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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ISSUES
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

Launching Emergency Management Leadership

(What we've got here is a) Failure To Communicate

TRADE
Emergency Management Issues
Special Interest Group
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Failure to Communicate

"**What we've got here is (a) failure to communicate**." Some men you just can't reach. So you get what we had here last week, which is the way he wants it…well, he gets it. I don't like it any more than you men."

"Cool Hand Luke" **circa 1967**

Background

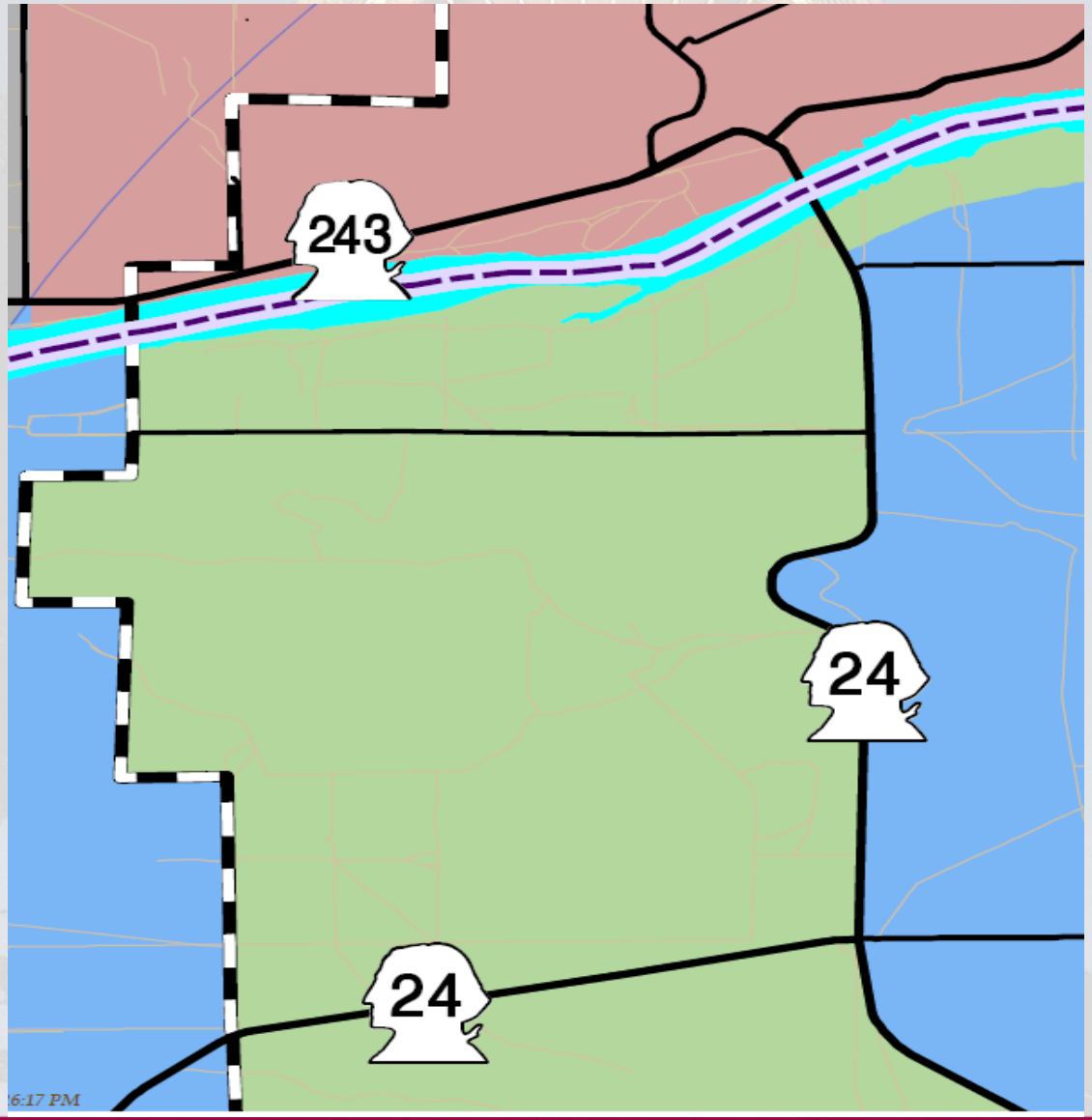
- The Hanford Site is an environmental remediation site with most of its 25 hazardous facilities in surveillance, decommissioning, or remediation mode.
- In order to initiate emergency response including event classification, decision makers must generally rely on field information from witnesses.
- Verbal communication of event conditions is critical to the decision making process.

Premise

- Communicating event conditions is critical to the decision making process. However:
  - Eyewitness accounts of events often are unreliable.
  - Communication of information during high stress situations is often inaccurate or incomplete.
  - When an individual is provided with incomplete information, they tend to make assumptions (fill in the blanks) based upon their knowledge and experience.
- An Emergency Response System can be derailed by a single point failure.

