

Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) History

In the early 1980s, the Fairfax County VA Fire & Rescue and Metro-Dade County FL Fire Department created elite search-and-rescue (US&R) teams trained for rescue operations in collapsed buildings. Working with the United States Department of State and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, these teams provided vital search-and-rescue support for catastrophic earthquakes in Mexico City, the Philippines and Armenia.

EMA established the National Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Response System in 1989 as a framework for structuring local emergency services personnel into integrated disaster response task forces.



In 1991, FEMA incorporated this concept into the Federal Response Plan (now the National Response Framework), sponsoring 25 national urban search-and-rescue task forces.

Events such as hurricane Andrew in 1992, the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City, the Northridge earthquake, the Kansas grain elevator explosion in 1998 and earthquakes in Turkey and Greece in 1999 underscore the need for highly skilled teams to rescue trapped victims.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 thrust FEMA's Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) teams into the spotlight. Their important

work transfixed a world and brought a surge of gratitude and support.

Today there are 28 national task forces staffed and equipped to conduct round-the-clock search-and-rescue operations following earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, aircraft accidents, hazardous materials spills and catastrophic structure collapses. These task forces, complete with necessary tools and equipment, and required skills and techniques, can be deployed by FEMA for the rescue of victims of structural collapse

IL-US&R TF-1 is an asset of MABAS-IL and serves as the State of Illinois' Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Taskforce. IL-TF1 is a Type I

US&R team which is modeled after and in compliance with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) / Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) US&R system. As a US&R team, IL-TF1 is trained, equipped and prepared to respond to all-hazard emergencies and disasters, both natural and man-made, which involve significant collapse of multiple, large and/or heavyweight constructed structures. A Type I US&R team responds with a compliment of 80 highly trained members that specialize in a wide variety of rescue and support functions including: search and rescue management teams, planning, safety, rescue, technical search, hazardous materials, communications, medical and logistics components.

These components are supported by canines which are trained and able to conduct physical searches and heavy rescue operations in damaged or collapsed reinforced concrete buildings. Each task force can be divided into two 35 member teams to provide 24-hour search and rescue operations.

Self-sufficient for the initial 72 hours, the task forces are equipped with convoy vehicles to support over the road deployments and can be configured into Light Task Forces to support weather related disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding incidents, earthquakes, and other similar incidents. IL-TF1 is ready to respond and deploy to all-hazard disasters throughout the State of Illinois. Furthermore, through an authorized Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), IL-TF1 can respond to any location within the United States.

A network of regional fire service based MABAS-IL Technical Rescue Teams (TRT) are available to protect the citizens of Illinois every day. Leaders in the Illinois fire and emergency management services recognized the need for an advanced US&R team to support the MABAS-IL TRT teams. Additionally, an advanced US&R team provides the skills, equipment, expertise, components, and response capabilities which the regional TRT teams potentially lack. MABAS-IL agreed to be the sponsoring entity for a FEMA equivalent Type I US&R team in Illinois. As a result, IL-US&R TF-1 was created and established in 2002.



IL-TF1 maintains a FEMA equivalent equipment cache. The equipment cache is based in the Chicago metropolitan area and is transportable either by ground or through air transport.

IL-TF1 is primarily staffed by personnel from fire departments throughout Illinois. Members are selected based on their training, experience and support from their local fire department. Civilian personnel such as, medical physicians, canine search handlers, structural engineers, may staff certain team position specialties.

Written by Team Members