

## **The Incident Command System**

The Incident Command System (ICS) document introduces the ICS and provides a description of the federal ICS structure and purpose. ICS is part of the broader incident management system outlined in the Department of Homeland Security's National Incident Management System (NIMS).

### **Understanding the Incident Command System**

Federal, state and local governments have created universal emergency and disaster planning standards for health care organizations. Government units such as Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Centers for Disease Control, in concert with State and County public health or health and human service units have developed these standards. Government expects health care organizations to adopt and implement a standard planning protocol so that in the event of a disaster or emergency resources are maximized to best respond to a specific incident. This can only be accomplished when we plan similarly and then integrate agency specific plans into the broader planning responses by officials.

### **National Incident Management System (NIMS)**

In response to attacks on September 11, 2001 President George W. Bush issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5) in February 2003.

HSPD-5 called for a National Incident Management System (NIMS) and identified steps for improved coordination of Federal, State, local, and private industry response to incidents and described the way these agencies will prepare for such a response.

The Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security announced the establishment of NIMS in March 2004. One of the key features of NIMS is the Incident Command System (ICS):

- A comprehensive, national approach to incident management.
- Applicable across all jurisdictions and all types of emergency incidents (and non emergency scenarios) regardless of size or complexity.
- Used to improve coordination and cooperation between public and private entities.
- Uses the Incident Command System to manage incidents.
- Examples of incidents when standardized planning might be employed include:
  - Fire, both structural and wild-land.
  - Natural disasters, such as tornadoes, floods, ice storms or earthquakes.
  - Human and animal disease outbreaks.
  - Search and rescue missions.
  - Hazardous materials incidents.
  - Criminal acts and crime scene investigations.
  - Terrorist incidents, including the use of weapons of mass destruction.
  - National Special Security Events, such as Presidential visits or the Super Bowl.
  - Other planned events, such as parades or demonstrations.

- ICS may be used for small or large events. It can grow or shrink to meet the changing needs of an incident or event.

Management of these incidents requires partnerships that often require local, State, Tribal, and Federal agencies. These partners must work together in a smooth, coordinated effort under the same management system.

### **ICS is Built on Best Practices**

ICS is:

- A proven management system based on successful business practices.
- The result of decades of lessons learned in the organization and management of emergency incidents.

ICS has been tested in more than 30 years of emergency and non-emergency applications, by all levels of government and in the private sector. It represents organizational "best practices," and as a component of NIMS has become the standard for emergency management across the country.

NIMS requires that all levels of government, including Territories and Tribal Organizations, adopt ICS as a condition of receiving Federal preparedness funding.

### **What ICS Is Designed To Do**

Designers of the system recognized early that ICS must be interdisciplinary and organizationally flexible to meet the following management challenges:

- Meet the needs of incidents of any kind or size.
- Allow personnel from a variety of agencies to meld rapidly into a common management structure.
- Provide logistical and administrative support to operational staff.
- Be cost effective by avoiding duplication of efforts.

ICS consists of procedures for controlling personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications. It is a system designed to be used or applied from the time an incident occurs until the requirement for management and operations no longer exists.

The Incident Command System, or ICS, is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazard incident management concept. ICS allows its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single or multiple incidents without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries.

ICS has considerable internal flexibility making it a cost effective and efficient management approach for both small and large situations.

### **Lessons Learned**

Weaknesses in Incident Management are often due to:

- Lack of accountability, including unclear chains of command and supervision.
- Poor communication due to both inefficient uses of available communications systems and conflicting codes and terminology.
- Lack of an orderly, systematic planning process.
- No common, flexible, pre-designed management structure that enables commanders to delegate responsibilities and manage workloads efficiently.
- No predefined methods to integrate interagency requirements into the management structure and planning process effectively.

A poorly managed incident response can be devastating to our economy and our health and safety. With so much at stake, we must effectively manage our response efforts. The Incident Command System allows us to do so. ICS is a proven management system based on successful business practices.

Emergency Management Limitations:

- Government cannot do everything for everyone.
- Assistance is not guaranteed.
- Prioritized response and recovery.
- Individuals must be prepared for self preservation for the system to work.

### **Conclusion**

In every emergency or disaster these statements will always apply:

- Local governments are the first to arrive and the last to leave.
- Local governments are responsible for the community.
- Local governments are in charge.
- Local governments have resource limitations.
- Individuals and families must make emergency and disaster plans and review them periodically.
- Institutional and community based health care agencies must plan for emergencies and disasters in a uniform manner and then take steps to integrate them into the local government planning effort (s).

Emergency management, personal and family preparedness, and agency planning is a system of local, county, state and federal and private resources organized to mitigate, plan for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters.

### **Additional Resources**

- FEMA - National Integration Center (NIC) Incident Management Systems Integration Division <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm>
- The Yale New Haven Center for Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response Online Education and Training: <http://ynhhs.emergencyeducation.org/>
- NIMS online: <http://www.nimsonline.com/>

- Basic Incident Command for Medical and Public Health Professionals:  
<http://www.mcph.org/BT/BT%202.19.03/ICS%20for%20Maine%20PH.ppt#1>