

# The Sit Rep

Newsletter of the NYC Office of Emergency Management

## Calinferno: OEM Takes on the Wild West

On October 20, 2007, a series of wildfires raged across southern California. A month-long drought left the arid land drier than usual and winds up to 85 miles an hour quickly spread the fires out of control. The inferno grew so large that NASA satellites photographed the smoke from space.

During the next 19 days, more than 500,000 acres of land burned across seven counties. Governor Schwarzenegger declared a state of emergency and President Bush committed federal resources to the response.

As hundreds of thousands of people evacuated, five OEMers flew into the fray. The team arrived on October 26<sup>th</sup> as part of a special arrangement between Frank "Cookie" McCarton, the chief deputy director at California's Office of Emergency Services (OES), and Calvin Drayton, OEM's first deputy commissioner.

When they returned, The Sit Rep sat down with them to hear what California was really like.

**Craig Bonney** is an inter-agency exercise coordinator from Montpelier, Ohio. He moved to New York on September 2, 2001, and joined OEM on September 19, 2005.

### What was your official job?

I was the deputy planning section chief for the state in the Joint Field Office (JFO).



A satellite image of the 2007 wildfires (photo: AFP – European Space Agency)

### What did you spend most of your time doing?

I spent my first day doing tasks for the planning section chief. The next morning, she retired. The fires were still burning and her replacement did not have much experience. We had to figure out what to do together. The biggest problem in the JFO was that everyone was putting out joint documents without actually talking to each other. For example, four different situation reports came out every day.

When OES asked us to put together another one, we opened lines of communication that allowed us to absorb one sit rep and become the source of state information for another. Basically, I helped the state reps at the JFO ensure FEMA's joint sit reps and joint incident action plans were actually produced jointly.

### What will you do differently during the next activation?

I liked FEMA's forward-leaning culture. In addition to checking with city agencies to find out what they are doing, I think it is important for us to ask about the specifics of what they plan to do next. By defining these tasks we can give resource managers, the mayor, and the public a heads-up about what is to come.

### What was your most memorable moment?

I had a reality check moment while we were driving from San Diego to Pasadena. One minute it was a beautiful, bright California day, and the next minute we drove straight into a cloud of smoke and ash and the sun disappeared entirely. It brought a vivid reality to the situation. We were here because a disaster was happening right now.

*Next up: Jonathan Jenkins on page 2*

### Editor's Note

It has been a quiet few months in New York City (the threat of a snowstorm led to the only activation), but OEM has kept busy during the lull. In addition to the daily demands of preparing eight million people for absolutely anything, OEM recently unveiled Notify NYC, and has narrowed the entries in the design competition to 10 finalists.

In this issue, the Sit Rep features five accounts of what is was like to join California's response to the wildfires and an invitation to join Citizen Corps Council's upcoming faith conferences.

The Sit Rep extends a special thanks to Jim McConnell for his submission about Sam, a mapping robot who visited the office in November. If you would like to share a story about an event in your unit, please send it to [Chris Varley](#) for inclusion in the next issue.

## Calinferno (continued from page 1)

**J**onathan Jenkins is a preparedness specialist from Morganfield, Kentucky. He worked for the U.S. Senate Sergeant at Arms at the Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness before joining OEM in the summer of 2006.

### What was your official job?

The first week I served as the special assistant to Chief Deputy Director Frank "Cookie" McCarton. The second week, after the rest of the team returned to New York, I took over for Dina as the coordinator of the Local Assistance Centers.

### What did you spend most of your time doing?

I sat in on conference calls with Cookie. I collected information on fire specifics, like acres burned, buildings destroyed, shelter numbers, etc., for the governor's briefings. Kelly and I also worked on an aircraft logistics project. If anything was on the ground, the governor wanted to know why.

