

Incident Command

September 2024



The IACP Policy Center creates four types of documents: Model Policies, Considerations Documents, Concepts & Issues Papers, and Need to Know one-page summaries. Typically, for each topic, either a Model Policy or a Considerations Document is created, supplemented with a Concepts & Issues Paper. This file contains the following documents:

- **Model Policy**: Provides police agencies with concrete guidance and directives by describing in sequential format the manner in which actions, tasks, and operations are to be performed.



Glossary

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DEFINITIONS¹

Command Staff: A group of incident personnel that the Incident Commander (IC) or Unified Command assigns to support the command function at an Incident Command Post (ICP). Command staff often include a Public Information Officer, a Safety Officer, and a Liaison Officer, who have assistants as necessary.

Division: The organizational level having responsibility for operations within a defined geographic area. Divisions are established when the number of resources exceeds the manageable span of control for the Section Chief.

General Staff: A group of incident personnel organized according to function and reporting to the Incident Commander or Unified Command. The Incident Command System General Staff consists of the Operations Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, Logistics Section Chief, and Finance/Administration Section Chief.

Group: An organizational subdivision established to divide the incident management structure into functional areas of operation. Groups are composed of resources assembled to perform a special function not necessarily within a single geographic area.

Incident: An occurrence, natural or manmade, that necessitates a response to protect life or property. In this document, the word “incident” includes planned events as well as emergencies and/or disasters of all kinds and sizes.

Incident Action Plan (IAP): An oral or written plan containing the objectives established by the Incident Commander or Unified Command and addressing tactics and support activities for the planned operational period, generally 12 to 24 hours.

Incident Base: A location where personnel coordinate and administer logistics functions for an incident. There is typically only one base per incident. (An incident name or other designator is added to the term *Base*.) The Incident Command Post may be co-located with the Incident Base.

Incident Command. The Incident Command System is the organizational element responsible for the overall management of the incident and consists of the Incident Commander or Unified Command and any additional Command Staff activated.

Incident Command Post (ICP): The field location where the primary functions of incident command are performed. The ICP may be co-located with the Incident Base or other incident facilities.

Incident Command System (ICS): A standardized approach to the command, control, and coordination of on-scene incident management, providing a common hierarchy within which personnel from multiple organizations can be effective. ICS is the combination of procedures, personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications operating within a

¹ The definitions provided herein are for the sole purpose of understanding the terms within the context of the guidance that follows. Most of the terms are derived from the NIMS / ICS model. For additional terms and/or information, please view here: [Glossary of Related Terms \(fema.gov\)](https://www.fema.gov/glossary-of-related-terms)

common organizational structure, designed to aid in the management of on-scene resources during incidents. It is used for all kinds of incidents and is applicable to small, as well as large and complex, incidents, including planned events.

Incident Commander (IC): The individual responsible for on-scene activities, including developing incident objectives and ordering and releasing resources. The IC has overall authority and responsibility for conducting incident operations.

Incident Management Team (IMT): A rostered group of ICS-qualified personnel consisting of an Incident Commander, Command and General Staff, and personnel assigned to other key ICS positions.

Intelligence/Investigations Function: Efforts to determine the source or cause of the incident (e.g., disease outbreak, fire, complex coordinated attack, or cyber incident) in order to control its impact and/or help prevent the occurrence of similar incidents. In ICS, the function may be accomplished in the Planning Section, Operations Section, Command Staff, as a separate General Staff section, or in some combination of these locations.

Liaison Officer: A member of the ICS Command Staff responsible for coordinating with representatives from cooperating assisting agencies or organizations.

Logistics Section: The ICS section responsible for providing facilities, services, and material support for the incident.

National Incident Management System (NIMS): A systematic, proactive approach to guide all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to work together to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from the effects of incidents. NIMS provides stakeholders across the whole community with the shared vocabulary, systems, and processes to successfully deliver the capabilities described in the National Preparedness System.² NIMS provides a consistent foundation for dealing with all incidents, ranging from daily occurrences to incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response.

Operational Period: The time scheduled for executing a given set of operation actions, as specified in the IAP. Operational periods can vary in length but are typically 12 to 24 hours.