Hanford Site

Examples



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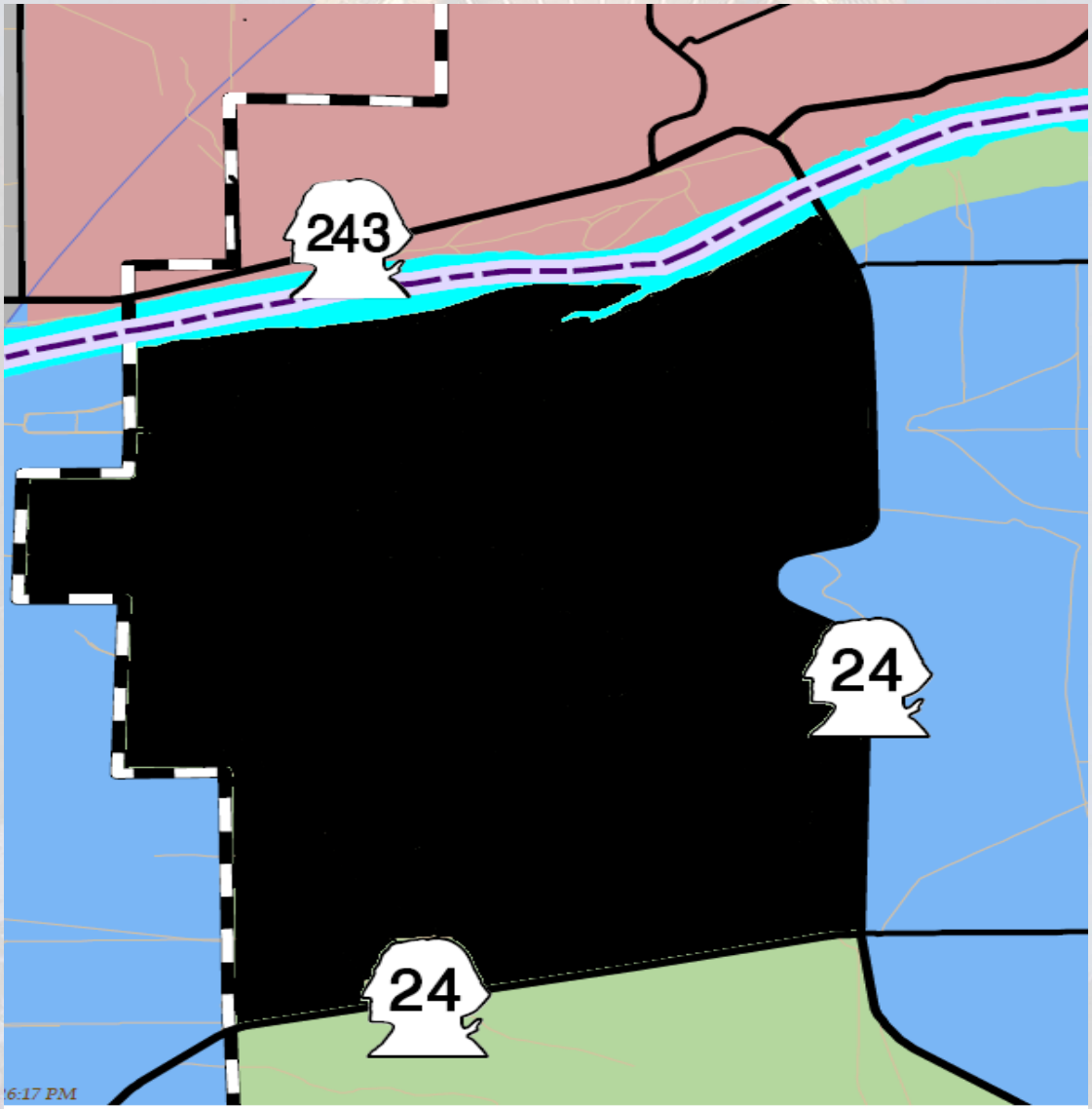
Examples



