

BASICS OF THE INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM (ICS)

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Introduction

Incident Command System (ICS) provides a mechanism for coordinated and collaborative incident management.

Most incidents are managed locally and handled by local communication or dispatch centers and emergency management/response personnel within a single jurisdiction. The majority of responses need go no further.

In other instances, incidents that begin with a single response within a single jurisdiction expand to multidisciplinary, multijurisdictional levels requiring additional resources and operational support. When a single incident covers a large geographical area, multiple local emergency management and incident response agencies may be required. In this situation, effective cross-jurisdictional coordination critical.

ICS is a management system designed to enable effective, efficient incident management by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure.

ICS is a fundamental form of management established in a standard format, with the purpose of enabling incident managers to identify the key concerns associated with the incident—often under urgent conditions—without sacrificing attention to any component of the command system.

ICS is used by all levels of government—Federal, State, Tribal, and Local—as well as by many NGOs and the private sector.

ICS is also applicable across disciplines.

ICS Management Characteristics

Common Terminology

Modular Organization

Management by
Objectives

Incident Action
Planning

Manageable Span of
Control

Incident Facilities and
Locations

Comprehensive
Resource Management

Integrated
Communications

Establishment and
Transfer of Command

Chain of Command
and Unity of Command

Unified Command

ICS Management Characteristics



Common Terminology

ICS establishes common terminology that allows diverse incident management and support organizations to work together across a wide variety of incident management functions and hazard scenarios.

When all players “speak the same language”, there is less room for confusion.



Modular Organization

The ICS organizational structure develops in a modular fashion based on the size and complexity of the incident. As incident complexity increases, the organization expands from the top down as functional responsibilities are delegated.

Concurrently with structural expansion, the number of management and supervisory positions expands to address the requirements of the incident adequately.



Management by Objectives

Management by objectives is communicated throughout the entire ICS organization and includes establishing incident objectives, developing strategies based on incident objectives, and establishing specific, measurable tactics or tasks for various incident management functional activities.

ICS Management Characteristics



Incident Action Planning

An Incident Action Plan provides a means of capturing/communicating priorities, objectives, strategies, and tactics in the context of both operational and support activities.

Most initial response operations are not captured with a formal IAP. However, if an incident is likely to become more complex, or involve multiple jurisdictions and/or agencies, preparing a written IAP will become increasingly important to maintain effective operations.



Manageable Span of Control

Span of control is key to effective and efficient incident management. Supervisors must be able to adequately supervise and control their subordinates, as well as communicate with and manage all resources under their supervision.



Incident Facilities and Locations

Various types of operational support facilities are established in the vicinity of an incident, depending on its size and complexity, to accomplish a variety of purposes.

ICS Management Characteristics



Comprehensive Resource Management

Maintaining an accurate an up-to-date picture of resource utilization is a critical component of incident management and emergency response. Resources to be identified in this way include personnel, teams, equipment, supplies, and facilities available or potentially available for assignment or allocation..



Integrated Communications

Incident communications are facilitated through the development and use of a common communications plan and interoperable communications processes and architectures. Preparedness planning should address the equipment, systems, and protocols necessary to achieve integrated voice and data communications.



Establishment and Transfer of Command

The agency with primary jurisdictional authority over the incident designates the individual at the scene responsible for establishing command. When command is transferred, the process must include a briefing that captures all essential information for continuing safe and effective operations.

ICS Management Characteristics



Chain of Command and Unity of Command

Incident communications are facilitated through the development and use of a common communications plan and interoperable communications processes and architectures. Preparedness planning should address the equipment, systems, and protocols necessary to achieve integrated voice and data communications.



Unified Command

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Incident Command & Command Staff

Single Commander

Unified Command

Public Information
Officer

Safety Officer

Liaison Officer

Incident Command



Incident Command is responsible for overall management of the incident. Overall management includes Command Staff assignments required to support the command function.

The command function may be conducted in one of two general ways:

Single Incident Commander:

When an incident occurs within a single jurisdiction and there is no jurisdictional or functional agency overlap, a single IC should be designated by the appropriate jurisdictional authority. (In some cases where incident management crosses jurisdictional and/or functional agency boundaries, a single IC may be designated if agreed upon.)

Unified Command:

This structure enables agencies with different legal, geographic, and functional responsibilities to coordinate, plan, and interact effectively. As a team effort, UC allows all agencies with jurisdictional authority or functional responsibility for the incident to jointly provide management direction through a common set of incident objectives and strategies and a single IAP. Each participating agency maintains its authority, responsibility, and accountability.

Command Staff

Command Staff typically includes a Public Information Officer, a Safety Officer, and a Liaison Officer, who report directly to the IC/UC.



The **Public Information Officer** is responsible for interfacing with the public and media and/or with other agencies with incident-related information requirements. The Public Information Officer gathers, verifies, coordinates, and disseminates accurate, accessible, and timely information on the incident's cause, size, and current situation; resources committed; and other matters of general interest for both internal and external audiences.



