



California Wing Liaison Officer Course



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Overview: The purpose of the Liaison Officer in the Incident Command System (ICS)

Search and rescue operations require the cooperation and assistance of many various agencies and widely dispersed facilities. CAP units must coordinate and cooperate closely with primary and secondary agencies whether they are military, civilian or foreign. The purpose of liaison and coordination is to pre-plan mutual assistance and eliminate duplication and confusion through joint operation procedures and agreements.

The text in the Table of Contents is hyper linked to allow you to find subjects faster when you come back after completing this course and are using it for reference. Once you get there, you will find an arrow on the toolbar above (pointing to the left) that will put you right back where you came from. When this document was converted into a Adobe PDF file the links moved to just below the hyper linked text. One the mouse cursor (a hand) changes to a pointing hand; you know you have found the link.

Liaison Officer duties and responsibilities

A Mission Liaison Officer, or LO, works closely with the CAP Incident Commander (IC) providing assistance to determine necessary tasking for non CAP originated resources. These resources may consist of personnel, material, or both, covering multiple jurisdictions. This position is within the Command staff structure of the ICS.

During larger incidents or events, representatives from other agencies (usually called agency representatives) may be assigned to the incident. To coordinate their agency's involvement during the mission, the Liaison Officer will be their primary contact.

The role of the Liaison Officer during the Incident/Mission

First, let us take an overview of the organization of an Incident management team. There are many major areas of any Incident/Mission operation in CAP. Each of these elements drives the Incident/Mission to a successful conclusion. Let's review each element in order that you, as a Liaison Officer, can understand and direct the proper agency information.

- Command
- Air Operations
- Ground Operations
- Communications
- Logistics
- Administration
- Safety

Command - Simply put, this is the person in charge of the Incident/Mission, the Incident Commander or IC. This individual is responsible for the successful execution of the Incident/Mission from the beginning through its conclusion or suspension. The person has complete authority over all CAP resources. You should identify yourself to this individual as soon as possible. Ask for his needs and keep him informed of your progress.

Air Operations – Air Operations is typically supervised by an Air Operations Branch Director. This person directly supervises the Air Search and Rescue. All CAP aircraft are under the control of this person. Tasking, briefing, debriefing and the overall welfare of the aircrews is under this person's area of responsibility.

Ground Operations – This operation is supervised by a Ground Branch Director. This person directly supervises the Ground Search and Rescue; all CAP ground vehicles and personnel are under his control. His responsibilities also includes tasking, briefing, debriefing and the overall welfare of the Ground Teams.

Communications – Communications is supervised by a Communications Unit Leader. This person is responsible for coordinating communication and supervising the radio network used to talk to all CAP personnel during the Incident/Mission. This person is a key element in Command and Control of the Incident/Mission. The old phrase, "...there is no Command and Control unless you can talk to the troops!" is very true.

Logistics- The Logistics Section Chief is responsible for getting appropriate people and material once the need is identified.

Administration- There are other members of the administration staff. The Operations Section Chief has over all supervision of the operations and is responsible for coordinating all CAP efforts. The Information Officer is the only person, other than the IC, who is to act as spokesperson with outside agencies. You don't want to end up on the 11:00 News by talking to the press on your own! Always refer them to the IO or the IC. The Planning Section Chief is responsible for identifying and preparing people and personnel needed to successfully execute the Incident/Mission.

Mission Safety Officer- It is an all-encompassing job during the Incident/Mission to ensure the safety and welfare of each participating member. The Mission Safety Officer will usually be "roaming" the area to detect any possible safety issues. He has the "ear" of the IC and is viewed by our Air Force component as an extremely valuable asset.

How would you work with each of these people? Your job as Liaison Officer requires that you know and work with all of these people. You should introduce yourself to each of the people in these offices. It is very important that you know them by name and that they know who you are and what your role is on the base. If the power structure does not know that you are available to help them with there task, you will not be effective.

Here are some examples of tasks that you might be asked to do. The Incident Commander may ask you to call or talk to someone at some another agency. You will need to know how to contact this person and what the IC wants from them. The Air Operations Branch Director may be ask you to talk to the Federal Aviation Administration representative in order to get permission for CAP aircraft to fly in a certain area not normally allowed. The Ground Branch Director might ask you to coordinate with the State Forestry service in order to get permission to travel in a restricted

area of a National Park. The Communications Unit Leader may ask you to contact a member of the local Federal Communications Commission regional office to request the use of special frequencies that would be of benefit to CAP in the present incident. Or, the Information officer might need your help in getting a camera crew into a restricted area. Last but not least, the Mission Safety Officer may need your help in contacting a construction crew in order to try and get them to stop working in an area that is felt to create a safety issue for the CAP mission participants.

