

Lesson Overview

Analysis of past responses indicates that the most common cause of response failure is poor management. Confusion about who's in charge of what and when, together with unclear lines of authority, have been the greatest contributors to poor response.

The Command and Management Under NIMS—Part 1 lesson introduces you to identify the benefits of using ICS as the model incident management system.

Incident Command and Management

NIMS employs two levels of incident management structures, depending on the nature of the incident.

- The **Incident Command System (ICS)** is a standard, on-scene, all-hazard incident management system. ICS allows users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the needs of single or multiple incidents.
- **Multiagency Coordination Systems** are a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications integrated into a common framework for coordinating and supporting incident management.

NIMS requires that responses to all domestic incidents utilize a common management structure.

The Incident Command System—or ICS—is a standard, on-scene, all-hazard incident management concept. ICS is a proven system that is used widely for incident management by firefighters, rescuers, emergency medical teams, and hazardous materials teams.

ICS represents organizational “best practices” and has become the standard for incident management across the country.

ICS is interdisciplinary and organizationally flexible to meet the needs of incidents of any kind, size, or level of complexity. Using ICS, personnel from a variety of agencies can meld rapidly into a common management structure.

ICS has been tested for more than 30 years and used for:

- Planned events.
- Fires, hazardous materials spills, and multicasualty incidents.
- Multijurisdictional and multiagency disasters, such as earthquakes and winter storms.
- Search and Rescue missions.
- Biological outbreaks and disease containment.
- Acts of terrorism.

ICS helps all responders communicate and get what they need when they need it. ICS provides a safe, efficient, and cost-effective recovery strategy.

ICS Features

ICS has several features that make it well suited to managing incidents. These features include:

- Common terminology.
- Organizational resources.
- Manageable span of control.
- Organizational facilities.
- Use of position titles.
- Reliance on an Incident Action Plan.
- Integrated communications.
- Accountability.

Common Terminology

The ability to communicate within ICS is absolutely critical. Using standard or common terminology is essential to ensuring efficient, clear communications. ICS requires the use of common terminology, including standard titles for facilities and positions within the organization.

Common terminology also includes the use of “clear text”—that is, communication without the use of agency-specific codes or jargon. **In other words, use plain English.**

Uncommon Terminology: “Response Branch, this is HazMat 1. We are 10-24.”

Common Terminology: “Response Branch, this is HazMat 1. We have completed our assignment.”

Organizational Resources

Resources, including all personnel, facilities, and major equipment and supply items used to support incident management activities, are assigned common designations. Resources are “typed” with respect to capability to help avoid confusion and enhance interoperability.

Manageable Span of Control

Maintaining adequate span of control throughout the ICS organization is critical. Effective span of control may vary from three (3) to seven (7), and a ratio of one (1) supervisor to five (5) reporting elements is recommended.

If the number of reporting elements falls outside of this range, expansion or consolidation of the organization may be necessary. There may be exceptions, usually in lower-risk assignments or where resources work in close proximity to each other.

Organizational Facilities

Common terminology is also used to define incident facilities, help clarify the activities that take place at a specific facility, and identify what members of the organization can be found there. For example, you find the Incident Commander at the Incident Command Post. Incident facilities include:

- The Incident Command Post.
- One or more staging areas.
- A base.
- One or more camps (when needed).
- A helibase.
- One or more helispots.

Incident facilities will be established depending on the kind and complexity of the incident. Only those facilities needed for any given incident may be activated. Some incidents may require facilities not included on the standard list.

Use of Position Titles

ICS positions have distinct titles.

- Only the Incident Commander is called Commander—and there is only one Incident Commander per incident.
- Only the heads of Sections are called Chiefs.

Learning and using standard terminology helps reduce confusion between the day-to-day position occupied by an individual and his or her position at the incident.

The titles for all supervisory levels of the organization are shown in the table below.

| Organizational Level | Title |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Incident Command | Incident Commander |
| Command Staff | Officer |
| General Staff (Section) | Chief |
| Branch | Director |
| Division/Group | Supervisor |
| Unit | Leader |
| Strike Team/Task Force | Leader |

Reliance on an Incident Action Plan

Incident Action Plans (IAPs) provide a coherent means to communicate the overall incident objectives in the context of both operational and support activities. Written IAPs documenting planned decisions should be considered whenever:

- Two or more jurisdictions are involved.
- The incident continues beyond one operational period.
- A number of organizational elements have been activated.
- It is required by agency policy.

IAPs depend on management by objectives to accomplish response tactics. These objectives are communicated throughout the organization and are used to:

- Develop and issue assignments, plans, procedures, and protocols.
- Direct efforts to attain the objectives in support of defined strategic objectives.

Results are always documented and fed back into planning for the next operational period.

Integrated Communications

Integrated communications include:

- The “hardware” systems that transfer information.
- Planning for the use of all available communications frequencies and resources.
- The procedures and processes for transferring information internally and externally.

Communications needs for large incidents may exceed available radio frequencies. Some incidents may be conducted entirely without radio support. In such situations, other communications resources (e.g., cell phones or secure phone lines) may be the only communications methods used to coordinate communications and to transfer large amounts of data effectively.

Accountability

Effective accountability at all jurisdictional levels and within individual functional areas during an incident is essential. To that end, ICS requires:

- An orderly chain of command—the line of authority within the ranks of the incident organization.
- Check-in for all responders, regardless of agency affiliation.
- Each individual involved in incident operations to be assigned only one supervisor (also called “unity of command”).