

NATIONAL HAZARDOUS MATERIALS FUSION CENTER

Focus Groups Report



U.S. Department
of Transportation
Pipeline and
Hazardous Materials
Safety Administration



Responders Helping Responders.

Background

On September 24, 2007 a cooperative agreement was entered into between the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to launch the National Hazardous Materials Fusion Center (Hazmat Fusion Center). The goal of the Hazmat Fusion Center is to enhance hazmat responder safety and improve decision-making for the prevention and mitigation of hazardous materials incidents through the systematic collection, analysis, and dissemination of information about hazmat incident responses. The National Hazardous Materials Fusion Center will provide a secure, web-based portal to serve as a data and information network for hazmat teams, first responders, federal, state and local agencies, and the private sector. Through this portal, they will share critical information to support the goal of the Hazmat Fusion Center.

In addition to the portal, the National Hazmat Fusion Center will collect, analyze, and disseminate information through Regional Incident Survey Teams (RIST). Each RIST is comprised of seven members from the hazmat community and is located in one of each of the five PHMSA regions. These teams respond post-incident to hazmat incidents by invitation of local or state jurisdictions or at the request of PHMSA. The goal of the RIST initiative is to develop and disseminate the lessons learned from unique hazmat incidents and then share best practices from surveyed incidents with the broader hazmat community.

Throughout the first year of the agreement, the Hazmat Fusion Center, in its mission to facilitate a bottom-up development process, reached out to the responder community, government agencies, and industry, engaging them in the conceptual development of the Hazmat Fusion Center. An Advisory Work Group made up of various subject matter experts representing the spectrum of the hazmat community met quarterly to shape and provide direction for the Hazmat Fusion Center's vision, conceptual framework, and development.

In the fall of 2008, five focus groups, one in each PHMSA region, were conducted to engage the broad hazmat population to share their opinions, needs, and insights about what the Hazmat Fusion Center should do and how it would operate to best support their needs. More information about the focus groups and how the feedback is being utilized are detailed throughout this report.

Fusion Center Focus Groups

The Focus Groups were conducted September through November in 2008, just a year after the IAFC and PHMSA entered into the cooperative agreement to form the Fusion Center. The dates and locations for each Focus Group are listed below.

Southwest: Dallas, TX	September 24, 2008
Southern: Atlanta, GA	October 23, 2008
Central: Chicago, IL	October 28, 2008
Eastern: Newark, NJ	November 13, 2008
Western: Seattle, WA	November 19, 2008

To provide a better understanding of these Focus Groups and respective findings, the Hazmat Fusion Center has generated this report. The design, approach and methods for the groups will be identified followed by their generated responses with a description of where the Hazmat Fusion Center is headed.

Design and Methods

The focus groups, facilitated and documented by a professional facilitator, asked a series of questions in five key areas of inquiry. The agenda was designed to capture a large amount of information about the preferences and opinions of a group of 20-40 participants. Attendees were made up from the broad hazmat community including responders, government agencies, industry, and others. Each focus group lasted from approximately 9:00 AM until 4:00 PM. Each session consisted of three segments:



- **Introduction to the National Hazmat Fusion Center (large group).** IAFC and PHMSA staff delivered presentations orienting participants to the vision, goals, and principles of the Hazmat Fusion Center. The presentations consisted of a video and PowerPoint slides. Data captured in this segment included initial impressions and feedback about a sample training product.
- **Content “Station” Work (small groups).** After receiving general instructions, participants were divided into small groups which rotated among six content stations, providing answers to questions in five key areas of inquiry:
 - The “Big Three”
 - General
 - Structure
 - Information
 - Products
- **Key Issues (large group).** Participants shared and discussed the key issues they discovered during their station work that they felt were important enough to the success of the Hazmat Fusion Center to highlight.

