



Guide to the Incident Command System for MRC Units

A Guide for Local MRC Units



Guide to the Incident Command System for MRC Units

Background

The Incident Command System (ICS) was developed by representatives of local, state, and federal fire agencies in Southern California in the 1970s to respond more effectively to the complexities of fighting large wildland fires that often crossed jurisdictional boundaries and involved multiple organizations. Since then, federal, state, tribal, and local governments and many private-sector and nongovernmental organizations have used ICS to respond to and manage numerous natural and manmade emergencies, from minor incidents to large, complex multi-jurisdictional emergencies and disasters.

MRC units should adopt ICS as the management system for response to emergencies and disasters, and all MRC members should have a basic understanding of ICS (i.e., an *awareness* level), regardless of their position or employment status (i.e., paid or volunteer) within an MRC unit (see <http://www.medicalreserv корпус.gov/NIMSGuidance> for more information on required ICS training for MRC members). ICS contains the attributes necessary for efficient, well-coordinated emergency operations. It allows MRC units to be integrated into the emergency response system used by emergency services agencies, local public health departments, and healthcare institutions nationwide. Many emergencies involve response from multiple disciplines and may involve multiple jurisdictions. Because of its standardized organizational structure and common terminology, ICS provides a useful and flexible management system adaptable to incidents involving multiple jurisdictions and agencies.

ICS Basic Concepts

The primary features of ICS include the following:

- It provides the flexibility to rapidly activate and establish an organizational form around the functions needing to be performed to efficiently and effectively mitigate an emergency.
- It can be used for any type or size of emergency, ranging from a minor incident involving only a few members of the emergency organization, to a large, complex incident involving multiple agencies and jurisdictions.
- It allows agencies at all levels of government, as well as nongovernmental and private sector organizations, to communicate using common terminology and operating procedures.
- It allows for the timely acquisition of a combination of resources during an emergency.
- It develops its organizational structure modularly, based on the type and size of the incident.
 - The organization's staff builds from the top down. Five sections can be developed, each with several units established as needed.
 - The specific organizational structure established for any given emergency will be based on the incident's management and resource needs.

Basic ICS Organizational Structure

Basic ICS organizational structure comprises five sections: Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance/Administration. Each section may contain several units that are established as needed.

Command

Command is responsible for overall management of the incident. The command function may be conducted in two general ways: Single Command or Unified Command. In a Single Command structure, the Incident Commander is solely responsible for the overall management of an incident. Because large or complex incidents usually require a response by multiple agencies and jurisdictions, a Unified Command structure, a hallmark of ICS, is invaluable in effectively managing and mitigating an emergency. In a Unified Command, all agencies having a jurisdictional responsibility at a multi-jurisdictional incident contribute to the process of:

- Determining the overall incident objectives
- Selecting strategies
- Ensuring that joint planning for tactical operations is accomplished
- Maximizing the use of all assigned resources
- Developing the overall Incident Action Plan

The proper selection of participants to work within a unified command structure depends upon the following:

- The location of the incident (i.e., which political subdivisions are involved)
- The kind of incident (i.e., which functional agencies are required)
- A Unified Command structure could consist of a key responsible official from each jurisdiction involved in a multi-jurisdictional incident, or it could consist of several functional departments within a single political jurisdiction.
- The major distinction between single and unified commands is that in a unified command structure, the individuals designated by their jurisdictions (or by departments within a single jurisdiction) jointly determine objectives, strategy, and priorities.

Command Staff

Command Staff positions include the Incident Commander (and Deputy Incident Commander if necessary), Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer. Command Staff positions may be established to assign or delegate responsibility for command activities that the Incident Commander cannot perform due to the complexity of the incident or other situational demands.

Incident Commander: The Incident Commander's function is to assume the overall responsibility for the management of the operation. The Incident Commander may be selected on the basis of the greatest jurisdictional involvement in the incident; the number of resources involved

in the incident; existing statutory or pre-agreement authority; or mutual knowledge of the individual's qualification for a specific type of incident.

