

Mutual Aid - Statewide
MABAS - IEMA - IFCA Initiative
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MABAS (**M**utual **A**id **B**ox **A**larm **S**ystem) in partnership with IEMA (Illinois **E**mergency **M**anagement **A**gency) have established a statewide, non-discriminatory mutual aid response system for fire, EMS and specialized incident operational teams. Sharing the effort are representatives from the Office of the State Fire Marshal, Department of Public Health – EMS Division and Illinois Fire Chiefs Association. The system defines a resource response plan to any location within the state when the Governor orders a Declaration of Disaster. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on January 16, 2001, a first in Illinois history.

Historically, IEMA has had the capability through state resources and assets to support disaster stricken communities in all areas except Fire, EMS, Technical Rescue, Urban Search and Rescue, and Hazardous Materials Operations Teams. Illinois assets like State Police, Department of Transportation and numerous other state assets are able to mobilize under the direction of the Governor in response to a disaster. Since Illinois does not own its own fire department, EMS ambulances or specialized operations, a substantial “system” resource within the control of the state was lacking. The plan provides a system of “one-stop shopping” for IEMA officials to activate and mobilize local municipal fire, EMS and special operations assets through MABAS.

MABAS is a mutual aid system, which has been in existence since the late 1960s. Pre September 11th, MABAS was heavily rooted throughout northern Illinois. Since September 11th, MABAS has rapidly grown throughout the State of Illinois and Wisconsin, and parts of Indiana, Iowa and Missouri. Day-to-day MABAS extra alarms are systematically designed to provide speed of response of emergency resources to the stricken community during an ongoing emergency. Declaration of Disasters are not required for routine, MABAS system activation's. Today MABAS includes approximately 1,000 of the state's 1,200 fire departments organized within 67 divisions. MABAS divisions geographically span an area from Lake Michigan to Iowa's border and south almost into Kentucky. Twelve Wisconsin divisions also share MABAS with their Illinois counterparts. The cities of Chicago, St. Louis, and Milwaukee are also MABAS member agencies. MABAS has also expanded into Indiana and Michigan.

MABAS includes approximately 35,000 of Illinois' 40,000 firefighters who staff emergency response units including more than 1,500 fire stations, 2,495 engine companies, 469 ladder trucks, 1,100 ambulances (mostly paramedic capable), 297 heavy rescue squads, and 788 water tenders. Fire/EMS reserve (back-up) units account for more than 1,000 additional emergency vehicles.

MABAS also offers specialized operations teams for hazardous materials (42 teams), underwater rescue/recovery (26 teams), technical rescue (41 teams) and a state sponsored urban search and rescue team. An additional element of resource are the certified fire investigators which can be “packaged” as teams for larger incidents requiring complicated and time-consuming efforts for any single agency.

MABAS is a unique organization in that every MABAS participant agency has signed the same contract with their 1,000 plus counterpart MABAS agencies. As a MABAS agency, you agree to: standards of operation, incident command, minimal equipment staffing, safety and on-scene terminology. MABAS agencies, regardless of their geopolitical origin, are able to work together seamlessly on any emergency scene. All MABAS agencies operate on a common radio frequency (IFERN) and are activated for response through pre-designed “run” cards each participating agency designs and tailors to meet their local risk need. MABAS also provides mutual aid station coverage to a stricken community when their fire/EMS resources are committed to an incident for an extended period.