

14 Management Characteristics of NIMS

The Incident Command System (ICS) is based on the following 14 proven NIMS management characteristics, each of which contributes to the strength and efficiency of the overall system:

- 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
- Unified Command
- Chain of Command & Unity of Command
- Accountability
- Dispatch/Deployment
- Information and Intelligence Management

Common Terminology

The Incident Command System (ICS) establishes Common Terminology that allows diverse incident management and support organizations to work together across a wide variety of emergency functions and hazard scenarios. This common terminology covers the following:

- Organizational Functions: Major functions and functional units with incident management responsibilities are named and defined. They remain standard and consistent.
- Resource Descriptions: Major resources – including personnel, equipment, teams, and facilities – are given common names and are “typed” with respect to their capabilities.
- Incident Facilities: Common terminology is used to designate the facilities in the vicinity of the incident area.

During an incident:

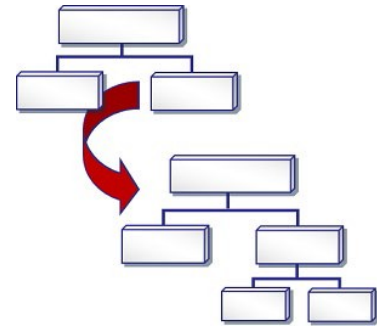
- Communications should use common terms.
- Organizations should avoid radio codes, agency-specific codes, acronyms, or jargon. Usage of these types of codes may cause confusion or possibly compromise life safety due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

The goal is to promote understanding among all parties involved in managing an incident.

Modular Organization

The Incident Command System (ICS) organizational structure develops in a modular fashion based on the incident’s size and complexity.

- The responsibility for the establishment and expansion of the ICS modular organization rests with the Incident Commander.
- As the incident grows more complex, the ICS organization may expand as functional responsibilities are delegated.



ICS Organizational Structure

The Operations Section develops and expands from the bottom-up in a modular fashion. As resources arrive and are added to the Operations organization, span-of control, geography, and/or functional responsibilities are considered in shaping how the Operations organization expands to coincide with increasing complexity.

The remaining ICS organizational structure typically develops in a top-down, modular fashion that is based on the size and complexity of the incident, as well as the specifics of the hazard environment created by the incident. As incident complexity increases, the organization expands from the top down as functional responsibilities are delegated.

The ICS organizational structure is flexible. When needed, separate functional elements can be established and subdivided to enhance internal organizational management and external coordination. As the ICS organizational structure expands, the number of management (or “Overhead”) positions also expands to adequately address the requirements of the incident.

Management by Objectives

The Incident Commander or Unified Command (which will be discussed later), establishes incident objectives that drive incident response activities.

Management by Objectives includes the following:

- Establishing specific, measurable incident objectives.
- Identifying strategies, tactics, tasks and activities to achieve the objectives.
- Developing and issuing assignments, plans, procedures, and protocols to accomplish identified tasks.
- Documenting results for the incident objectives.

Incident objectives are used to ensure that everyone within the ICS organization has a clear understanding of what needs to be accomplished.

Guiding the decisions that a team makes in choosing how best to accomplish their work is typically a set of Priorities. They are also provided by Command and must be numbered in order of importance to have any true value for making decisions. A set might look like the following:

1. Life safety.
2. Incident stabilization.
3. Property/Environmental preservation.

Incident Action Planning

Incident action planning guides effective incident management activities. An Incident Action Plan (IAP) is a concise, coherent means of capturing and communicating overall incident priorities, objectives, strategies, tactics, and assignments in the context of both operational and support activities. The IAP should focus on addressing the needs of future timeframes (called operational periods).

To be effective, an IAP should:

- Cover a specified timeframe
- Be proactive and address contingencies
- Specify the incident objectives
- State the activities to be completed
- Assign responsibilities
- Identify resources
- Specify communication protocols

Even the smallest of incidents are managed by incident objectives and plans. The plan can be as simple as the next steps the Incident Commander plans to do. For smaller/less complex incidents, the IAP may be oral or written, except for hazardous materials incidents, which require a written IAP.

Manageable Span of Control

Depending on your role within the Incident Command System (ICS) structure, you may be asked to manage the activities of others.

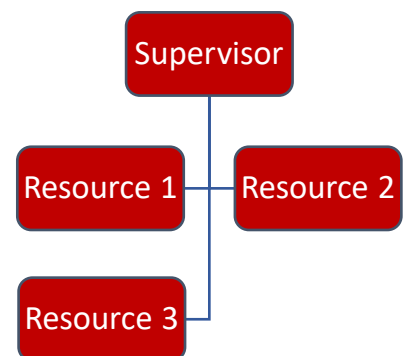
Span of control refers to the number of individuals or resources that one supervisor can manage effectively during an incident. This concept is especially important for shaping the Operations Section organizational structure.

