# Introduction: National Incident Management and Incident Command Systems

## National Incident Management System (NIMS)

Originally issued in 2004, the National Incident Management System (NIMS) provides a consistent nationwide template to enable partners across the nation to work together to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents, regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, NIMS provides:

- A "best practices" approach to incident management, including the command and coordination of incidents, resource management, and information management;
- A set of concepts and principles for all threats, hazards, and events and through all stages (planning, preparation, response, recovery);
- Standard resource management procedures that enable coordination among different jurisdictions or organizations;
- Scalability, flexibility, and adaptability for all incidents, from day-to-day to large-scale; and
- Consistent principles and terminology for communications and information management.

NIMS is based on three guiding principles:

1. Flexibility – the components are adaptable across scale, situations and facilities;
2. Standardization – NIMS promotes coordination, integration and "interoperability" among agencies, jurisdictions and organizations responding to incidents; and
3. Unity of Effort – NIMS establishes a basis for coordination of efforts while respecting jurisdictional responsibilities and authorities.

NIMS incorporates three critical components in incident management:

1. Resource Management:
   a. Resource Management Preparedness;
   b. Resource Management During an Incident; and
   c. Mutual Aid.
2. Command and Coordination:
   a. NIMS Management Characteristics;
   b. Incident Command System (ICS);
   c. Emergency Operations Centers (EOC);
   d. Multiagency Coordination Group (MAC); and
   e. Joint Information Systems (JIS).
3. Communications and Information Management:
   a. Communication Management;
   b. Incident Information; and
   c. Communications Standards and Format.

## The Incident Command System (ICS)

The ICS is a part of NIMS that falls under the "Command and Coordination" component. ICS consists of procedures for managing personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications. It is designed to be used or applied from the time an incident occurs until the requirement for management and operations no longer exists.

The ICS is a management structure used to organize personnel during a crisis or disaster. The ICS offers a scalable response to an emergency (incident) of any magnitude and provides a common framework within which people can work together. These people (resources) may be drawn from multiple agencies that do not routinely work together.

The ICS is designed to grow and shrink along with the incident, allowing more resources to be smoothly added into the system when needed and released when no longer needed. This is achieved because, in essence, the ICS is a special case of "role playing." Authorities and responsibilities are inherent in roles (positions); individuals are assigned more or less temporarily to those roles and can be reassigned, replaced, or released as needed. This key aspect of the ICS helps to reduce or eliminate the "who's in charge" problem.

The ICS structure is unique but easy to understand. There is no correlation between the ICS structure and the administrative structure of any single facility or organization. This is deliberate, because confusion over different position titles and organizational structures has been a significant stumbling block to effective incident management in the past. For example, someone who serves as a department manager every day may not hold that level or area of responsibility when deployed under an ICS structure.

There are five major management functions that are the foundation upon which the ICS organization develops. These functions apply whether the incident is a routine emergency, a major non-emergency event, or a major disaster. The major management positions always apply and are always filled, no matter the size of the incident, and represent five sections of staff:

### The Incident Command System
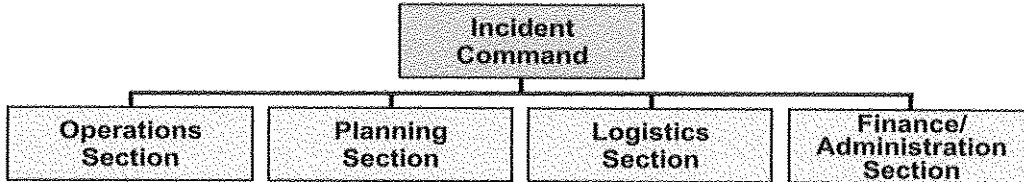


**Incident Command** — The facility's Incident Commander is the single person in charge of the incident at the facility and initially fills all five command staff positions. As the incident grows, the tasks covered by other sections can be delegated, and those new positions take the title of Section Leader.

1. **Incident Commander** — The most qualified staff member (in respect to the Incident Command System) on duty at the time of the emergency will assume the Incident Commander position until the Administrator or his/her designee arrives at the facility. The Administrator or his/her designee can then assume the role of Incident Commander, if he/she is more or equally qualified.

   The Incident Commander is responsible for all activity regarding the incident as well as creating the overall incident objectives. Three additional Incident Command positions are Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer. The staff positions can be performed by the same person or multiple people.

2. **Public Information Officer** serves as the conduit for relaying information to internal and external stakeholders, including the media or other organizations seeking information directly from the incident or event.

