents requiring a multi-agency response. This position reports directly to the IC. Key responsibilities include:

- Identify, contact, and coordinate with key agencies
- Keep agencies supporting the incident aware of incident status
- Identify current or potential inter-organizational problems
- Organize and facilitate Cooperator Briefings as needed

Incident Application:

The Liaison Officer position was filled and the function aggressively managed under the USCG ICS organization while it was up and running. Key agency representatives were identified, contacted, and kept informed. With the transition to NTSB control, the Family Assistance Group Chair was assigned to liaison with state and local agencies. At the County level, this position was filled by representatives from Sheriff's OES.

Safety Officer

Position Description:

The Safety Officer assesses the incident for hazardous or unsafe conditions and situations, then develops and recommends measures to assure safety of personnel. This position reports directly to the IC. Key responsibilities include:

- Identify hazardous situations associated with the incident
- Review Incident Action Plan (IAP) for safety implications
- Develop Hazardous Materials Site Safety Plan as required
- Approve medical plan, including Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) as needed

Incident Application:

The initial USCG ICS organization included a designated Safety Officer, however their focus was with their at-sea operations. The primary safety issue of dockside Hazardous Materials exposure, both biological and chemical was dealt with using local fire service resources to perform decontamination as needed. There was no Hazardous Materials Site Safety Plan developed. The Ventura County Public Health Laboratory Van was brought in to monitor occupational hazards and exposure.

CISM was made available primarily via the County's Critical Incident Management Team, the American Red Cross, Salvation Army and various fire and law chaplains at the ICP. This was not initially provided in a coordinated fashion until all groups met and determined which groups need to be served and which agency would provide the service. All groups were addressed including families, workers, beach residents, volunteers and the general community.

General Staff

Operations Section Chief

Position Description:

The Operations Section Chief manages all operations directly applicable to the primary mission, executing the IAP to achieve the incident objectives. Key responsibilities include:

- Brief, assign, and supervise organizational elements in accordance with the IAP
- Expediently modify the IAP as needed, advising the IC of same
- Determine resource needs and releases

- Supervise Staging Area Manager
- Supervise Operations Branch Directors, including Air Operations Branch Director

Incident Application:

Once the local ICS/MACS organization was established, the Operations Section chief position was filled by Ventura County Sheriffs personnel. The primary responsibility of this position became coordinating the various issues surrounding detection, protection, and recovery of remains, personal effects, and wreckage debris as these items came ashore on area beaches. This involved such tasks as facilitating beach closures and searches; developing discreet communication terms to avoid inappropriate media attention; and coordinating security for family members during site visitations.

Planning Section Chief

Position Description:

The Planning Section Chief manages the collection, evaluation, and application of information for the purposes of understanding the current situation, forecasting the future situation, and preparing alternative strategies. The primary responsibilities of the position include:

- Maintain status of resources
- Collect and process incident situation information
- Supervise preparation of the IAP
- Conduct Planning Meetings
- Facilitate Operational Briefings

Incident Application:

The NTSB held daily briefings primarily directed at obtaining progress reports from the various functional units of the investigation team. Limited representation from cooperating agencies was allowed, however there was strict instruction from the Investigator-in-Charge (IIC) that any information shared during the meeting was to remain confidential. Given this restriction, these briefings provided little if any information that could be shared with the incident as a whole in the way of Situation Status.

Once the local ICS/MACS organization was established and the Plans Section Chief position filled, formalized check-in and resource status processes were put in place. These processes were aimed primarily at tracking Ventura County government personnel, however included allied local and state agencies as well.

An Incident Action Plan (IAP) was developed for each operational period. These documents primarily provided situation information such as weather reports, event logs, and maps. They also included comprehensive contact information lists for the many agencies and venues involved. Objectives were defined on an ICS 202 form, and primarily focused on interagency coordination and communication. Not included in the IAP were elements such as Division Assignment List (ICS 204), Communications Plan (ICS 205), and a Medical Plan (ICS 206).

Key to the success of this organization was the twice-daily briefing/planning meeting, which provided the primary interagency coordination mechanism. These sessions, primarily facilitated by State OES personnel helped to identify and resolve coordination needs, as well as provide for agency-specific activity reports. The NTSB was not represented in these meetings in a Command and Control sense, however the NTSB representative for family affairs was frequently present to coordinate and report on his function.

