
Preparedness: The range of deliberate, critical tasks and activities necessary to build, sustain, and improve the operational capability to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents. Preparedness is a continuous process. Preparedness involves efforts at all levels of government and between government and private sector and nongovernmental organizations to identify threats, determine vulnerabilities, and identify required resources. Within the NIMS, preparedness is operationally focused on establishing guidelines, protocols, and standards for planning, training and exercises, personnel qualification and certification, equipment certification, and publication management.

Resource Management: Efficient incident management requires a system for identifying available resources at all jurisdictional levels to enable timely and unimpeded access to resources needed to prepare for, respond to, or recover from an incident. Resource management under the NIMS includes mutual-aid agreements; the use of special federal, state, local, and tribal teams; and resource mobilization protocols.

Communications and Information Management: NIMS requires incident management organizations to ensure that effective interoperable communications and information management processes, procedures, and systems exist to support a wide variety of incident management activities across agencies and jurisdictions.

Incident: An incident is an occurrence, either caused by humans or natural phenomena, that requires response actions to prevent or minimize loss of life or damage to property and/or the environment.

ICS is 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 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 Head every day may not hold that level or area of responsibility when deployed under an ICS structure.

The ICS is a management system used to organize emergency response to a crisis or disaster situation within the facility as well as a system used by emergency responders across the county. 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 system 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, 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 ICS helps to reduce or eliminate the “who’s in charge” problem.