The optimal span of control is one supervisor to five subordinates (1:5).

However, effective incident management particularly outside of the Operations Section may require ratios significantly different from this. This ratio is a guideline--incident personnel should use their best judgement to determine the appropriate ratio for an incident.

If too much responsibility is given to the supervisor, the span of control may become unmanageable. A manageable span of control on incidents may actually vary depending upon the type of incident, nature of the task, hazards and safety factors, and distances between personnel and resources.

Maintaining a manageable span of control is particularly important at incidents where safety and accountability are a top priority.



Incident Facilities and Locations

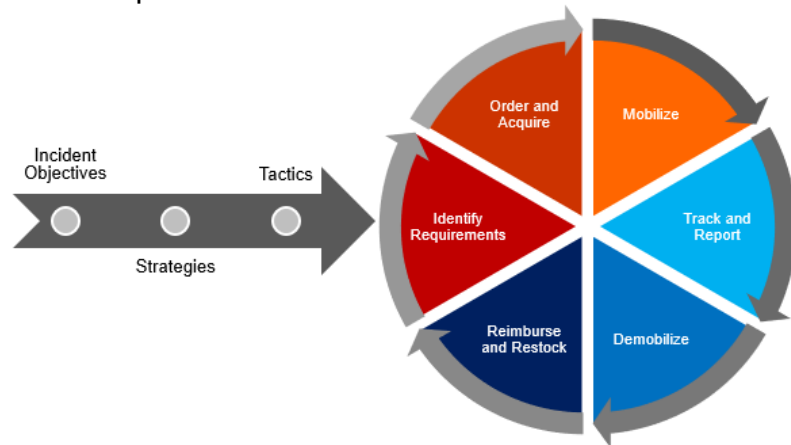
Depending upon the incident size and complexity, various types of support facilities may be established by Incident Command. These designated facilities typically include:

- Incident Command Post (ICP)
- Incident bases and camps
- Joint Information Centers (JIC)
- Staging Areas
- Helicopter (Helo) Spots and Helibases (Air and UAV)

Comprehensive Resource Management

At any incident or event, the situation must be assessed and response planned. Resources must be organized, assigned and directed to accomplish the incident objectives. As they work, resources must be managed to adjust to changing conditions. Managing resources safely and effectively is the most important consideration at an incident. The formalized resource management process in ICS ensures that the management principles translate into practice at the incident.

Comprehensive Resource Management describes standard mechanisms to identify requirements, order and acquire, mobilize, track and report status, demobilize, and reimburse and restock resources such as personnel, teams, and equipment.



Key resource management activities include:

- Resource Identification and Typing
- Qualification, Certification and Credentialing Personnel
- Planning for Resources
- Acquiring, Storing and Inventorying Resources

Integrated Communications

Incident communications are facilitated through the development and use of a common communications plan and interoperable communication processes and systems that include voice and data links.

Integrated Communications are necessary to:

- Maintain connectivity
- Achieve situational awareness
- Facilitate information sharing

Establishment and Transfer of Command

The command function should be clearly established at the beginning of an incident. The jurisdiction or organization with primary responsibility for the incident designates the Incident Commander and the process for transferring command.

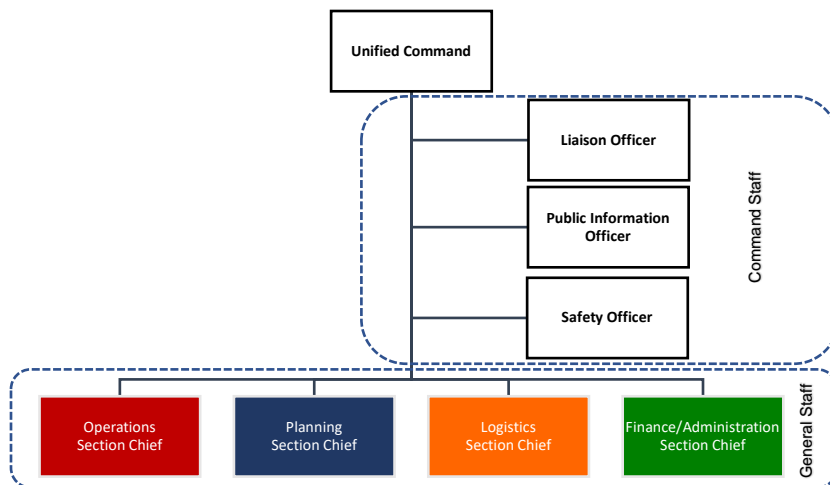
Transfer of command may occur during the course of an incident. When command is transferred, the process should include a briefing that captures all essential information for continuing safe and effective operations.