Logistics Section Chief

Position Description:

The Logistics Section Chief supports management of the incident by providing facilities, services, and materials. Primary responsibilities include:

- Identify current and future incident service and support needs
- Service Branch (Communications, Medical, and Food Units) activation and supervision
- Support Branch (Supply, Facilities, and Ground Support Units) activation and supervision
- Review Communications Plan, Medical Plan, and Traffic Plan IAP elements

Incident Application:

Ventura County Fire Department personnel initially filled this position in the local ICS/MACS organization. Service and support needs were identified in the planning/briefing meetings.

Although the Communications Unit Leader position was not filled, the need for common communications was determined early, and was met with an OES Law Branch portable radio cache. Command (repeated) and Tactical (local) nets were made available using OES frequencies. There was no incident dispatch established.

Cellular phone communications were problematic due to the local cell sites being overwhelmed by response agencies and the media. Agencies with PCS-type communications were able to use their radio capability with greater effectiveness. A Cell site On Wheels (COW) was provided by a local cellular service provider, including phones that had priority access to the portable site. This was also a very effective adjunct. An OES Operational Area Satellite Information System (OASIS) trailer was brought in, and supplied phone and data transmission capability for the ICP until landlines could be brought in.

The Ventura County Naval Public Works Department (Department of the Navy) provided for the vast majority of facility needs. These included the overnight emptying of entire warehouses needed for processing and storage of personal effects, wreckage, and human remains; phone and power wiring throughout the ICP as needed; and the installation of perimeter fencing around various restricted areas.

Food Unit responsibilities were generously and effectively handled by the American Red Cross and Salvation Army, who both self-dispatched to the scene.

There was no incident Medical Unit established, however the Disaster Mortuary Response Team (DMORT) hired a paramedic ambulance to stand by as part of their internal deployment plan.

Finance/Administration Section Chief

Position Description:

The Finance/Administration Section Chief manages the financial, administrative, and cost analysis aspects of the incident. Primary responsibilities include:

- Develop Finance/Administration operating plan in conjunction with responsible agencies
- Maintain daily contact with responsible agencies on Finance/Administration matters
- Ensure all obligation documents initiated at the incident are accurate and complete
- Provide financial and cost analysis information as requested
- Coordinate Finance/Administration closeout of incident with responsible agencies

Incident Application:

This position was not filled in the local ICS/MACS organization. One of the “lessons learned” by New York State during the TWA 800 incident was the need to thoroughly track and document response-related costs, reportedly a \$6 million lesson for them. This in comparison with Florida’s Value Jet incident, in which diligent cost tracking resulted in complete reimbursement.

During his visit to the ICP, Congressman Gallegly related to Alaska Airlines his expectation they would fully reimburse local government for their response costs. Determining these costs may be a problem, however. Certainly many of the costs incurred by local responders can be backtracked using the Plans Section’s records, however this may not provide a full accounting of incurred costs. It remains to be seen whether leaving this position unfilled will have a significantly negative impact on cost recovery.

Multi-Agency Coordination System (MACS)

A MACS is a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications integrated into a common system with responsibility for coordination of assisting agency resources and support to agency emergency operations. Examples with the Alaska Airlines incident are paraphrased in parentheses.

MACS Functions

- Evaluate new incidents (priorities)
- Prioritize incidents
 - Life threatening situation
 - Real property threatening situation

- High damage potential
- Incident complexity
- Determine specific agency resource requirements
- Determine agency resources availability
- Allocate resources to incidents (issues) based on priorities
- Anticipate future agency resource needs
- Communicate MACS “decisions” back to agencies
- Review need for other agencies involvement in MACS
- Provide necessary liaison with out-of-region agencies and facilities as appropriate

MAC Group Coordinator

Position Description

The MAC Group Coordinator serves as a facilitator in organizing and accomplishing the mission, goals and direction of the MAC group. The coordinator will:

- Facilitate the MAC Group decision process by obtaining, developing and displaying situation information
- Fill and supervise necessary unit and support positions within the MAC Group
- Acquire and manage facilities and equipment necessary to carry out the MAC Group functions
- Implement the decisions made by the MAC Group

Incident Application

OES Law, in cooperation with Ventura County Sheriff, Ventura County Fire and OES Fire, acted as the MAC Group Coordinator fulfilling all of the four functions described above. This function started at the inception of the incident once the Ventura ICP was established near Dock 3. Ventura County Sheriff Department and Ventura County Fire Department provided essential and critical support to this “collaborative” group which functioned very remarkably. This function shifted from OES to Ventura County Sheriff Department about a week after the first day.