The **Safety Officer** monitors incident operations and advises the IC/UC on all matters relating to operational safety, including the health and safety of emergency responder personnel. The Safety Officer is responsible to the IC/UC for the systems and procedures necessary to ensure ongoing assessment of hazardous environments, including the incident Safety Plan and implementation of measures to promote emergency responder safety as well as the general safety of incident operations.



The **Liaison Officer** is Incident Command's point of contact for representatives of other governmental agencies, NGOs, and the private sector to provide input on their agency's policies, resource availability, and other incident-related matters. Under either a single-IC or a UC structure, representatives from assisting or cooperating agencies and organizations coordinate through the Liaison Officer.

General Staff

Operations Section

Planning Section

Logistics Section

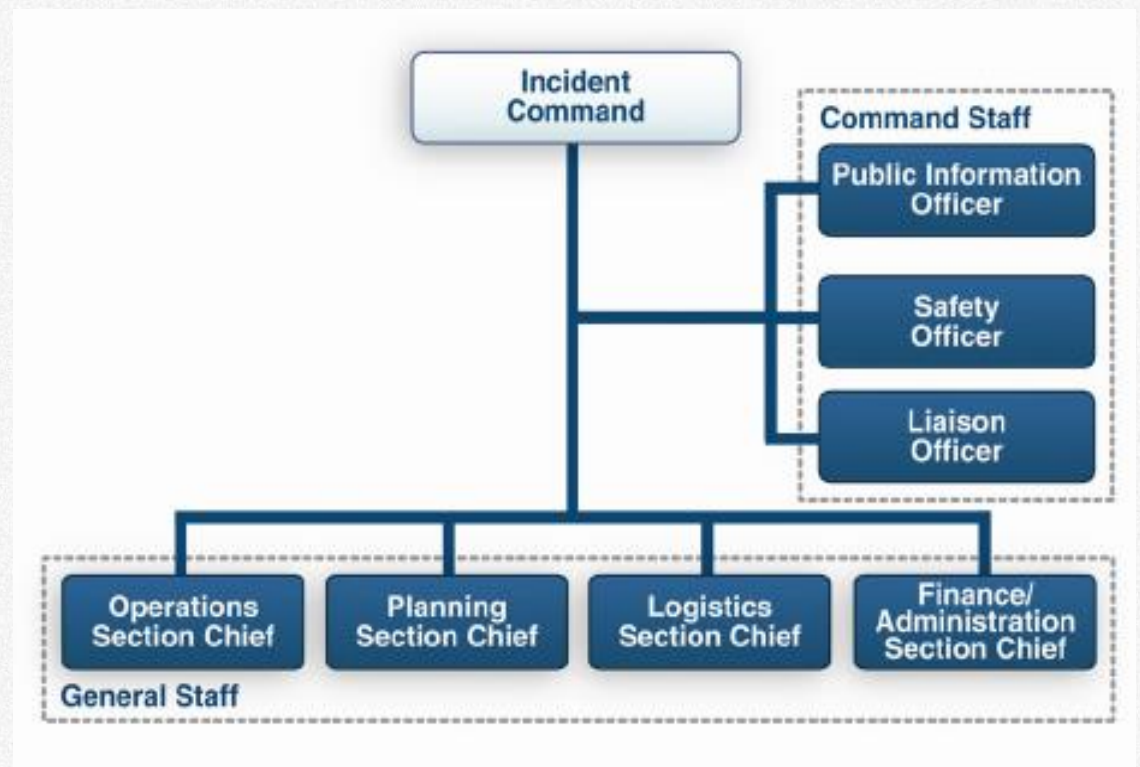
Finance and
Administration Section

General Staff

The **General Staff** is responsible for the functional aspects of the incident command structure.

The General Staff typically consists of the Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance/Administration Section Chiefs.

The Section Chiefs may have one or more deputies assigned, with the assignment of deputies from other agencies encouraged in the case of multijurisdictional incidents.



Operations Section

The Operations Section is responsible for all tactical activities focused on:

- Reducing the immediate hazard
- Saving lives and property
- Establishing situational control
- Restoring normal operations

Lifesaving and responder safety will always be the highest priorities and the first objectives in the IAP.



Planning Section

The **Planning Section** collects, evaluates, and disseminates incident situation information and intelligence to the IC/UC and incident management personnel. This Section then prepares status reports, displays situation information, maintains the status of resources assigned to the incident, and prepares and documents the IAP, based on Operations Section input and guidance from the IC/UC.



The Planning Section is comprised of four primary Units that fulfill functional requirements:

- **Resources Unit:** Responsible for recording the status of resources committed to the incident. This Unit also evaluates resources committed currently to the incident, the effects additional responding resources will have on the incident, and anticipated resource needs.
- **Situation Unit:** Responsible for the collection, organization, and analysis of incident status information, and for analysis of the situation as it progresses.
- **Demobilization Unit:** Responsible for ensuring orderly, safe, and efficient demobilization of incident resources.
- **Documentation Unit:** Responsible for collecting, recording, and safeguarding all documents relevant to the incident.

