

# Incident Management & Command Systems

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## The National Incident Management System

The federal government – in order to achieve unified, single- and interagency management in emergency response - adopted the National Incident Management System (NIMS). The central purpose is to ensure a comprehensive national framework designed to efficiently support incident management, regardless of the size, nature, or complexity of the event.

Under NIMS, the framework of operations is the Incident Command System (ICS). NIMS requires the use of the Incident Command System by all levels of government and by healthcare organizations.

## The Incident Command System

The purpose of the Incident Command System (ICS) is to provide an interdisciplinary and flexible management system that is adaptable to an incident of any kind or size. ICS defines a clear chain-of-command and provides logistical and administrative support to operational staff responding to the incident.

The Incident Command System is a proven system based on organizational “best practices” and the successful use in military and business practices. ICS has been built on lessons learned in response to incidents.

ICS is a framework (not a plan) that defines the actions to be carried out by whom, what, when, where, and how (the Incident Action Plan). The ICS puts into place common terminology, standards and procedures. The activation of ICS is scalable, and its standardized structure allows for the integrations of other agencies and organizations. ICS can be used in planned events (NASCAR), exercises and for actual incidents.

The main components of the ICS are the Command Staff, and the General Staff or functional sections. The ICS may exist in its full form or in a truncated form in more minor events in which certain pieces are not necessary. In the full form, the ICS Command Staff is lead by the Incident Commander.

The Incident Commander (IC) or the Agency Incident Commander, if the disaster involves several agencies working together, is in charge of the incident. The Incident Commander is responsible for the development of an Incident Action Plan, allocation of resources and assuring that the necessary sections are activated (and subsequently de-activated at the end of the crisis). This person has the authority to make decisions and ultimately execute the Incident Action Plan.

The **Chain of Command** refers to the orderly line of authority within the ranks of the incident management organization. **Unity of Command** means that every individual has a designated supervisor to whom he or she reports at the scene of the incident. These principles clarify reporting relationships and eliminate the confusion caused by multiple, conflicting directives. Incident managers at all levels must be able to control the actions of all personnel under their supervision.

A **Unified Command** takes place when multiple jurisdictions, a single jurisdiction with multi-agency involvement, or multiple jurisdictions with multi-agency involvement respond to an incident. Unified Command allows agencies with different legal, geographic, and functional authorities and responsibilities to work together effectively without affecting individual agency authority, responsibility, or accountability. A Unified Command analyzes information, establishes common objectives and strategies, and develops a common Incident Action Plan.

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An **Emergency Operations Center (EOC)** is established for incidents involving multiple organizations or governmental agencies. Multiple agencies and/or disciplines are represented in the EOC. The purpose of the EOC is to provide support and coordination for on-scene responders, and to coordinate and allocate resources.

The **Span of Control** refers to the number of individuals or resources one supervisor can manage effectively. The Span of Control is accomplished by organizing resources in Sections, Branches, Groups, Divisions and Teams. The recommended span of control for is one to five reports per supervisor. Ratios may vary from three to seven reports per supervisor.

## Command Staff

The Command Staff consists of the Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer. They report directly to the Incident Commander, and are made up of the following positions:

- **Public Information Officer (PIO)** - responsible for assuring that appropriate information is provided to the public, as well as to government officials and collaborating agencies.
- **Safety Officer** - responsible for scene safety, availability and appropriate use of personal protective equipment, and basic human needs (rest, nutrition, and hydration).
- **Liaison Officer** - responsible for coordinating all activities with other agencies and groups involved in the response.

Note: The Documentation Officer is responsible for recording all activity, particularly meetings, phone calls, and other logistic matters.

## General Staff

This organization level has functional responsibility for primary segments of incident management (Operations, Planning, Logistics, Finance/Administration). The General Staff (or functional section leads) also report directly to the Incident Commander. These are the General Staff positions:

- **Operations Section Chief** is responsible for managing all tactical operations at an incident. The Incident Action Plan provides the necessary guidance. The need to expand the Operations Section is generally dictated by the number of tactical resources involved and is influenced by span of control considerations.
- **Planning Section Chief** is responsible for providing planning services for the incident. Under the direction of the Planning Section Chief, this section collects situation and resources status information, evaluates it, and processes the information for use in developing action plans. Dissemination of information can be in the form of the Incident Action Plan, formal briefings, or through map and status board displays
- **Logistics Section Chief** provides all incident support needs with the exception of support to air operations. The Logistics Section is responsible for providing: facilities, transportation, communications, supplies, equipment maintenance and fueling, food services (for responders), medical services (for responders), and all off-incident resources.
- **Finance/Administration Section Chief** is responsible for managing all financial aspects of an incident. Not all incidents will require a Finance/Administration Section. This section is activated only when the involved agencies have a specific need for finance services.

## Joint Information Systems

The purpose of a Joint Information Systems (JIS) is to communicate timely and accurate information to the public. Local, regional and state governments set up the Joint Information System. Public Information Officers operate in a Joint Information System to:

- Establish plans, procedures and structures for gathering and disseminating information
- Develop coordinated messages
- Ensure that the public and decision-makers are informed throughout a response

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The Lead Public Information Officer (PIO) ensures that all messages are approved by the Incident Commander before release.

## **Joint Information Center**

The Joint Information Center (JIC) is a temporary organization or entity where information management activities are performed. A Joint Information Center will:

- Gather information and intelligence
- Develop consistent and coordinated messages
- Disseminate messages and information

JIC activities enhance the likelihood that information released to the public will be accurate and coordinated across agencies. One or more JICs may be operating under the JIS, and may be large or small and may not house all communications staff. The base of operations for a JIC may be federal, state, or local, and its resources may flow from any of these sources.

As with the ICS, the JIC may be scaled to fit the situation by enlarging or contracting its services and resources. A large JIC may activate all components: media relations, research and writing, and all special project functions. In a full health and medical activation, the JIC could include a spokesperson, hospital liaisons, media monitoring, State PIO, and State Medical Advisor, all working together under the ICS-PIO. A large JIC may include audiovisual and production support, web management, briefing room staff, and more.

## **Organizing a Joint Information Center (JIC)**

A JIC enhances the likelihood that information released to the public will be accurate and coordinated across agencies. A well-organized JIC can increase the ability to do so quickly and effectively.

The Lead **Public Information Officer (PIO)** in a JIC is responsible for overall JIC operations and providing prompt and organized responses to the news media. The lead PIO coordinates all public information efforts out of the JIC, ensures protocols are followed, attends Command briefings and coordinates these efforts with local and state partners.

**Research and Writing** is responsible for researching, verifying information and writing media advisories, releases and other materials. They generate reports and obtain approvals from the PIO.

**Media Relations** is responsible for dealing with all media requests and logistics. They distribute news releases, brief and support spokespersons, determine and set up media-briefing area, generate reports and obtain approvals from the PIO.

**Special Projects** is responsible for working with key partners and posting accurate information to Web sites and making sure information is distributed to non-media partners, organizations, agencies and audiences. They monitor Web sites generate reports and obtain approvals from the PIO.

As with all disaster planning, communications services personnel should practice protocols, roles and responsibilities. This can be done through formal NIMS and ICS trainings, as well as by conducting tabletop exercises and drills specific to public communications.