

## Sri Lanka Disaster Simulation Exercise

### The Challenge

Sri Lanka was one of the Southeast Asian countries impacted by the December 26, 2004, tsunami. This natural disaster devastated 75 percent of its coastal belt, displaced 44,500 people and left an estimated 3,800 dead.

### The Solution

Beginning in 2006, the US Forest Service began delivering Incident Command System (ICS) training as part of a United Nations (UN) initiative titled the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System. This comprehensive preparedness effort was designed to enable more effective governmental response to future disasters. During the spring of 2007, the Northeastern Area (NA) participated in the Forest Service International Programs Initiative offering disaster preparedness programs to the Sri Lanka National Disaster Management Centre. As the ICS training was being completed, the Sri Lankan government started preparing to test their new incident management plans and team skills in a full-scale disaster exercise. Meetings with an exercise development team in late March set the stage for conduct of the exercise at the end of June. The Galle District at the southwestern tip of Sri Lanka had been particularly hard hit in the 2004 tsunami and was suggested as the focus for the exercise. A soccer field near the Police Emergency Communications Center became the Incident Command Post for the exercise, with communication links to the District Secretariat Emergency Operations Center some four kilometers distant. Local police, fire and emergency medical services, public works department employees, environmental spill responders, electric power utility workers, and Sri Lankan Red Cross staff all had roles in the exercise.

### Resulting Benefits

With ICS training to enable a managed team response, other UN efforts helped rebuild emergency response infrastructure, tsunami warning systems, and disaster

*Incident Command System training will help improve Sri Lanka's response to disasters such as the tsunami in 2004.*



John Grosman, Northeastern Area fire training officer, and Hiranthe Senaratne of the Sri Lanka Disaster Management Centre go over plans for the exercise. (Photo credit: John Grosman)

response plans. NA, acting as a consultant, helped the Sri Lankan incident management team (IMT) create exercise development and evaluation plans. The resulting 3 ½ hour exercise included 25 simulated disaster inputs, covering mass casualties, interruption of electronic communications, civilian medical and fire emergencies, environmental impacts requiring timely intervention, and civilian evacuations. The exercise tested understanding of ICS within a division-level unit of the Disaster Management workforce and key local cooperators. It helped identify areas to improve the local disaster management response plan and fit it to ICS structures. Overall, the group performed admirably during the exercise.

### Sharing Success

The Sri Lanka Simulation Team facilitated a group discussion with participants at the end of the effort to acknowledge individual success, and identify needed improvements for future emergency response.

Sri Lankan ICS cadre that helped develop the simulation exercise will continue to use Federal Emergency Management Administration exercise design resources in future training.

The group receiving the ICS training will continue developing additional IMTs, while themselves serving key IMT roles in any disaster response, anywhere within the country.



USDA Forest Service  
Northeastern Area  
State and Private Forestry

#### For more information, contact:

Kathryn P. Maloney, Area Director  
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200  
Newtown Square, PA 19073  
Phone: 610-557-4103  
Email: kmaloney@fs.fed.us

Billy Terry, Assistant Director  
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200  
Newtown Square, PA 19073  
Phone: 610-557-4145  
Email: bterry@fs.fed.us