



Mutual Aid: Let's Make Sure by Mike Crawford

Many years ago, I volunteered as a firefighter in the small town I lived in. In our response district we had three gas processing facilities. I often asked the Fire Chief what would happen if we had to respond to an incident in the facilities. The answer was always the same; "don't worry, they have their own response teams and won't need us".

Fast forward a few years and sure enough we get paged out to one of the facilities for a medical rescue. On arrival we encountered a male patient on a fixed mobile scaffold about 13 meters off the building floor. He had been performing inspections and somehow managed to bang his head resulting in an open skull fracture and ending up unconscious on the floor of the tiny scaffold.

I asked if the facility had a rescue team and was informed that, to paraphrase; "Billy retired, Fred transferred, the rest of us haven't trained in years and the equipment logs haven't been maintained". I put in a call to the nearest city and requested their high angle team. We did what we could for the patient who was eventually rescued and recovered.

For years this call stayed in my mind because of the lack of preparedness as well as the fact no one even thought to prepare. Fast forward 15 years to when I had retired from my municipal firefighter career and entered the energy and mining sectors.

In reviewing a number of ERP's, in the event of assistance frequently the plans stated to call the local towns fire department or nearby plants for help.

But what can your local town or plant provide? In the case of a town it might be a municipal sized engine with a crew of very good firefighters however they might have little to no industrial fire, medical or technical rescue experience. In the event of a major incident could they even help or want to help? Is it safe for them to be there? If activating mutual aid from a nearby site will they even be released from their site? Do they still have the equipment, staffing and training levels they had at the time the agreements were written?

By preplanning and having mutual aid agreements in place we protect ourselves from the distance and limited resources our remote site locations have. However, we must ensure that what we have available is really there. Through regular meetings, cross training and conducting exercises we can ensure what we think is available really is. During a response is not a time to discover it."

