

Implementing Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Trainings at Fresno Yosemite International Airport

The Learning Curve

As the primary commercial airport serving California's Central Valley and its three national parks, the Fresno Yosemite International Airport (FAT) is a regional hub that hosts emergency response units on site. FAT contracts for aircraft rescue and firefighting (ARFF) services with the Fresno Fire Department. As with any outsourced function, ARFF requires special attention to ensure optimized operations, which are especially critical for emergency response.

In 2005, the airport entered a new agreement with the city of Fresno, contracting for six firefighters from the municipal fire department to serve the on-airport ARFF station

24 hours a day, seven days a week. Initially, the contracted staff faced a steep learning curve to understand and accept ARFF procedures, protocols, and trainings. High staff turnover and leadership changes over the years amplified this challenge, so Kevin Meikle, Director of Aviation, and Alicia Miranda, Airport Operations Manager, turned to the ACRP library, where they often go to find best practices from a reliable source.

Meikle and Miranda found *ACRP Report 103: A Guidebook for Integrating NIMS for Personnel and Resources at Airports*, which addresses many of their concerns

“[ACRP Report 103] is a powerful tool to drive home the point that ARFF is important and can absolutely jeopardize safety if not properly implemented.”

— Kevin Meikle, Fresno Yosemite International Airport

around proper ARFF functions. *ACRP Report 103* ultimately was a key training tool to reinforce ARFF's unique nature (compared to other firefighting missions) and ensure that fire department leadership and staff knew ARFF culture and protocols.

Using ACRP Report 103

While *ACRP Report 103* broadly addresses integrating the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) into airport response plans, it also includes specific protocols for incorporating onsite emergency responders such as ARFF personnel.



FAT at sunrise, the airport's peak activity period.

Since 2006, ACRP has served as an industry-driven, applied research program that develops near-term, practical solutions to problems faced by airport operators.

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ACRP Report 103 presents all the elements needed to be included in an operations plan and the roles that different airport personnel can assume. For example, in case of an aircraft fire, the ARFF chief should serve as incident commander and coordinate staff activities while ensuring safety.

The report also describes lessons learned and best practices gathered from five airports. These case studies are organized into four categories: planning, training and evaluation, response, and communications. This information can help airports enhance their emergency response plans.

Developing Solutions

ACRP Report 103 also provides a customizable, Excel-based matrix of suggested training for airport staff. FAT staff found this tool particularly valuable to identify specific gaps in training and new areas to address.

Meikle and Miranda used this tool to highlight the differences and challenges ARFF presents compared to traditional municipal emergency response as they created their own training program. Miranda sat down with the report and highlighted the recommended positions and actions in the matrix that they could transfer to the airport's personnel structure. Some

of the highlights include:

- Identifying which ICS certifications are needed for each position.
- Developing an airport and ARFF-appropriate training program.
- Distributing *ACRP Report 103* to non-ARFF senior municipal leadership to disseminate as appropriate.

The airport is singularly responsible for the ARFF function and guides the training process. By using *ACRP Report 103's* guidelines and tailoring its recommended practices to the Fresno airport, the staff were able to validate their processes.

Positive Outcomes

Since the FAT staff initiated and shared the *ACRP Report-103*-inspired training

program, the Fresno Fire Department has gained a deeper understanding of the cultural, procedural, and operational differences of ARFF functions compared to traditional municipal fire department functions. Renewed communication and training efforts are now underway with staff from both departments. The training program helps to reinforce the differences between ARFF and traditional firefighting to municipal firefighters, and with this awareness, fire department leadership and firefighters now have a better understanding of ARFF trainings and airport procedures in general. Moving forward, Meikle hopes to continue using the training guide his team developed and to keep the airport's emergency responders as alert and prepared as possible in case any emergency events occur.



FAT's Oshkosh and Striker units pose with airport staff.

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