Operations Section: The ICS section responsible for implementing tactical incident operations described in the IAP. In ICS, the Operations Section may include subordinate branches, divisions, and/or groups.

Planned Event: An incident that is a scheduled non-emergency activity (e.g., political convention, sporting event, concert, parade). May also be referred to as *event*.

Planning Section: The ICS section that collects, evaluates, and disseminates operational information related to the incident and for the preparation and documentation of the IAP. This section also maintains information on the current and forecasted situation and on the status of resources assigned to the incident.

Public Information Officer (PIO): A member of the ICS Command Staff responsible for interfacing with the public and media and/or with other agencies with incident-related information needs.

Safety Officer: In ICS, a member of the Command Staff responsible for monitoring incident operations and advising the Incident Commander or Unified Command on all matters relating to operational safety, including the health and safety of incident personnel. The Safety Officer modifies or stops the work of personnel to prevent unsafe acts.

Section: The ICS organizational element having responsibility for a major functional area of incident management (e.g., Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance/Administration).

² This system can be defined as an organized process with the goal of achieving a secure and resilient Nation.

Staging Area: A temporary location for available resources in which personnel, supplies, and equipment await operational assignment.

Unified Command (UC): An ICS application used when more than one agency has incident jurisdiction or when incidents cross political jurisdictions.

Unity of Command: A NIMS guiding principle stating that each individual involved in incident management reports to and takes direction from only one person.



Model Policy

Updated: September 2024

Incident Command

I. PURPOSE

This agency has adopted the National Incident Management System (NIMS)³ as the primary method to prepare for, respond to, and manage incidents. NIMS is a comprehensive national approach to incident management, applicable at all jurisdictional levels and across functional disciplines. It provides a consistent nationwide Incident Command System (ICS) approach for U.S. federal, state, and local governments to work effectively and efficiently.

ICS may be utilized for any size or type of incident or event as a means to coordinate the efforts of individual members and other responding agencies as they work toward the stabilization of the incident. The ICS may expand or contract depending on the complexity of the incident and the on-scene requirements, as determined by the Incident Commander (IC) or Unified Commander (UC).

II. POLICY

This agency shall utilize NIMS and ICS direction for various incidents and events and shall incorporate these structured processes into other agency policies and procedures, when appropriate.

III. PROCEDURES

This agency shall use the following directive when establishing an ICS.

A. Plan

1. For incidents that may require an ICS, this agency shall do the following:
 - a. Establish priorities,
 - b. Assess capabilities, and
 - c. Establish roles and responsibilities.
2. Plans for scheduled events (such as conventions, fairs, holiday parades, and major sporting events) shall be maintained, updated, and disseminated prior to the event.
3. For scheduled events, the IC or their designee should assign officers to assist in planning the event with other county, public safety, or police agencies, to include demobilization plans.
4. For unplanned incidents, proceed to [incident assessment](#).

³ For more information, see [National Incident Management System \(fema.gov\)](#).

B. Organize and Equip

This agency shall utilize the following numerical system based on NIMS and ICS to establish a scale to categorize each potential incident's size, magnitude, and overall complexity.⁴ This agency shall assess ICS activation requirements, standard equipment, staffing needs, goals, and objectives. The necessary organization and equipment for each level includes, but is not limited to the following:

1. Type One Incident Activation
 - a. The most complex type of incident.
 - b. National resources will be required to safely and effectively manage and operate the incident.
 - c. All ICS positions are activated.
 - d. There may be a high impact on the local jurisdiction, which requires additional staff for administrative and support functions.
2. Type Two Incident Activation
 - a. The incident is expected to go into multiple operational periods.
 - b. It may require the response of additional resources out of the immediate area/jurisdiction.
 - c. Most or all of the Command and General Staff positions are activated.
 - d. A written IAP should be required for each operational period.
 - e. Many of the functional units are required.
3. Type Three Incident Activation
 - a. Some or all of the Command and General Staff positions may be activated, as well as Division/Group Supervisor and/or Unit Leader level positions.
 - b. The incident may extend into multiple operational periods.
 - c. A written IAP may be required for each operational period.
4. Type Four Incident Activation
 - a. Command staff and general staff functions are activated, as needed.
 - b. Several resources are required to mitigate the incident.
 - c. The incident is typically limited to one operational period.
 - d. Briefings may take place at the discretion of the IC.
 - e. No written IAP is required, but a documented operational briefing may be completed for all incoming resources.
5. Type Five Incident Activation
 - a. A limited number of officers can handle the incident.
 - b. Command and general staff positions are not activated.
 - c. No written Incident Action Plan (IAP) is required.
 - d. The incident is typically contained within the first operational period.