Liaison Officer do's and don'ts

In many cases the Liaison Officer is the ONLY person an outside agency will communicate with during the Incident. This puts a heavy responsibility on a Liaison Officer to communicate effectively. It is extremely important that the requirements of **both** the Incident and the outside agency be effectively communicated to the other party. For an example, if the IC wants you to get in touch with the local Wal-Mart to ask them for permission to use their parking lot as a staging area for ground vehicles, you have to find out whom to get the permission from, ask and get permission. Then, pass the "word" back to the IC as soon as possible. If you talk to the Wal-Mart Manager as though you were "God", in a condescending manner, this reflects directly on the view that manager will have of the CAP. You absolutely must be diplomatic at all times.

In order to serve as a CAP Liaison Officer you must have a highly developed sense of people skills. Tact and political sensitivity are essential.

- (1) DO identify yourself and your needs simply and politely.
- (2) DO be courteous and friendly at all times. Even though the other agency person may act like a jerk.
- (3) DO respond to the CAP requests as quickly as possible.
- (4) DO ask...you can't demand anything from anybody. You do not have the weight of authority that the Air Force has. You may have to use that later.
- (5) DO get your requests in writing if you can. It helps the agency; it helps you communicate better. It is better to have simple handwritten notes, than a poor memory. Remember that we usually are doing a SAR Incident/Mission to save lives. Complete, clear communication is vital to our life saving duty.
- (6) DO know EXACTLY what the CAP requestor wants! You can't effectively communicate the CAP need to an agency person unless you understand it yourself. This may require you to ask the CAP requestor to explain further to you the details of the request.
- (7) DON'T order anybody around! You don't have the authority and this never works anyway! We always ask. Your agency contact will be ready to help if you ask and don't tell.
- (8) DON'T delay your communications or requests. Lives may be at stake!
- (9) DON'T talk to Law Enforcement members without going through the chain of command. Respect their authority.
- (10) DON'T leave your CAP requestor without a clear understanding of what they want. You might have to explain what the CAP wants! If it's too technical, bring somebody from CAP that can explain it for you.
- (11) DON'T assume anything in your communication with the other agency. You need to find out when and how we can get what the CAP wants.
- (12) DON'T embarrass the CAP in front of the agency. Use your best, smoothest, professional CAP approach to the job.

Liaison Officer image

As a CAP member you have a certain image to present to your fellow members, to our Air Force partners, to the general public, and to the agencies which you work with directly during an Incident/Mission. Above all, we must ACT professional at all times. There are two critical elements to a Liaison Officer's job that MUST be followed. Your IMAGE is very important. Dress for the part. Your CAP uniform MUST be correct, clean and appropriate for the occasion. CAP

requires your uniform for the Incident/Mission to be either CAP style or Air Force style. We wear Air Force style apparel with the Air Force's permission as long as we conform to the Air Force weight and grooming standards. When we wear the Air Force style uniform, most people think WE ARE THE AIR FORCE! Act accordingly. A uniform brings with it a certain respect. But worn incorrectly, sloppily and uncleanly, destroys the professional image we all work hard to earn. Show up in front of your agency counterpart "looking sharp!" The ATTITUDE that a Liaison Officer must have is a positive "can do" attitude. You are directed to communicate with, or solicit help from, another agency. This agency is important to CAP in order to get the SAR job done. If you approach the task, no matter how daunting it may seem, you will find a willing participant as your agency counterpart. If you find that you don't like the job of Liaison Officer, let someone else do it! It is critical that you don't "drop the ball." We will find someone else to do it. A poor attitude or non-responsive attitude in this job is unacceptable. Keep in mind, your agency counterpart will hear your request, and then respond to you. Communicate with the CAP requestor as soon as possible.

Agencies you may work with

Law Enforcement agencies whether local, county, state, federal are somewhat paramilitary in structure. You should know the local Police Chief and County Sheriffs are GOD! Respect their authority. Because they live in the areas affected by our Incident/Mission, some jurisdictional issues can arise. It is far better to ask for their help than to try and tell them what they need to do to help you. Try putting the ball in their court first, they know the area much better than you do.

CAP already has a limited, defined, working relationship with the Red Cross. We may ask for more than they are used to providing, however. They have tremendous experience in handling disasters of all kinds and all scales. Ask them for assistance and listen to what they have to offer.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the "disaster agency" of the Federal Government, is well organized, stratified, but mostly staffed for large disasters. They probably will not be ready to respond to the kind of requests that the typical SAR mission might make.

The Federal Aviation Administration has over all jurisdiction over all civilian aviation, which includes CAP. However, special requests can be made from local control towers, air traffic control centers and flight service stations.

The US Air Force can move mountains for CAP "in a pinch". Each CAP Wing has a State Director just for the purpose of CAP and Air Force cooperation. Be warned though, check with the powers that be before launching along this route.

Fire Departments have territorial jurisdictions that may limit their ability to respond to our needs. Be sure you are dealing with the department that has jurisdiction over the area that you are interested in.

The Department of Forestry is a small cadre but they are very responsive. You should get help even when dealing with the local office.