This was a difficult question to answer because aircraft were taking off from a number of different airports and the state had no central flight log. We had to go directly to the airports and the pilots, many of which were on restricted military bases, to find out what was going on. It turned out to

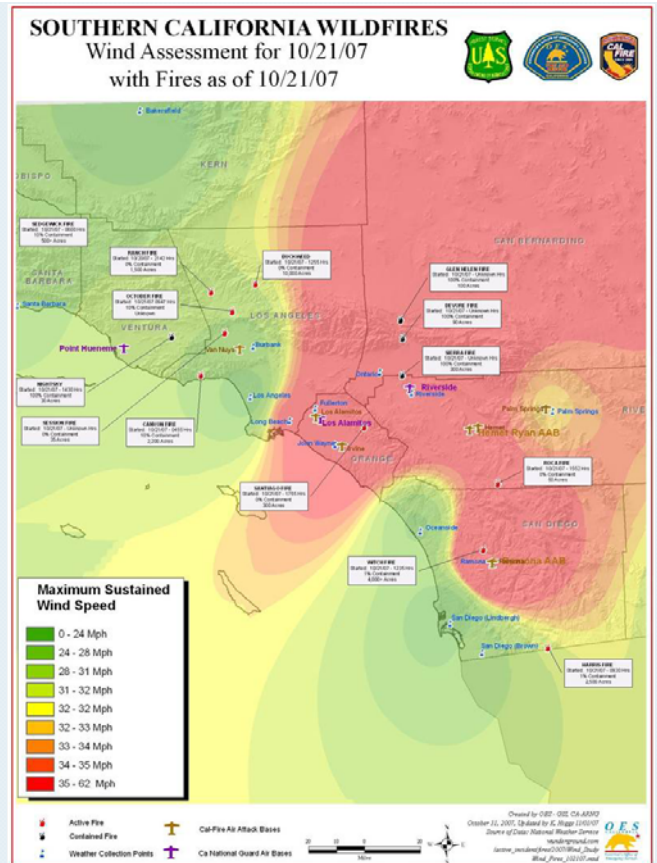
be worth the trouble because that's how we found out about the varying wind conditions between the coast and the hills. Pilots had no trouble flying along the coast, where the winds were calm, but the gusts were so powerful in the hills, pilots were throwing up in their cockpits before they could get to the fires. We worked with GIS and weather experts to create wind maps illustrating where fires could be fought from the air and where they couldn't.

### How was it different from the way we do things here?

I had to learn a lot more names — probably about 200 by the end of the two weeks. I felt more out of touch with what was going on. This was a state operation, so it was two levels further removed from the action. Instead of talking to our own responders we were talking to state and regional managers who were compiling information from the field. When they delivered contradicting information, it became very difficult to coordinate a response.

### What will you do differently during the next activation?

Data runs an event. The way we collect it and the way we depict it. I guess I always knew



that, but working two levels further removed from the action showed me that reliable data becomes harder and harder to come by as it filters in from different places and through different people. Imagine a 200-person game of telephone. Our presentation of data needs to be very precise and concise.

### What was your most memorable moment?

In addition to the irreplaceable experience and knowledge I gained, I went to visit the Disney EOC with Julie Pugal (a former OEMer). They had all these clocks up on the wall that told the time at each major Disney location. That was cool.

*Next up: Dina Maniotis on page 3*



Sam the robot maps his way around Wai.

## Robots! By Jim McConnell

On November 15, 2007, Sam the robot made a surprise visit to OEM. He was a last-minute stand-in when his sister, Sara, who had been scheduled to appear, was suddenly called out of town. Approximately 50 OEM staffers turned up to meet him. Although he is a little guy, only two feet tall with one large eye, he was clearly the center of attention. He quickly set about showing what he could do.

Robots like Sam and Sara offer agencies the ability to see

what is going on in a room without sending personnel into potentially hazardous situations. The Department of Health has already contracted a similar robot for its emergency services unit.

In less than 10 minutes, Sam created a detailed floor plan of the EOC. Depending on the arrangement of the space, he can collect information on 250,000 square feet in a single day.

