Incident Command System Overview

The following description of the Incident Command System (ICS) is a summary for use by radio operators working on emergency communications activities. This summary only provides a limited basic understanding of terminology and concepts associated with ICS.

This outline does not replace formal ICS training which is *strongly* recommended. If your primary served agency or the emergency management agency for your area conducts its own ICS training, all Team members should participate in this training. If no local classes are available, Team members should complete the Basic Incident Command System home study courses available from the FEMA Emergency Management Institute (See Appendix C).

Suggested Team training standards are:

Recommendations	**All Team Members**	**All Team Leaders**
Minimum Essential Training	ICS-100, ICS-700	ICS-100, ICS-200, ICS-700, ICS-800
Highly Recommended	ICS-200, ICS-800	IS-29, IS-288
Suggested	IS-394	IS-240, 241, 242 & 244, IS-802
If Available		ICS-300
Training to consider based on Team location and mission	IS-324, IS-325, IS-559	

Incident Command System is a management tool designed to assist anyone who has the responsibility for the successful outcome of an incident. An "incident" is any planned or unplanned occurrence or event, regardless of the cause, which requires action by emergency service personnel to prevent or minimize loss of life or damage to property and/or natural resources.

The Incident Command System has two facets. These are interrelated and both are critical to the successful outcome of the incident. They are management by objectives and a consistent organizational structure.

Management by Objectives

Four essential steps used in every incident, regardless of the size or complexity, are:

- Understand policy, procedures, and statutes
- Establish incident objectives
- Select appropriate strategy
- Apply tactics most likely to accomplish objectives (assign correct resources and monitor results)

The complexity of the incident will determine how formally the management by objectives portion will be handled. In a small, simple incident, the process can be handled by verbal communication among appropriate people. As the incident becomes more complex many of the differences in individual objectives will be resolved by documentation of the incident objectives. The ICS 201 document describes the process that allows this to happen in a systematic way.

Organizational Structure

The ICS structure begins with the Incident Commander (IC). The person designated IC is responsible for the management of the incident and starts the process by setting incident objectives. This person may do all functions without aid but will usually delegate responsibilities to others in the organization. The IC still has overall responsibility for the incident, regardless of duties delegated.

It is common to have an incident cross jurisdictional boundaries. Unified Command is the ICS process that allows the multiple jurisdictions to develop unified objectives and strategies for the incident. This is accomplished without any loss of authority, responsibility, or accountability.

Under Unified Command:

- The incident will be handled under a single coordinated Incident Action Plan (IAP).
- One Operations Section Chief will have responsibility for implementing the Incident Action Plan (IAP).
- One Incident Command Post (ICP) will be established.

As the IC fills positions in the organizational structure, the positions will fall into five areas of management function:

- Command - Responsible for all incident or event activity. The command staff assists the IC and reports directly to the IC. The incident size/complexity will determine which other management functions will be filled.

- Operations - Responsible for directing the tactical actions to meet incident objectives. There is only one Operations Chief (if activated by the IC) per operational period but that position may have deputies as needed. The Operations Section commonly uses Branches, Divisions, Groups, Task Forces, and Strike Teams to maintain unity, chain of command, and span of control.

- Planning - Responsible for collection, evaluation, and display of incident information. It also maintains status of resources, preparing the IAP and incident related documentation.

- Logistics - Responsible for providing adequate services and support to meet all incident or event needs. *Communications is part of Logistics.*

- Finance/Administration - Responsible for tracking incident related costs, personnel, and equipment records, and administering procurement contracts associated with the incident or event.

Each of these functional areas can expand as needed into additional organizational units with further delegation of authority. As positions are filled, the ICS position titles are used as the message addresses and radio designations.

The ICS organization at any time should reflect only what is required to meet planned tactical objectives. The size of the current organization and that of the next operational period is determined through the incident action planning process.

A number of organizational elements may be activated in the various sections without activating sectional chiefs. Each activated element must have a person in charge of it. A single supervisor may initially be in charge of more than one unit. Elements that have been activated and are no longer needed should be deactivated to decrease organizational size.

The greatest challenge for the IC is to maintain control of the resources and to keep open communication both up and down the organizational structure. The principles of unity of command, chain of command, and span of control allow this to take place. These three principles are also critical for maintaining the safety of incident personnel.

- Unity of Command means that every individual has one designated supervisor, knows who that person is, and knows how to contact them.
- Chain of Command means that there is an orderly line of authority within the ranks of the organization with lower levels subordinate to and connected to higher levels. In most incidents, chain of command will initially consist of:

  Command
     Resource

  As incidents expand, the chain of command expands through an organizational structure that can consist of several layers. For example:

  Command
     Section
       Branch
         Division or Group
           Unit
             Resource

- Span of Control relates to the number of individuals one supervisor can manage effectively. In ICS the span of control for any supervisor should fall in the range of three to seven, with five being considered normal. Span of control is accomplished through timely use of delegations and good resource management.