Public Information Officer (PIO): The PIO is responsible for developing accurate and complete information regarding incident cause, size, current situation, resources committed, and other matters of general interest. The PIO will normally be the point of contact for the media and other organizations desiring information about the incident. In both Single and Unified Command structures, only one PIO is designated, although assistants from other agencies or departments may be appointed. In a Unified Command structure, a Joint Information Center (JIC) should be established. The JIC contains representatives from all involved agencies and collects and disseminates information for the entire Unified Command.

Safety Officer: The Safety Officer is responsible for assessing hazardous or unsafe situations and developing measures to ensure the safety of incident personnel. The Safety Officer must have the authority to stop and/or prevent unsafe acts and practices. In both Single and Unified Command structures, only one Safety Officer is designated, although assistants from other agencies or departments may be appointed.

Liaison Officer: Incidents that are multi-jurisdictional or involve multiple agencies may require the establishment of the Liaison Officer position on the Command Staff. The Liaison Officer is the point of contact for the assisting and cooperating agency representatives and stakeholder groups. Only one Liaison Officer will be assigned for each incident, including incidents operating under Unified Command and multi-jurisdictional incidents. The Liaison Officer may have assistants, as necessary, and the assistants may also represent assisting agencies or jurisdictions.

General Staff

The General Staff represents the major functional elements of ICS. It includes the Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance/Administration sections.

Operations: The Operations Section is responsible for the management of all incident tactical operations (i.e., those operations directed at the reduction of immediate hazards, the establishment of control over the situation, and the restoration of normal activities and conditions). The Operations Section Chief activates and supervises organization elements in accordance with the Incident Action Plan and directs its execution. The Operations Section Chief also directs the preparation of unit operational plans, requests or releases resources, makes expedient changes to the Incident Action Plan as necessary, and reports information regarding these activities to the Incident Commander.

Planning: The Planning Section is responsible for the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of disaster intelligence. This section maintains information on the current and forecast situation and on the status of assigned resources. The Planning Section is also responsible for the preparation of Incident Action Plans, which outline the objectives, strategy, organization, and resources necessary to effectively mitigate an incident and cover all tactical and support activities for a given operational period.

Logistics: The Logistics Section is responsible for providing all support needs to an incident, including ordering all resources from off-site locations. The Logistics Section provides facilities, transportation, supplies, and equipment maintenance, as well as fueling, feeding, communications, and medical services.

Finance/Administration: Usually only established on large and complex incidents, the Finance/Administration Section is responsible for all financial and cost analysis aspects of an incident. This section also oversees contract negotiations, tracks personnel and equipment time, processes claims for accidents and injuries, and works with the Logistics Section to ensure that resources are procured.

Additional Resources

Additional information on ICS is available at the following Web sites (please note that this is not a comprehensive list):

IS-100.a *Introduction to the Incident Command System*, ICS-100:

<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/IS100a.asp>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Incident Command System eTool:

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/ics/index.html>

National Response Team Technical Assistance Document on the Incident Command System/Unified Command:

[http://www.nrt.org/Production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-52ICSUCA/\\$File/ICSUCA.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.nrt.org/Production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-52ICSUCA/$File/ICSUCA.pdf?OpenElement)

National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System:

http://www.fema.gov/txt/nims/nims_ics_position_paper.txt

Incident Command System Primer for Public Health and Medical Professionals:

<http://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/planning/mscc/handbook/Pages/appendixb.aspx>

FIRESCOPE Incident Command System Field Operations Guide:

<http://www.firescope.org/ics-8x11-fog.htm>

U.S. Coast Guard Incident Command System Online Resources:

<http://homeport.uscg.mil/mycg/portal/ep/browse.do?channelId=-17668>

NIMSONline.com—The Incident Command System:

<http://www.nimsonline.com/incident-command-system-ics.html>

U.S. Forest Service ICS Forms:

http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/planning/nist/ics_forms.htm

NIMS Incident Command System Emergency Responder Field Operations Guide:

<http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/erfog.pdf>