Focus Groups Findings

Initial Impressions During the Introduction

After a brief presentation about the National Hazmat Fusion Center, participants were asked for their initial impressions about the concept, vision, and goals of the Hazmat Fusion Center. Overall, comments were very positive and attendees were enthusiastic about the possibilities and implications of the Hazmat Fusion Center. Specific comments offered for consideration as the Hazmat Fusion Center building moved forward included:

- Great tool to put out quality training, deal with risk management and best practices
- Serve as benchmark for teams in similar situations
- Can create a good opportunity to share smaller incidents
- Long overdue
- Good bottoms-up approach
- Need to keep the training packages inexpensive.
- The Fusion Center needs to ensure access for volunteers
- Would be a good idea to partner with public health, OEM, CDC
- Should shoot for different formats (regional, timeframes)

Some of the concerns raised included:

- Duplication with other resources or incident reporting systems: Responder Knowledge Base, LLIS CHEMTREC, DOT 5800 report, CDP
- Confusion from using the term “Fusion”, with other “Fusion Centers” already existing and the term being linked to law enforcement & intelligence
- Small or corporate hazmat teams could look bad
- Possibility of bypassing the state
- Sustaining funding for the long term

“Stations” Work Questions

After initial impressions were captured, participants were broken into small groups to answer questions in six different “stations.” The following is a summation of the answers to the questions posed to the five different focus groups.

1. What would you like the Fusion Center to do for you?

Responses:

- Timely, useful, trends, analysis, collection location; educational tool that enhances safety; one-stop website that provides links to other data sites (NIOSH, MSDS); coordinate with CSB investigations; equipment test results; “Do not Do” list; learning points by training level: Operations, Tech., Command; structured training.
- Provide accurate, useful information that people can learn from for the mitigation of similar incidents and for the safety of personnel.
- Serve as an educational tool. Serve as problem identification tool.
- Provide an open forum to connect with other responders.
- Be a national-level voice for hazmat.
- Develop nationally recognized response procedures.
- Ensure quality and search ability.
- Send a weekly email that contains brief summary of new information posts to list of subscribers.
- Be careful not to whitewash sensitive information to the point of uselessness; find an effective balance.
- Safeguarding information is key.
- Provide a list of subject matter experts.
- Ensure access to volunteers.

2. What should the top three priorities be for the Fusion Center?

Responses (top three):

- Information (collection, dissemination, valid & up to date)
- Training
- Accessibility and usability

Other Common Responses:

- Security
- Networking
- Safety
- Lessons Learned

3. Why would you NOT use the Fusion Center?

Responses:

- If the information is not useful to the street-level responder, is not disseminated in a timely manner, or is not user-friendly
- If it was more difficult to use/access than similar sites.
- If there is too much unneeded information to sort through to find the important information
- If it is more work than help
- If it cost money to participate
- Fear of misuse of the data
- If it were too sanitized

4. What constitutes an incident worthy of Fusion Center involvement, particularly for a RIST call-out?

Responses:

- Injury to responder, near miss event, or one requiring 5800
- Any Hazmat/bio that meets specified list of criteria that is published by the Center; RIST team at request of local/corporate and/or criteria
- Any incident requiring active participation of an ER team
- For Fusion Center: Any incident that requires an entry by a Hazmat team. For RIST: Determined by incident size, duration, uniqueness, chemical involved
- A unique incident that provides lessons learned of benefit to many and increases situational awareness
- Cost, potential loss of life, environmental impact, universality vs. unusual
- County or state OEM request
- Invitation
- Regional or multi-jurisdictional event
- Based on IC decision
- Request for review by agency
- New and/or abnormal calls
- Large or lengthy mitigation
- Systems failure (PPE, monitoring, etc.) or process failure
- Outside the scope or capabilities of responding jurisdiction or other agencies involved (major incidents)

5. How do we name/define a “unit or team” and what information should the Fusion Center collect about them?

Responses:

- Every jurisdiction defines team/unit differently. Determine how each state defines this. Collect information on capabilities, training, experience, and authority.
- As defined by NIMS and regional authorities
- Teams should be state recognized/certified or meet OSHA definition of team.
- Recognized by state EMA
- Team assets—training requirements, equipment assets
- Base on training level: Awareness, operations, technical, specialist. Information: training and capabilities, NIMS type capability
- Let the team or unit tell the Fusion Center.
- There has to be some sort of structure to be called a team, along with some sort of endorsement with an emergency agency.
- Establish minimum requirements (IES 1910.120, NFPA), training records, certifications, CEU's, baseline compliance (both training and physical requirements, volunteer vs. career, local vs. regional).
- Group under control of one supervisor, whether a government (e.g. Ray, ND Rural Fire Department), industry (e.g. Robinson Lake Gas Plant), or contractor (e.g. SET Chicago Office)
- Experts or knowledgeable individuals similar to NTSB
- Just describe it. Each state uses different ways of defining their response teams and training. Training is not the same for technicians even with NFPA 472 out there.