Incident Documentation

The Incident Action Plan provides all incident supervisory personnel with direction for future actions. It may be written or verbal but written plans are preferred. It is important to use written IAPs when:

- Two or more jurisdictions are involved
- The incident will overlap major changes in personnel or go into a new operational period
- There is extensive or full activation of the ICS organization
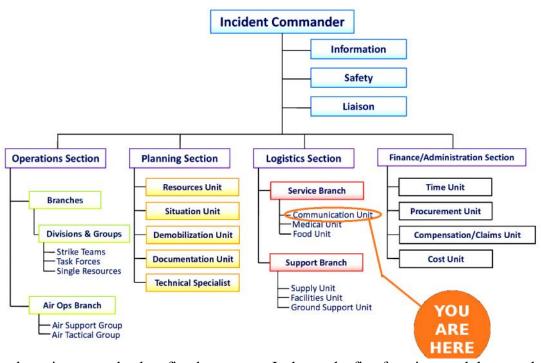
Incident Communications Plan

The Communications Plan can be very simple and given verbally or may be quite complex and form a portion of the written Incident Action Plan. ICS forms 205 and 205A are used to document the Communications Plan.   In a complex incident, the ICS form 205 will be developed from the information maintained on ICS form 217.

INCIDENT RADIO COMMUNICATIONS PLAN (ICS 205)

1. Incident Name:				2. Date/Time Prepared: Date: Time.				3. Operational Period: Date From: Date To: Time From. Time To.			

4. Basic Radio Channel Use:

Zone Grp.	Ch #	Function	Channel Name/Trunked Radio System Talkgroup	Assignment	RX Freq N or W	RX Tone/NAC	TX Freq N or W	TX Tone/NAC	Mode (A, D, or M)	Remarks

5. Special Instructions:

6. Prepared by (Communications Unit Leader): Name: _____ Signature: _____

ICS 205	IAP Page _____	Date/Time: _____

COMMUNICATIONS LIST (ICS 205A)

1. Incident Name:	2. Operational Period: Date From: Date To: Time From: Time To:

3. Basic Local Communications Information:

Incident Assigned Position	Name (Alphabetized)	Method(s) of Contact (phone, pager, cell, etc.)

4. Prepared by: Name: _____ Position/Title: _____ Signature: _____

ICS 205A	IAP Page _____	Date/Time: _____

ICS Command Structure

The above is not an absolute fixed structure. It shows the five functions and the way the structure typically expands within each of those functions. Depending on the type and size of the incident, there may be more or fewer units under each function, but the units will not move under a different function. It is possible in a small incident that one person may head more than one function, such as one person being both Planning and Finance Officer.

Position Objectives

Each person within the ICS structure is charged with accomplishing specific tasks in support of the overall effort. These tasks, for incident managers are:

Incident Commander (IC)
- Assess the situation
- Establish incident objectives and overall plan
  - For the first hour
  - For hours two through eight
  - For extended operations
- Fill necessary ICS functions
- Brief staff
- Monitor staff and revise plans as necessary
- Handle requests for additional resources and release resources

Operations Chief
- Obtain briefing from IC
- Establish operational objectives per incident plan
  - For the first hour
  - For hours two through eight
  - For extended operations
- Develop tactics to accomplish objectives
- Divide incident by geographic reference and/or function
- Appoint and brief Branch/Division/Group leaders
- Supervise operations
- Determine and acquire resources from Branch/Division/Group leader input

Branch/Division/Group Leaders
- Assess the situation
- Establish incident objectives for Branch/Division/Group
  - For the first hour
  - For hours two through eight
  - For extended operations
- Develop tactical plan to accomplish objectives
- Determine time and resource requirements
- Determine logistical requirements
- Request needs from Operations Chief

Plans Chief
- Obtain briefing from IC
- Establish necessary positions within function
- Supervise preparation of Incident Action Plan (IAP)
- Develop alternative strategies
- Provide periodic predictions on incident potential
- Supervise planning section units

  Situation Unit
  - Compile incident situation information
  - Display incident status on maps, boards, etc.

  Resources Unit
  - Compile incident resource information
  - Display resource utilization/availability
  - Check in resources as they arrive

  Documentation Unit
  - Document complete incident

Logistics Chief
- Obtain briefing from IC
- Establish logistics section positions as necessary and do briefings as necessary
- Identify service and support needs for the duration of the incident
- Coordinate and process requests for resources
- Advise IC and staff of current service and support capability
- Prepare Service and Support portions of the IAP

Finance/Administration Chief
- Obtain briefing from IC
- Obtain briefing from agency administrator(s)
- Work with IC and Ops Chief to ensure work/rest guidelines are being met
- Identify cost sharing possibilities
- Assess potential for legal claims arising out of incident activities
- Ensure that proper tax documentation is completed
- Determine whether hosting agency will maintain time records, or whether the incident will document all time for the incident, and what forms will be used
- Track all expenditures