

ICECAP Newsletter – June 2001

New ICECAP Download Site

An updated version of ICECAP is now available via <http://fire.ak.blm.gov>

Select the ICECAP link (bottom left) and then choose the ICECAP configuration that is right for you. Remember to update your bookmarks.

What is ICECAP?

ICECAP is an easy-to-use incident based computer program designed to check in, track, and manage incident resources and produce incident action plans. ICECAP's combination of productivity, ease of use, quality products, and stability sets it apart from other incident software.

ICECAP has been used on incidents of all types, sizes, and complexities. At a minimum, it can be used as an ICS forms package. Even new users find they are able to complete standard ICS forms using ICECAP faster than they can by hand or using other templates. ICECAP is routinely used on the largest incidents in the U.S. and is easily scaleable as incidents grow and shrink.

ICECAP = Incident **C**ommand **E**asy **C**omputer **A**pplication

ICECAP News – Users Want to Share

2000 was an incredible fire season. It was also an incredible year for ICECAP. Its popularity and acceptance far exceeded expectations. ICECAP is not aggressively marketed, nor does it have an extensive training program so most teams and individuals learn about it through word of mouth or by seeing others use it. Over 70% of the ICECAP support calls in 2000 dealt with just two issues – how to convert an existing IRSS database to an ICECAP system and how to share data so both programs could be used together. ICECAP excels as a Planning and general use tool but it lacks Finance tools—it does not compute costs or post time.

In 2000, some teams used ICECAP just for the superior IAP forms. Many teams used primarily one software package or the other, and then manually re-entered data to use ICARS for cost reports or ICECAP for demob. Some (with technical expertise or support) exchanged data between the two. Clearly, incident personnel recognize the advantages of both programs and want to exploit the best features of both with a minimum of hassle. Exchanging data between ISUITE and ICECAP is a top priority for incident personnel so it is also a priority for me.

Although previous versions of IRSS had import/export ability, the 2000 rewrite neglected this functionality. Therefore the import and export routine that allowed an easy exchange of data in 1999 no longer works. Until IRSS revives its import/export format, incident personnel must either limit the tools they have available, endure a manual import/export process, or duplicate effort.

New Features in the June 2001 Release

New 209 – Updated to the latest NWCG standard. Using the old form is still an option. Import / Export functionality with IRSS / ISUITE

Demob module – includes full planning & processing capability and the standard ICS forms.

Enhanced T-card module – produce quality T-cards using standard T-card stock.

Simpler setup for a new incident and networking.

Expanded preferences facilitate full control and flexibility over 14-day and R&R date calculations.

Team member contact management and team import.

Enhanced user-defined quick reports – customizable templates or build from scratch.

Enhanced built-in Help, tips, and documentation. ICECAP allows you to be self-sufficient.

Numerous interface enhancements were also made and all reported bugs have been fixed. Your feedback continues to make a difference.

ICECAP Training

Training is not essential to effectively use ICECAP. Its intuitive design is optimized for use by typical incident personnel rather than computer specialists. However, previous experience or training with ICECAP will dramatically affect productivity and effectiveness – particularly during the first few days of an incident.

New users are encouraged to “test drive” ICECAP prior to using it during an ongoing incident. Users that spend an hour exploring the functionality and reading the tips will be much more productive at all stages of the incident.

ICECAP workshops benefit those that desire a more formal ICECAP learning environment, team members who intend to use ICECAP together, and anyone who wants to learn the advanced features of ICECAP. The workshops also cover finding, sorting, and rearranging resource data, as well as creating custom reports and advanced data management. If you, your agency, or your team are interested in hosting or attending a one-day ICECAP workshop, contact me via e-mail.

NWCG Sanctioned Incident Software

There is considerable misinformation on this topic. Despite claims to the contrary, the NWCG currently does not fund, support, or sanction any incident software. In February of 2001, the NWCG established the Interagency Incident Automation Task Group to “collaborate, review, and evaluate current business practices at emergency incident situations surrounding the use of ISUITE, INCINET, and ICECAP to determine the feasibility of blending these systems into one, or incorporating parts of any of the applications into one to establish a system that meets user needs on an interim basis.”

The Task Group is specifically chartered to evaluate the three software packages on how well they meet the Finance and Planning Section needs, as well as their potential for system growth and interaction with other applications. The Task Group is scheduled to present its recommendations in September of this year.

Over the next few years (the interim basis referred to before) NWCG will likely support the recommendations of the Task Group. Beyond that, either an existing package or perhaps a new package will evolve to more fully meet incident needs.

On a related topic, most federal agencies require approval to purchase software such as FileMaker Pro (FMP) if it is not part of the standard-issue agency software package. As

just one example of the utility and agency acceptance of FMP, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service about one year ago purchased 1700 copies of FileMaker Pro for their daily operations. For an agency technical approval, the justification that ICECAP is an essential tool necessary to do your job is widely used and accepted. This is similar to Engineers needing AutoCAD or GIS technicians using Arc View.