MAC Group Agency Representatives

Position Description

The MAC Group is made up of top management personnel from responsible agencies/jurisdictions and those heavily supporting the effort and/or are significantly impacted by use of local resources.

MACS Agency Representatives involved in a MAC Group must be fully authorized to represent their agency. Their functions can include the following:

- Ensure that current situation and resource status is provided by their agency

- Determine specific resource requirements by agency
- Collectively allocate scarce, limited resources to incidents based on priorities
- Anticipate and identify future resource needs
- Review and coordinate policies, procedures and agreements as necessary
- Consider legal/fiscal implications
- Review need for participation by other agencies
- Provide liaison with out-of-the-area facilities and agencies as appropriate
- Provide personnel cadre and transition to emergency or disaster recovery as necessary

Incident Application

MACS briefings were held two times each day, once in the morning at 10:00 and in the afternoon at 4:00. It would be fair to assume that each agency that attended these briefings were functioning as the respective agency representative knowing that or not. Each agency was invited and asked to speak to the group as to their status, current issues and future concerns. Each seemed to be fully authorized to speak for their respective agency. Although some agencies were not consistent with their participation with the MACS briefings, everyone was aware of such meetings and eventually attended at one time or another either as a necessity because of resource needs or curiosity.

Situation Assessment Unit

Position Description

The Situation Assessment Unit (This is also referred to in some agencies and EOC's as the Intelligence Unit) in a MACS is responsible for the collection and organization of incident status and situation information. They evaluate, analyze and display information for use by the MAC Group. Functions include the following:

- Maintain incident situation status including location, type, size, potential for damage, problems and any other significant information.
- Maintain information on environmental issues, cultural and historic resources or sensitive populations and areas.
- Maintain information on meteorological conditions and forecast conditions that may have an effect on incident operations.
- Request/obtain resource status information from the Resources Unit or agency dispatch sources.
- Develop projections of future incident activity.

Incident Application

As stated above, Ventura County Sheriff and Ventura County Fire provided all of the documentation support, incident action plans and display products to support the MACS Group.

Resources Unit

Position Description

The Resources Unit, if activated in a MACS, maintains summary information by agency on critical equipment and personnel committed and available within the MACS area of responsibility. Status is kept on the overall numbers of critical resources rather than on individual units. Functions can include the following:

- Maintain current information on the numbers of personnel and major items of equipment committed and/or available for assignment.
- Identify both essential and excess resources.
- Provide resource summary information to the Situation Assessment Unit as requested.

Incident Application

Ventura County Sheriff and Ventura County Fire provided this function. Check in procedures were established and communicated to the agencies, which in turn provided head counts for the Red Cross and Salvation Army in determining feeding needs. This also allowed the needs of other agencies to become known which prompted them to become players in the system.

Information Unit

Position Description

The Information Unit is designed to satisfy the need for regional information gathering. The unit will operate an information center to serve the print and broadcast media and other governmental agencies. It will provide summary information from agency/incident information officers and identify local agency sources for additional information to the media and other government agencies. Functions are to:

- Prepare and release summary information to the news media and participating agencies.
- Assist in scheduling media conferences and briefings. Assist in preparing information materials, etc., when requested by the MAC Group Coordinator.
- Coordinate all matters related to public affairs (VIP tours, etc.).
- Act as escort for facilitated agency tours of incident areas, as appropriate.

Incident Application

The NTSB provided all media releases up until the 5th of February. Those releases were only pertinent to the accident investigation. Ventura County Sheriff stepped in at their departure and provided daily media releases.

Appendices

I – Cooperating Agency List

II – Internet Web Site References

III– NTSB Hierarchy

IV- NTSB Incident Organization Chart

V- USCG Incident Organization Chart

VI- Coroner Operations Organizational Chart

VII- Port Hueneme CBC Site Map