Most State Agencies have lower level staffers communicate with CAP. They usually have many layers before you get some answers so if you need them, start early and expect to work for their support.

The office of the Mayor or Governor will usually will help you. The person that you are usually dealing with is mostly a facilitator and the help that you get will probably take some time and there are usually lots of restrictions placed on the help. Only when the Mayor or Governor gets directly involved will things happen really fast.

Other political officials sometimes get involved. Particularly when a family member or someone from their jurisdiction is an object of the search. This type of influence is general in nature as it relates to the total CAP effort.

Occasionally CAP asks for help from private agencies. They tend to be more flexible in most cases. Usually we get excellent cooperation.

We all have worked with the “government” in some way shape or form in our daily lives. When we go to the DMV to get our driver’s license, or go to the courthouse for trial or jury duty. We recognize that government, at any level, can be severely structured. We must respect the structure. It may appear very bureaucratic at times, which may be frustrating when lives are at stake. But we must remain calm, patient and understanding.

Your Liaison Officer position allows you to explain why we need what we need and why we may need it quickly. As a last resort, through the good offices of our Air Force partners, we can usually get government to move more rapidly. But, this is done at a higher level than Liaison Officer and is usually a tactic of last resort. If you tell most people, “it’s a Search and Rescue operation”, such as a search for a known downed aircraft, the urgency of “saving a life” generates instant cooperation. Do not ever use this reason when it is untrue just to generate some “fast action” for the CAP.

What the IC can, and cannot, do...

What the IC can do

He CAN direct ANY CAP member present to a task appropriate to his training and skill level in order to accomplish the SAR objective.

He CAN ask the Air Force or any military agency for help using personnel and/or equipment of ANY KIND.

He CAN create a sense of urgency in a SAR effort, which may help save lives by finding the object of the search.

He CAN direct CAP resources using the authority of the Wing Commander to accomplish the task at hand.

He CAN speak to the media about the mission status, objective and results.

He CAN speak to the family, concerned relatives or other individuals about the CAP effort to find the objective in a SAR mission.

He CAN continue searching until all leads are exhausted; at which time the mission is suspended.

He CAN “hire and fire” CAP mission members at will, in order to effectively run the mission and prosecute the mission’s goal.

He CAN, through cooperating agencies, request that roads are blocked, airports are closed airspace is restricted, and otherwise extend the CAP SAR effort towards a successful mission.

What the IC cannot do.

He CANNOT order CAP members to do anything. We are a volunteer organization. CAP has no police powers or weight of military authority over a CAP member. Any good manager asks people to do things, rather than telling them.

He CANNOT commit CAP resources and people to known dangerous tasks, with or without their cooperation. This is not the active duty military. There is no CAP “suicide missions.”

He CANNOT ask a CAP member to perform a duty that he is not qualified for or trained to perform.

He CANNOT fail to follow CAP regulations or procedures at all times.

He CANNOT allow any laws to be broken in the operation of the mission. There are no special exemptions from the law for CAP members when performing their duties.

He CANNOT expend CAP resources without the ability to justify their use.

He CANNOT give you his authority or responsibility for the task of managing the mission. You must only convey his requests to the proper agency. You may not second-guess what he wants, or what is needed. When in doubt, ask him again. Ask more than once, if necessary.

Conclusion

The Liaison Officer duty is one of the more interesting jobs in CAP. It requires interfacing with a number of different agencies, with which you may not normally be familiar, and gaining from them the cooperation, material or personnel necessary for a successful conclusion to the CAP SAR mission. The most successful Liaison Officer is one who can communicate to other agencies what CAP wants, and gets it!

If you are a "people person" who loves to scrounge for things and is happiest when on the phone trying to accomplish this end, this job's for you. If your not, it is suggested that you would be happier in another specialty.

Now it is time to take the written test, which can be found at the CAWG web page. After passing the test present the certificate to your unit commander and he/she can enter into the WMU that you have completed the Familiarization and Preparatory Training tasks. At this point you can start your Advanced Training under the direct supervision of a TTT Incident Commander. Download the Liaison Officer Evaluation form from the CAWG website and present it to the evaluator at your next training event. If you have any suggestions or comments please feel free to send them to DOT@cawg.cap.gov

Liaison Officer Checklist – unofficial advisory only

___ Do you have a comprehensive phone contacts list for every non-CAP agency that may be tasked by this Incident/Mission?

___ Have you been briefed by the IC on any non-CAP resources that are needed?

___ Are there any non- CAP agency personnel that have been assigned to the Incident/Mission?

___ Are all Section and Branch Chiefs aware that you are the Liaison Officer?

___ Are you informed and aware of all local and regional joint operation procedures and agreements with other agencies?

___ Is there needless duplication of effort from non-CAP agency personnel and/or resources, which could cause confusion during the Incident/mission?

___ Are any participating outside agency representatives aware and understand that you are their primary contact during the Incident/Mission?