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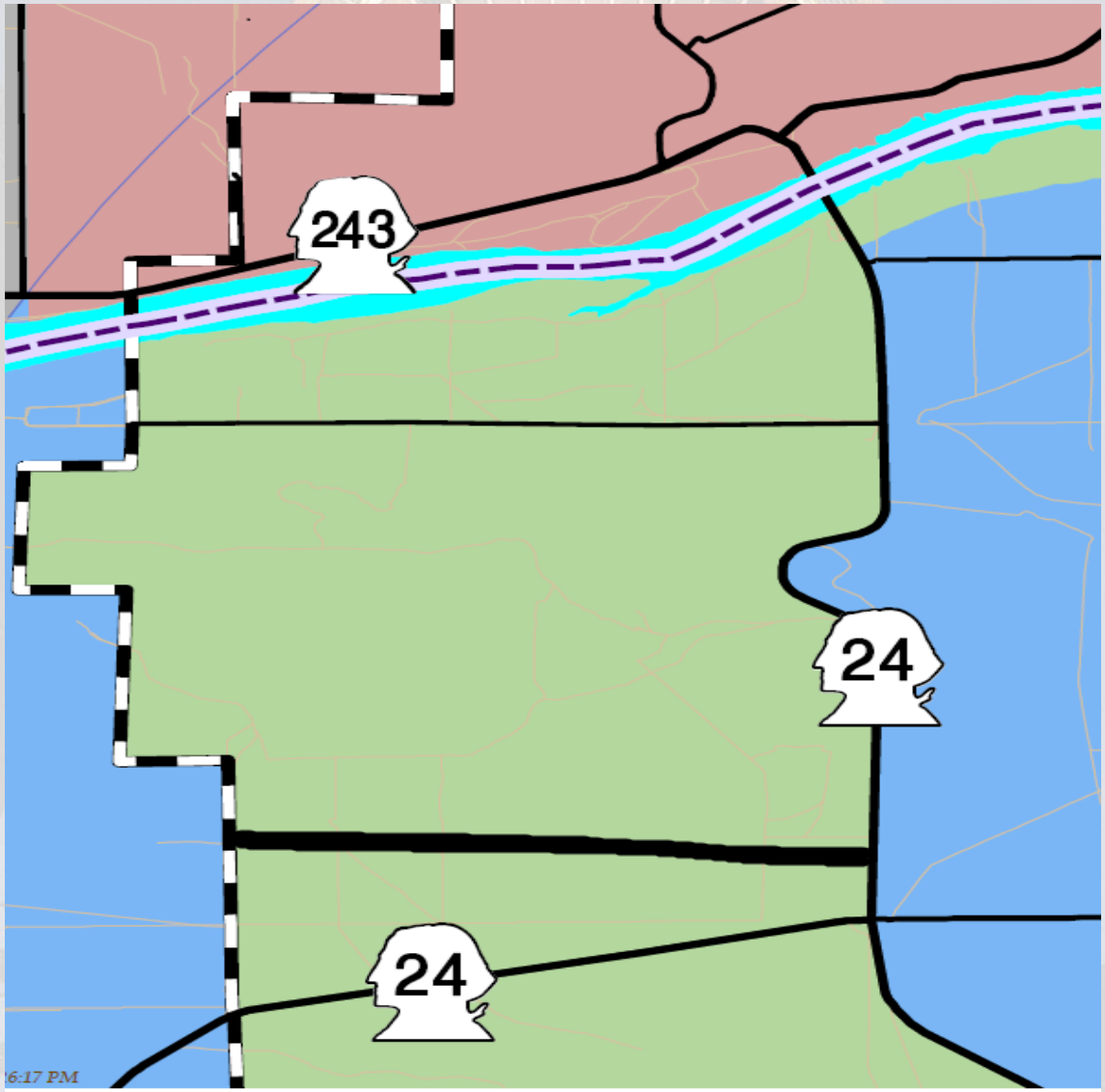
Examples



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Examples

- During an exercise, correct information about a confirmed hazardous material spill from a fuel truck was reported to the Building Emergency Director.
- The Building Emergency Director did not retain all the details provided and assumed the spill was small and non-hazardous.
- Personnel dispatched to investigate were not directed to respond from a safe location, resulting in them being too close to the spill.

Examples

- During an actual event involving a truck accident and a potentially contaminated patient, emergency service responders were told by radiological control that the completed radiological surveys concluded there was no contamination found on the injured patient.
- This was understood by emergency services to mean the patient was clear for transport and did not require any further contamination control or surveys.

Examples

- In actuality, not all required surveys had been completed to allow the patient to be released.
- This misunderstanding resulted in a delay in dispatch of site radiological support resources to the hospital.

Causes

- Witness memory
  - *Mental lapse*
- Receiver memory
  - *Mental lapse*
- Poor communications technique
  - *Verification not used*
- Time constraints
  - *Too much activity*
  - *Insufficient time*
- Assumptions
  - *Incorrect assumption*
- Communications chain
  - *Communications between groups less than adequate*

Common Denominator

Human Performance

Consequences

- Inaccurate classification/categorization
  - *Inappropriate protective actions*
- Incorrect or inadequate resources
- Response to incorrect location
- Response delays
- Damage control

Barriers

- If possible, provide tools to personnel who are likely to witness events that must be reported in order to record event details as soon as possible to prevent loss of critical information.
- Three way communication is essential to ensure correct details of a reported event.
- Persons receiving a report should ask questions to gain needed additional information based upon knowledge of response procedures.
- Minimize reporting chains.
- Recognition of human performance issues and minimize reliance on verbal communication.
  - *Technology*
  - *EALs*
  - *Response Procedures*

Summary

- Communication is fundamental to emergency response.
- There are numerous potential barriers to good communication that can affect response.
- Strive to minimize the potential for communication errors, and …
- Minimize the impact of communications errors on response.