To create the floor plan, Sam can follow a master, like a dog, or just bang into a wall, chair, or

person until he finally gets through. His relentless nature led one disgruntled ESF Coordinator to mutter something about his potential for prodding EOC agency reps to turn in their sit reps on time.

Sam can be custom-fitted with devices for motion detection, change detection, infrared sensor collection, noise detection, and many more. The on-board camera may be raised or lowered, giving a full view of the room.



## OEM NEWS

### Combined Municipal Campaign

Contributions for the Combined Municipal Campaign will be accepted until February 15th. All contributions are tax deductible. Last year OEM employees donated \$2,094 for the charities of their choice. OEM received a certificate from the United Way in recognition of our outstanding leadership and support.

### Renewable Energy Certificate

On December 6th, Renewable Choice Energy awarded OEM a certificate for the purchase of 2,830,000 kWh of wind power over two years. In the green tradition of OEM's new headquarters, this commitment will help keep as

much as 3,857,290 pounds of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere.

Renewable Choice provides clean tech products around the country to help move our society toward a more sustainable future.



### Congratulations!

Amber Greene is one of five City employees selected by the Mayor's Office to receive an award for outstanding public service in honor of Black History Month. The ceremony will be on February 4th at Gracie Mansion.

### Blood Drive

On January 4th, OEM staff donated 27 pints of blood during the agency's first blood drive of 2008. The donations may save up to 81 lives. Unfortunately, Tim Kane and Lisa Schulman immediately burned through their awarded comp time by passing out on the donation table.

### Discovering OEM

On January 23, producers from the Discovery Channel visited OEM to investigate how New York City responds to emergencies. They toured the facilities, interviewed Watch Commanders and responders, and visited the evacuation job on Kent Avenue. The producers are considering tailing responders for an extended period in order to put together a case study of a

## Baby Boom



Patrick Ryan Markowski  
8lbs. 9ozs.  
Born 11/9/2007 to Alex  
Markowski and Lauren  
McQuade

## Calinferno (continued from page 2)

**D**ina Maniotis is an ethnically Greek Canadian. She was raised in Montreal, but spent much of her life between there and Greece. She moved to New York in 1983 and joined OEM in 2006 after 15 years with Catholic Charities.

### What was your official job?

I coordinated the work of the Local Assistance Centers (LACs), California's equivalent of our Disaster Assistance Service Centers (DASCs). They housed local social services and state and federal benefits in one location.

### What did you spend most of your time doing?

There were nine LACs spread across the seven counties. I visited each of the centers to meet with the local managers and discuss services, layout, and customer flow. Meeting these people face-to-face gave me a chance to explain who I was and what I had come to do. The relationships I built made it easier to facilitate the daily interagency con-

ference calls that managed the centers. We got all of the problems out in the open and addressed them together.

### How was it different from the way we do things here?

The wildfires affected such a large area, a number of local jurisdictions opened their own shelters. The Red Cross refused to manage some of these shelters because they did not fit their guidelines. Without previously established relationships, it was difficult to get information about these local shelters and there was some confusion. Many of them opened and closed within 24 hours.

### What will you do differently during the next activation?

At the San Bernadino fairgrounds shelter, I saw evacuees choose to sleep in stables with their pets. Katrina highlighted the importance of including pets in sheltering operations, but California really drove the point home. People will not be separated from



Smoke obscures the mountains on the road from San Diego to Pasadena

their pets. They slept together in stables. The bond between pets and owners is not one we want to come between. In addition to making more of our shelters pet-friendly, we need to run a serious public awareness campaign to inform people that pets are welcome. That way, they won't hesitate when we ask them to evacuate.

### What was your most memorable moment?

The opportunity to drive through the countryside while visiting the LACs. The landscape was beautiful. It reminded me of Greece despite the scorched undergrowth.

Next up: John Grimm and Kelly McKinney on page 4

## Keeping the Faith



In 2008, Citizen Corps Council reaches out to faith communities.