It is a fact that some individuals believe that a word processor is an adequate IAP production tool. They would probably be equally happy using it for engineering and GIS. I have not encountered anyone who needed FileMaker Pro for ICECAP that was unable to obtain it. Since interagency teams are interagency, it may be easier for some team members than others to obtain it for the team.

Producing IAP's with ICECAP

Most personnel who have ever used ICECAP to produce an Incident Action Plan (IAP) would dread producing it any other way. If you're producing handwritten plans initially or using word processing templates to produce an IAP, you have not experienced the speed and efficiency of producing IAP's with ICECAP. And here's the kicker – you can produce your first IAP with ICECAP faster and better than you can by hand or using any other method. So you don't waste productivity waiting for systems to get set up or databases to be filled. ICECAP's stability, ease of use, interface, and quality products are also major selling points.

Sharing Data Between ICECAP and ISUITE

Except for CDF which uses InciNet almost exclusively, most large incident management organizations use ISUITE or ICECAP or some combination of the two. Although the programs compete with each other to some degree, they also complement each other. ISUITE certainly has the advantage in tracking costs and, new for this year, posting time.

Repeatedly, users like you have requested that these programs be able to share data to reap the advantages of both. This can be done in at least 2 ways – importing data from one program to the other or actually sharing the same database.

As stated before, the import / export capability of IRSS was lost in 1999. If this fairly simple feature is reactivated, incident personnel will have a relatively quick and simple way to share or exchange data.

In the meantime, ICECAP has an import / export function that uses an export of the IRSS Resource List. Currently, to export data out of IRSS, you need Microsoft Access 2000. Most teams have this software as part of the Microsoft Office software.

Using ODBC to access a single database from both programs is also being pursued. ODBC stands for Open Database Connectivity. This standard interface allows software such as IRSS and ICECAP to access data from different systems. Although this has the potential to be the best and simplest solution for users, it may take some time to develop. Stay tuned.

Using ICECAP as an ICS Forms Package

Although it pains me a little to say so, using ICECAP simply as a forms package is a valid option. Even though you lose the huge benefit of assigning resources from a pick list, and instead, type them in, you can still produce an IAP faster (and much more professional looking) than using the word processing templates many still use.

You still have the relational advantages between all the forms (the names you assign on the Organizational Assignment List still auto-fill into all the other forms), you only type the incident name once, and you'll never have to type in any dates, times, or operational periods on the IAP. Entering radio frequencies only once and not worrying about transposing digits as these roll into the 204, 206, and 220 is a timesaver and safer too. Naming, storing, organizing, and performing searches through all the forms is far easier with ICECAP than managing dozens or hundreds of word processing documents.

Using ICECAP as an ICS forms package is possible using either the runtime or the standard version. You can place the ICECAP runtime version on all of your computers and use them separately (and at \$0 cost), or, by adding FileMaker Pro software and the standard version of ICECAP, network the computers together for greater efficiency.

For those of you who may be nervous about giving up the familiarity of a word processor, relax. Even though ICECAP auto-fills information to help you enter it quickly and accurately, you can always change it by just selecting it and typing. ICECAP also offers extensive text formatting, rulers, tabs, and a spelling checker. ICECAP forms don't "fall apart" if you try to squeeze extra text into a block. Simply drop the font size down a notch to make it fit.

What's Next?

The fire community's response to ICECAP over the past 2 years has been phenomenal. I appreciate the interest and support you've given to ICECAP. ICECAP is a solid incident management tool but its list of features and functionality continues to expand. Currently, I'm focusing on 3 primary areas of ICECAP development: Enhancing existing ICECAP functionality, developing additional features (primarily forms), and improving interoperability with other programs. Whenever a significant feature is completed, I'll post an updated version on the ICECAP web site.

ICECAP has some built-in functionality that I personally have not exploited but some of you have. Many are aware that the standard version of ICECAP has instant Web publishing capabilities. Additionally, the underlying software also harnesses advanced technologies to exchange information with Palm OS devices, use bar code readers, and exchange data using two-way dynamic ODBC. If you are currently using or are planning to use these or other features with ICECAP, please contact me so I can pass on the benefits of your pioneering efforts. If you have ODBC experience and are interested in assisting with development or testing of this functionality with ICECAP, please contact me. As always, I encourage (and respond to) feature requests, bug reports, or general support questions.

Lastly, this newsletter is only distributed to those who have specifically asked for it (200+). Please help distribute this widely to those who may have an interest in ICECAP. If you wish to receive future ICECAP newsletters and did not receive this mailing directly, request a subscription to the ICECAP Newsletter via the email address below.

Have a safe and productive summer!

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