6. Who should the Fusion Center contact to receive information about the number, location, and points of contact for the Hazardous Materials teams in your state/territory/agency?

Responses:

- Agency administration of record
- Poll all available agencies
- Predetermined by IAFC (Fusion Center)

7. Who should the Fusion Center contact to receive information about state and local Hazmat training requirements for emergency responders and minimum requirements for Hazmat technicians and Hazmat specialists?

Responses:

- The state mandated fire training institution if there is one - Maybe state fire marshal or state police
- State and/or local authority having jurisdiction over requirements and regulations
- State entity who licenses/certifies team, local fire departments
- State certifying authority or training standards
- The Hazmat Fusion Center is a good group to determine what a team is (at various levels).
- Per state law
- SERC
- Request a point of contact from the state. Have POC give information on requirements.

8. What collaboration systems such as online forums or chat rooms should the Fusion Center have, and how and where would you utilize them?

Responses:

- “Hosted” forum with facilitator
- Online search
- Weekly email summary of activity
- Forums; postable; no anonymous (must register and approve members)
- Online forum to post and answer questions
- Online forums that require registration
- Establish secure portal. Membership should be “approved” at local level. Establish “alert” networks similar to HAN (e.g. text/email). Provide web links.
- Forums on different subjects; chat rooms such as “Ask an Expert”
- Equipment blogs
- Blackboard with reporter information and a tab to send a private reply - No chat room



9. What information about you would you want shared with other members of the Fusion Center community and what would you like to know about them?

Responses:

- Size of department, size of team, urban or rural, paid or volunteer
- Training and experience, education level
- Job function or role if on incident, background and/or position, how to contact
- Department size, team make up, budget, run numbers
- Very little - If someone needs to contact me, they can get the Fusion Center to contact me with their information, then I have the option to contact them.
- Capabilities and equipment of our team; offers to provide assistance
- Name, title, organization, contact information
- National credentialing
- Internal legal policies for sharing information
- Information should be limited to what I want to disclose.

10. Should the Fusion Center differentiate between Hazmat team networking and individuals utilizing the Fusion Center? How would that be accomplished?

Responses:

- The Center should have group and individual access capability—a question and answer portal.
- Allow users to query database to select specific organizations.
- There should be a separation and/or ability for team vs. individual networking.
- Yes, teams should be isolated from non-team members or at least have that option available.
- Would like for Hazmat teams and/or individuals to access this. There are concerns that individuals may bypass their training officer and information may be misunderstood or not contribute to effective training.
- Teams do not log on (for data); individuals do. Why shouldn't an individual contractor be able?
- Could have registration for teams/members for certain information that might be sensitive.

- No. There may be jurisdictions that choose not to participate or do not have Hazmat teams, but individuals who seek out information on their own.
- Yes, do not let vendors have access for marketing or soliciting.
- No, everyone is there to accomplish the same goals.
- Yes, tiered access

11. Who should have access to information or reports and should a registered user system be implemented?

Responses:

- Registered user
- Everyone should register to use the system. Once you are registered, you should be able to access the information.
- There should be password protection and registered users if SOPs and SOGs are involved.
- Team members/participants and those doing research. A registered user system will be necessary for security.
- A tiered registered user system could be developed with team representatives having broader access to more service areas.
- Some information should be public, but not all of it.

12. What Hazmat incident information do you want captured? Do these data need to be consistent with NFIRS?

Responses:

- Need to know lessons learned, what happened that was not expected, what did you do that you would not do again?
- Scenario—what, when, where, why, weather conditions. Mitigation actions, population impacted, public information released, outcome, things you would do differently next time, injuries
- Chemical information, quantity shipped, container, time and date, weather, quantity released
- Chemical name, amount involved, container type (super bulk, bulk, IBC), packing group, evacuation, mode of transportation, wind direction and speed, synopsis of response, ideas for improvement, DOT/EPA reportable
- Run volume, types of incident, mitigation tactics, outcome/disposition
- What went wrong during response and how was it corrected?