Over the next few weeks, the New York City Citizen Corps Council (CCC) and its partners will host five community-based forums to help local faith leaders prepare their communities for emergencies.

The CCC brings together leaders from an array of public and private institutions to engage citizens in community preparedness.

This year the CCC will focus its outreach efforts on faith communities. Working through faith communities, a trusted outlet of information for many of New York's hard-to-reach populations, will allow the CCC to provide preparedness resources to groups such as immigrants, seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income residents.

If you are a member of a faith community, encourage your leaders to participate in one of the upcoming conferences. Contact [Calder Yates](#) at (718) 422-8904 for more information. Promotional postcards are available at the front desk.

## Calinferno (continued from page 3)

**J**ohn Grimm is a former Marine combat engineer. He is from Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and he joined OEM two years ago as director of the Urban Search and Rescue program.

### What was your official job?

I went to assist OES' deputy director of operations with response operations.

### What did you spend most of your time doing?

I spent a lot of time ensuring FEMA and California's OES understood each other's actions. Information was coming into the Joint Field Office (JFO) through two parallel lines — one from FEMA responders and the other from the counties. The most important thing we did each day was hold a conference call to connect the two command elements and make sure they were operating with the same information.

### How was it different from an operation here in NYC?

A lot of aspects of emergency management were happening at the same time. Response operations were taking place in front of the fire line and recovery operations were going on behind it. It is unusual to run both operations at the same time.

### What will you do differently during the next activation?

Pre-establishing objectives is an important component of each operational period. It gives resource managers a heads up and lets the guys in the field under-



Wildfire team: (left to right) Jonathan Jenkins, Craig Bonney, Kelly McKinney, Dina Maniotis, and John Grimm

stand exactly what questions need to be answered. For example, a report came in saying the Delzura community was without power and utilities. The community relies on electricity to pump water from a well. A blackout left them without water — a serious problem during a wildfire.

To address this, we needed information on the size of the community, the amount of time it had been without utilities, what type of generators they needed to pump water, how long it would take to get them there, and the amount of time until utilities would be restored. If it takes longer to get generators to the community than it takes to restore the utilities, there is no reason to send them. We can only make that call if we've asked the right questions, both in the field and of the resource managers.

### Any memorable moments?

A well-dressed and well-rehearsed version of Captain Jack Sparrow from *Pirates of the Caribbean* served us dinner one night.

**K**elly McKinney joined OEM in 2005 as the deputy commissioner of planning. He is originally from Lawrence, Kansas, and has a background in environmental engineering.

### What did you spend most of your time doing?

I spent most of my time working on messaging for air quality and respirator issues. Over 20 different agencies were offering health information about the fires— everything from the effects of smoke inhalation to proper safety measures for cleaning up ash in the home. The public started to get confused.

### How was it different from the way we do things here?

First of all, they didn't feed us. We were working 16-hour days and OES only provided one meal. We take better care of our workers here. But on a more serious note, it was interesting to be on the far side of the home-rule concept. See, the State doesn't do anything

until the local jurisdictions ask for help or exhaust their resources. At OEM, we are in control. Our proximity to the action makes it easy to communicate confidently with the mayor. California's OES was so far removed from the field the executive branch had difficulty accepting its synopses. They used any discrepancy in data as a reason to get involved in operations. I know they wanted to help, but in the end they created more work for OES.

### What will you do differently during the next activation?

Wildfires are not new to California. The whole time we were there, people kept saying things like "this is just like the fire of '93," yet they hadn't created templates needed to collect and depict the data decision-makers needed. It wasn't until two days into the event that we had our data gathered in an actionable format. We always need to be thinking beforehand, not only about what data we need to make decisions during an emergency, but how we will present that data so it can be easily absorbed.





**Photo Hunt:** OEM has tripled in size over the last five years. The first person to correctly name all 48 staffers pictured below will win a secret prize! Submit your lists to [Lisa Schulman](#).