3. **Safety Officer** monitors safety conditions and develops measures for assuring the safety of all assigned personnel.
4. **Liaison Officer** serves as the primary contact for supporting agencies assisting at an incident. In accordance with available staff at the time of the crisis or disaster situation, it is essential to establish an Incident Commander and designate tasks in accordance with this model or as specific needs dictate.

**Operations** — Operations is tasked with directing all actions to meet the incident objectives.

**Planning** — Planning is tasked with the collection and display of incident information, primarily consisting of the status of all resources and overall status of the incident, including:

- Collecting, evaluating, and displaying intelligence and information about the incident;
- Preparing and documenting Incident Action Plans;
- Conducting long-range and/or contingency planning;
- Developing plans for demobilization;
- Maintaining incident documentation; and
- Tracking resources assigned to the incident.

**Logistics** — Logistics is tasked with providing all resources, services, and support required by the incident, including:

- Ordering, obtaining, and maintaining essential personnel, equipment, and supplies;
- Providing communication planning and resources;
- Setting up food services;
- Setting up and maintaining incident facilities;
- Providing transportation; and
- Providing medical services to incident personnel.

**Finance/Administration** — Finance is tasked with tracking incident-related costs, personnel records, and requisitions as well as administering procurement contracts required by Logistics, including:

- Contract negotiation and monitoring;
- Timekeeping;
- Cost analysis; and
- Compensation for injury or damage to property.

**ICS Key Management Concepts**: Many agencies and organizations modify ICS to fit their needs, yet it is absolutely critical to realize that without the application of the ICS management concepts, ICS becomes ineffective. While the picture of the response organizational tree may look like the ICS, without applying the management concept and principles, the organizational charts and models will resemble the original ICS model in title alone. Furthermore, problems and conflicts experienced during some incidents will indicate that fundamental ICS management concepts either are missing or are not functioning as designed. Therefore, to avoid such difficulties, agencies/organizations using an ICS design should incorporate the following basic management concepts:

1. **Span of Control**: Span of Control is the most fundamentally important management principle of ICS. It applies to the management of individual responsibilities and response resources. The objective is to limit the number of responsibilities being handled by, and the number of resources reporting directly to, an individual. ICS considers that any single person's span of control should be between three and seven individuals, with five being ideal. In other words, one manager should have no more than seven people working under him/her at any given time.

When span-of-control problems arise around an individual's ability to address responsibilities, they can be addressed by expanding the organization in a modular fashion. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. An Incident Commander can delegate responsibilities to a deputy and/or activate members of the Command Staff. Members of the Command Staff can delegate responsibilities to assistants, etc. There may be exceptions, usually in lower-risk assignments or when resources work in proximity to each other.

2. **Incident Action Plans**: "Incident Action Plans" mean that for the specific event, the response is coordinated and managed through one plan of action. The Incident Action Plan (IAP) can be verbal or written (except for hazardous material incidents, for which it must be written), and it is prepared by the Planning Section. The IAP means that everyone is working in concert toward the same goals set for that operational time period.

   The purpose of the IAP is to provide all incident supervisory personnel with direction for actions to be implemented during the operational period identified in the plan. Incident Action Plans include the measurable strategic operations to be achieved and are prepared around a time frame called an "Operational Period." Incident Action Plans provide a coherent means of communicating the overall incident objectives in the context of both operational and support activities. The consolidated IAP is an important component of the ICS that reduces freelancing and ensures a coordinated response.

   At the simplest level, all Incident Action Plans must have four elements:
   a. What do we want to do?
   b. Who is responsible for doing it?
   c. How do we communicate with each other?
   d. What is the procedure if someone is injured?

3. **Unity of Command**: Unity of Command means that each individual participating in the operation reports to only one supervisor. This eliminates the potential for individuals to receive conflicting orders from a variety of supervisors, thus increasing accountability, preventing freelancing, improving the flow of information, helping with the coordination of operational efforts, and enhancing operational safety. Unity of Command also means all personnel are managed and accounted for.

4. **Accountability**: Effective accountability during incident operations is required at all levels within the facility.


For detailed information regarding NIMS and ICS, refer to: National Incident Management System. October 2017. https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1508151197225-ced8c60378c3936adb92c1a3ec6f6564/FINAL_NIMS_2017.pdf

For information on the Nursing Home Incident Command System (NHICS) developed by the California Department of Public Health and the California Association of Health Facilities, visit the CAHF website's Guidebook and Tools: http://cahfdisasterprep.com/NHICS/GuidebookTools.aspx