13. What Hazmat incident reporting system(s) do you currently use?

Responses:

- Establish secure portal. Membership should be “approved” at local level. Establish “alert” networks similar to HAN (e.g. text/email). Provide web links.
- In house
- NFIRS
- County reporting
- INFRS
- NRC, accident data (large trucks)
- USDOT 5800 reports, FRA, FAA, FMCSA, PHMSA incident report and inspection reports
- EPA spill report
- Firehouse

14. Do you use an incident reporting software system? If yes, is it commercially available or one developed by the department, city, etc?

Responses:

- Firehouse software; commercially available
- RMS, FireRMS, commercially available
- SunPro; commercially available
- Yes, NFIRS-based reporting called “FireManager”
- Nationwide 5800 incident reporting, but only as good as the data supplied.
- Yes, county developed
- Yes, commercially available: IMC.
- No, all done on paper
- No, self-created forms
- Yes, commercial

15. Because the Fusion Center depends on you to submit incident information, what is your preferred method? (Web, phone, fax, etc.) How much time are you willing to take to accomplish report entry?

Responses:

- Web portal; 15-20 minutes
- FDM check-the-box format to speed the process up.
- All methods should be available.



16. Does someone with command authority need to sign-off on the report? If so, who?

Responses:

- Report to be submitted by team leader (IC submit report to team leader).
- Yes; Team OIC
- Yes, to prevent liability issues. This would come into play with a formal incident reported to Fusion Center. It should be left up to department to designate person.
- No; there should be an option to review to prevent venting.

17. Do you want the option to add anonymous comments or have anonymous reporting? If so, how?

Responses:

- No, there needs to be an accountability process for information submitted.
- Follow Near-Miss protocols. Should accept anonymous reports deemed credible by Fusion Center screening
- No anonymous anything for initial submission. The Fusion Center can set up criteria for “cleansing” the data before it is made public.
- No, then how would you ask questions or get clarifications?

18. How would additional/updated information be added after the initial report is filed?

Responses:

- Supplemental reporting; check box or by reporting number
- Add additional information as “addendum” to original report. Original report should not be altered.
- Marked or flagged as an amendment
- Originator has “super-user” status for that report only. All others would add comments, but not change or add to initial

19. Would you want other users of the Fusion Center to be able to contact you about your report?

Responses:

- Yes, email, phone, or fax.
- Yes, I would want to be able to be reached in case additional information is needed, etc.
- Yes, this would help answer any questions. Request via Fusion Center for clarification of reporting official
- Up to the discretion of the reporter
- No problem for contacting for general or generic information. Confidentiality would apply.

20. How would you prefer to find information in the Fusion Center – looking up specific reports, chemicals, geographic, search engine, etc.

Responses:

- All: by incident, chemical, geographic, date, injury/death, financial loss, hot topics, frequently requested reports
- Search function plus “new posts” listing
- Need several methods and be able to narrow search to specific information

21. What types of analysis would benefit you?

Responses:

- Most common incidents
- Most common materials
- Geographic areas of concern (higher incident rate)
- Training deficiencies identified
- Any container failures found to be common
- Routes unsafe for Hazmat transportation shared with state agency responsible for routing
- Failure rates
- Hazard class
- Method of transportation
- Types of agents involved
- Response actions
- Call volumes
- What not to do. Product problems; old product new (bad) uses
- Lessons learned and case studies
- Critique reports, NIFRS data consolidated, any video or audio, lessons learned, near misses, LODD
- Special circumstances
- What was the outcome?

