

FIRE CHIEF'S MESSAGE

APRIL 2019

"The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is practice." – Vladimir Horowitz, classical pianist/composer
Practice makes perfect. In our case, we don't need perfection, we need precision.

Every year, members of the Los Angeles County Fire Department's (LACoFD) urban search and rescue (USAR) team train to keep their skillsets sharp and on point, so they are ready to go when they are called to task at a moment's notice.

As USA-2, our Department is one of two USAR teams that is deployed abroad by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) to help with incidents all over the world by providing search and rescue operations. The other team, our counterpart USA-1, is based out of Fairfax County, Virginia.



This year, the LACoFD hosted the 96-hour continuous USAR field training exercise at the Del Valle Regional Training Center in Castaic. It is an annual full-scale mock exercise for USA-1 and USA-2. This year's training started with a simulated alert, calling for USAR teams to assemble and deploy on April 1.

The mock scenario requested emergency assistance for several victims left trapped after a magnitude 7.1 earthquake hit Angeles City in the Philippines on March 31.

Members of USA-1 and USA-2 went through the entire process of packing up their cache, traveling to the airport, going through customs, setting up base camp, assigning specialized tasks, and then reporting to the incident scene.

At the scene, firefighters, along with doctors and structural engineers, methodically assessed the situation and performed whatever was necessary to save lives – no matter how long it took.

When you observe these simulated trainings, you gain a greater appreciation and deeper understanding of the skillsets our USAR team members must develop and refine over time. It takes dedication to sharpen those skills and true mental fortitude to focus on the duty at hand while processing what is currently happening as they are performing their tasks in highly stressful situations. This is where time and experience can mean the difference between life and death. There is not a minute to waste; we have to act with no room for error or second-thought.



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The Fire Chief's Message is a monthly communication from the Fire Chief of the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

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I applaud our USAR team members who possess a level of expertise that is world-class and uniquely specialized. They are not only important to our mission of protecting residents here at home but also those who depend on all over the country and world.

In fact, we welcomed observers from teams that are part of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group. Our visitors traveled from Australia, Colombia, Iceland, and Israel to watch and learn best practices from this year's training exercise. It provided a good opportunity to mutually share information, discover ways to improve our own operations, and foster working relationships in a learning environment.

It may not seem apparent to many just how valuable our USAR team members are until crisis hits. But I can assure you that they will know exactly how resourceful and skilled we are when it matters.

When we receive the call for assistance, our USAR team members are expected to hit the ground running and to perform at the highest level possible – and they always deliver. They are the Swiss Army knives of our Department with the ability to complete whatever tasks are asked of them in the darkest of conditions.

Thank you for your commitment to the mission and your compassion for humanity.



THANK YOU, DISPATCHERS

In 1991, the United States Congress enacted legislation to pay tribute yearly to telecommunications personnel. This year, "National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week" took place from April 14 through April 20, 2019.

During this celebratory week, we recognized our team members who staff the 9-1-1 dispatch center. They are truly the first, first responders!

I paid a visit to our Command and Control Division personnel and personally thanked them for their hard work and dedication. Our fire dispatchers calmly and compassionately provide the public with exceptional customer service during high-stress situations.

I commend each and every one of you for a job well done – and for always keeping our mission of protecting lives, property, and the environment at the forefront of everything you do.



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