Logistics Section

The **Logistics Section** is responsible for all service support requirements needed to facilitate effective incident management, including ordering resources from off-incident locations.

This Section also provides facilities, security (of the incident command facilities and personnel), transportation, supplies, equipment maintenance and fuel, food services, communications and information technology support, and emergency responder medical services, including inoculations, as required.

Within the Logistics Section, six primary Units fulfill functional requirements:

- **Supply Unit:** Orders, receives, stores, and processes all incident-related resources, personnel, and supplies.
- **Ground Support Unit:** Provides all ground transportation during an incident. In conjunction with providing transportation, the Unit is also responsible for maintaining and supplying vehicles, keeping usage records, and developing incident Traffic Plans.
- **Facilities Unit:** Sets up, maintains, and demobilizes all facilities used in support of incident operations. The Unit also provides facility maintenance and security services required to support incident operations.
- **Food Unit:** Determines food and water requirements, plans menus, orders food, provides cooking facilities, cooks, serves, maintains food service areas, and manages food security and safety concerns.
- **Communications Unit:** Major responsibilities include effective communications planning as well as acquiring, setting up, maintaining, and accounting for communications equipment.
- **Medical Unit:** Responsible for the effective and efficient provision of medical services to incident personnel.

Finance and Administration Section

A **Finance/Administration Section** is established when the incident management activities require on-scene or incident-specific finance and administrative support services.

Functions that fall within the scope of this Section include recording personnel time, maintaining vendor contracts, administering compensation and claims, and conducting an overall cost analysis for the incident.

Close coordination with the Planning Section and Logistics Section is also essential so that operational records can be reconciled with financial documents.



Within the Finance/Administration Section, four primary Units fulfill functional requirements:

- **Compensation/Claims Unit:** Responsible for financial concerns resulting from property damage, injuries, or fatalities at the incident.
- **Cost Unit:** Responsible for tracking costs, analyzing cost data, making estimates, and recommending cost savings measures.
- **Procurement Unit:** Responsible for financial matters concerning vendor contracts.
- **Time Unit:** Responsible for recording time for incident personnel and hired equipment

The Planning Process and Incident Action Plan (IAP)

Understand the Situation

Establish Incident Objectives and Strategy

Develop the Plan

Prepare and Disseminate the Plan

Execute, Evaluate, and Revise the Plan

The Planning Process

The five primary phases in the planning process are:

1. Understand the Situation - The first phase includes gathering, recording, analyzing, and displaying situation, resource, and incident-potential information in a manner that will facilitate:

- Increased situational awareness of the magnitude, complexity, and potential impact of the incident.
- The ability to determine the resources required to develop and implement an effective IAP.

2. Establish Incident Objectives and Strategy - The second phase includes formulating and prioritizing measurable incident objectives and identifying an appropriate strategy. The incident objectives and strategy must conform to the legal obligations and management objectives of all affected agencies, and may need to include specific issues relevant to critical infrastructure.

Reasonable alternative strategies that will accomplish overall incident objectives are identified, analyzed, and evaluated to determine the most appropriate strategy for the situation at hand. Evaluation criteria include public health and safety factors, estimated costs, and various environmental, legal, and political considerations.

The Planning Process

The five primary phases in the planning process are:

3. Develop the Plan - The third phase involves determining the tactical direction and the specific resources, reserves, and support requirements for implementing the selected strategies and tactics for the operational period. Before the formal Planning Meetings, each member of the Command and General Staffs is responsible for gathering certain information to support the proposed plan.

4. Prepare and Disseminate the Plan - The fourth phase involves preparing the plan in a format that is appropriate for the level of complexity of the incident. For the initial response, the format is a well-prepared outline for an oral briefing. For most incidents that will span multiple operational periods, the plan will be developed in writing according to ICS procedures.

5. Execute, Evaluate, and Revise the Plan - The planning process includes the requirement to execute and evaluate planned activities and check the accuracy of information to be used in planning for subsequent operational periods. The General Staff should regularly compare planned progress with actual progress. When deviations occur and when new information emerges, it should be included in the first step of the process used for modifying the current plan or developing the plan for the subsequent operational period.

ICS Resources

*ICS 100 Independent
Study*

*ICS 200 Independent
Study*

ICS Resources

There are countless resources for ICS training both in person throughout the region, and online. Trainings can be general or specific to position. General trainings are available for self-directed study online, while more advanced trainings span two-three days and require in-person commitments.

Further Self-Directed Study:

ICS 100: Introduction to the Incident Command System:

<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-100.b>

ICS 200: ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents:

<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-200.b>

ICS 100HC: Introduction to the Incident Command system for Healthcare/Hospitals:

<https://www.training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-100.HCb>