22. What types of information products should the Fusion Center provide and in what format(s)?

Responses:

- Word, pdf, zip, wmv; electronic and downloadable
- CD/DVD, written reports, email reports of actions taken
- Alerts regarding significant incidents
- Training—all levels. Best practices, accurate statistical data, safety bulletins, contact information for other agencies, secured access to any Hazmat commodity, flow study data, resources for departments considering forming a response team
- Development of training aids, AARs, possibly have users be able to post lesson plans. Word and Excel
- Links to other information sites, links to training, links to equipment manufacturers. Format: online and downloadable
- Give run down on new products and testing equipment. Give out usable ideas on techniques used to mitigate situations.
- Training packages
- PowerPoint for training, 1-2 page summary of product
- Web-based courses

23. What types of training packages would benefit you?

Responses:

- Web-based, CDs, cheat cards, help stickers to jog memory
- Continuing education, Web-based training with a method of keeping track of individual's training hours
- PowerPoint and DVD with narrative of incident and lessons learned
- Manuals and guides, input cards, CDs, videos, PowerPoints, table tops, hands-on programs
- Internet pdf or sortable database format
- Video, instructors, case study exercises
- Help files, short training videos
- Web-based, interactive
- Mentoring by someone more knowledgeable

Key Issues

Based on the small-group work at the content stations, participants identified key issues they felt require more focused attention as the Fusion Center transitions from planning to operations. Key issues posed to and discussed with IAFC staff included:

Legal issues

- Protect from legal ramifications related to data collected being used in litigation
- Potential of information being collected and used under Freedom of Information Act
- Explore anonymity options, information confidentiality.

Security/access issues

- Easy to use, while still maintaining security
- Determine different levels of access.
- Use passwords.

Definition of unit/team

- Fusion Center could play a role in standardizing definitions for hazmat teams, authority level, and jurisdictions.
- Follow model that bomb community used for team configurations.

Information issues

- Keep it simply and current.
- Fill in information gaps, link to other resources.
- Provide opportunity for information sharing through interactive features like forums/discussion boards or live online chats.
- Credibility concerns, need to have a strong editor/monitoring of content and verification of information
- Provide constructive information on mistakes without assigning blame.

Standardization

- Help establish national standards for typing, education, and training.
- Create National Board for testing.
- Develop incident reporting template.

Training

- Need for training packages, serve as a tool for developing and distributing these packages
- Help formalize training nationwide.
- Provide training materials in a way that allows for upfront access.
- Make responders aware of training opportunities.

Relationships

- Work with law enforcement to share information.
- Push down through Chiefs to encourage data entry.
- Serve as a voice to legislators on funding.
- Work with state OES/DHS.
- Expand to other partners.
- Represent industry interests.

Other concerns

- Distrust, fear of punitive action
- Long term commitment of PHMSA/IAFC funding
- Scope is broad and must be narrowed to determine information attribution.
- Sustainability, maintaining interest so that it remains a valuable resources in hazmat response

Responders Helping Responders.



Moving Forward

The National Hazardous Materials Fusion Center is committed to continuing the bottom-up development process and is relying on the hazmat community at large to help operationalize the Hazmat Fusion Center. The results and feedback from the five focus groups have been used to develop the beta version of the National Hazardous Materials Fusion Center web-portal which is currently in the testing phase. Once the beta version is fully vetted, version one will be rolled out nationally during 2010. Demonstrations of the portal are being conducted at conferences throughout the country and at the National Hazardous Materials Fusion Center Symposiums. The first symposium was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on July 28, 2009 and was a success with about 150 people attending. More feedback about the design and functionality of the Hazmat Fusion Center portal was received at the symposium and changes will be incorporated in future versions of the portal. Plans are underway to hold symposiums in all five PHMSA regions.

Regional Incident Survey Teams are operational throughout the country and are currently surveying hazmat incidents. The RIST are developing reports that will share lessons learned and best and effective practices from those incidents without identifying the jurisdiction or assessing blame. If your area has experienced a hazmat incident that might provide valuable lessons learned for other responders across the country, please email your contact information to hazmatfusion@iafc.org.

As the focus groups noted, the hazmat community has needed something like the National Hazardous Materials Fusion Center for a long, long time. The Hazmat Fusion Center is about responders helping responders and assisting the Hazmat community to ensure the safety of the public when it comes to the production, transportation, handling, and use of hazardous materials. It will help revolutionize response to hazmat incidents while also improving daily interactions with hazardous materials and substances. For more information or to receive updates, please email hazmatfusion@iafc.org or visit www.hazmatfc.com.



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