Unified Command

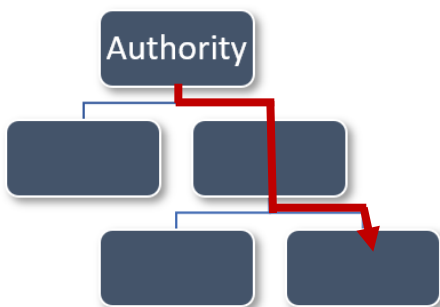
In a Unified Command, there is no single "Commander." Instead, the Unified Command manages the incident through jointly approved objectives. Unified Command allows entities with different legal, geographic, and functional responsibilities to work together effectively without adversely affecting individual agency authority, responsibility, or accountability.

Unified Command is typically established when no single jurisdiction, agency or organization has the authority and/or resources to manage the incident on its own.

Unified Command can include incidents involving multiple jurisdictions, a single jurisdiction with multiagency involvement, or multiple jurisdictions with multiagency involvement.



Chain of Command



Chain of command is an orderly line that details how authority flows through the hierarchy of the incident management organization. Chain of command:

- Allows an Incident Commander to direct and control the actions of all personnel on the incident.
- Avoids confusion by requiring that orders flow from supervisors.

Chain of command does NOT prevent personnel from directly communicating with each other to ask for or share information. While formal direction and control follows the chain of command, informal information sharing occurs throughout the ICS structure.

Unity of Command

While chain of command relates to the overall hierarchy of the organization, unity of command deals with the fact that all individuals have a single designated supervisor they report to.

Based on the principle of unity of command, you will:

- Report to only one Incident Command System (ICS) supervisor.
- Receive work assignments only from your ICS supervisor.

When you are assigned to an incident, you no longer report directly to your day-to-day supervisor. In fact, there is no correlation between the ICS organization and the administrative structure of any single agency or jurisdiction. 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.

While chain of command and unity of command are applied in all incidents, the actual command structure itself and the responsibilities of those involved change based on the type of incident and your specific role.

Accountability

Effective accountability during incident operations is essential. As part of the Incident Command System (ICS) structure, you will need to abide by agency policies and guidelines and any applicable rules and regulations.

There are several principles you will need to adhere to:

- Check-In/Check-Out. All responders must report in to receive an assignment. Checking out is just as critical as checking in.
- Incident Action Planning. Response operations must be coordinated as outlined in the Incident Action Plan.
- Unity of Command. Each individual will be assigned to only one supervisor.
- Personal Responsibility. ICS relies on each individual taking personal accountability for his or her own actions.
- Span of Control. Supervisors must be able to adequately supervise and control their subordinates, as well as communicate with and manage all resources under their supervision.
- Resource Tracking. Supervisors must record and report resource status changes as they occur. Accountability starts as soon as a resource is requested through the time that the resource returns to their home base safely.

In addition to the incident, personal accountability is critical to response success. Each member is responsible for maintaining situational awareness of their environment, as well as reporting safety concerns to the chain of command.

Dispatch/Deployment

Resources should be deployed only when requested or when dispatched by an appropriate authority through established resource management systems. Resources not requested should refrain from self-dispatching to avoid overburdening the incident

command.

Another key feature of ICS is the importance of managing resources to adjust to changing conditions.

When an incident occurs, you must be dispatched or deployed to become part of the incident response. In other words, until you are deployed to the incident organization, you remain in your everyday role.

After being deployed, your first task is to check in and receive an assignment. After check-in, you will locate your incident supervisor and obtain your initial briefing. The briefings you receive and give should include:

- Current assessment of the situation.
- Identification of your specific job responsibilities.
- Identification of coworkers.
- Location of work area.
- Identification of break areas, as appropriate.
- Procedural instructions for obtaining needed resources.
- Operational periods/work shifts.
- Required safety procedures and personal protective equipment (PPE), as appropriate.

Information and Intelligence Management

Information and intelligence are important in the Incident Command System (ICS). Incident management must establish a process for gathering, analyzing, assessing, sharing, and managing incident-related information and intelligence. In NIMS, "intelligence" refers exclusively to threat-related information developed by law enforcement, medical surveillance, and other investigative organizations.