C. Training and Exercise

1. The chief executive or their designee shall do the following:
 - a. establish and outline training requirements for the ICS.
 - b. conduct training in conjunction with established NIMS and ICS procedures.

⁴ For more information, see [Incident Types \(fema.gov\)](https://www.fema.gov).

- c. conduct, at a minimum, annual training in the form of tabletop or field exercises and include multiple agencies within and adjacent to the jurisdiction.
 - d. prepare an after-action report following each training exercise,
 - e. be responsible for facilitating and documenting NIMS and ICS training as required,⁵ and
 - f. ensure all sworn agency personnel complete awareness-level NIMS courses.
2. Advanced NIMS courses are required for supervisors, to coincide with increasing levels of responsibility.
3. Training shall proactively assess gaps and weaknesses within agency plans, policies, and procedures.
4. All training shall be documented and debriefed.

D. Incident Assessment

The first responding officer shall:

1. Assume initial incident command.⁶
2. Assess the operational situation immediately upon arrival and proceed according to applicable policies and procedures. This assessment includes the following:
 - a. Size: How large a geographical area is (or will be) affected?
 - b. Scope: How many resources are likely to be involved? What will be necessary to achieve stabilization and/or containment?
 - c. Duration: How long can one reasonably expect the event or incident to last with or without ICS intervention?
 - d. Potential multiagency involvement.
 - e. Requests for additional resources as needed.
 - f. Determining if any specialized units are needed.
3. Manage assigned resources.
4. Establish the command organization based on the needs of the incident and the assets available.
5. Establish immediate priorities.
6. Ensure adequate safety measures are in place.
7. Authorize and coordinate with key people and officials.
8. Authorize and coordinate the release of information to the media.
9. Maintain command and control of the incident or event until properly relieved.

E. Establishing Command

Once the ICS has been activated, the following shall occur.

1. The first responder shall serve as the initial IC. Prior to being relieved, the first responder shall have the latitude and authority to assign any person to any assignment or task.
2. The IC shall determine whether the incident warrants an expanded ICS response.
3. Upon on-scene arrival of a higher-ranking agency official, if not yet established, the higher-ranking official shall ensure the establishment of an ICS immediately.

⁵ For additional information, see [Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 | Homeland Security](#).

⁶ The first responder should assume incident command responsibilities until official release, dependent on agency policy. In some instances, the first responder will remain the Incident Commander for the duration of the incident.

4. As soon as practical following ICS activation, the responsibility of the initial IC shall be assumed by a ranking member, if necessary. Most often, this will be an on-duty patrol supervisor. However, depending upon the nature of the incident, the immediate transfer of command may take place for reasons such as the following:
 - a. a higher-ranking official assumes command,
 - b. command is assumed by an individual with a particular expertise, or
 - c. command is assumed by a designated qualified member, as appointed by the highest-ranking member on scene.⁷
5. Various components of the ICS should be activated depending on the size and complexity of the incident or event. Operational need is the primary factor in determining which components or functions are activated. The IC, utilizing the standardized ICS structure, shall activate those components necessary for the particular incident. These components are represented graphically in [Appendix A](#) and include the following:
 - a. Command Staff Sections
 - i. Safety Officer,
 - ii. Liaison Officer, and
 - iii. Public Information Officer (PIO).
 - b. General Staff Sections
 - i. Operations;
 - ii. Planning;
 - iii. Logistics;
 - iv. Finance/administration; and
 - v. If necessary, placement of the Intelligence/Investigations function.⁸
 - c. Branches (subdivisions within the Operations Section formed to manage the broad span of control issues)
 - d. Divisions (geographical subdivisions)
 - e. Groups (functional subdivisions)
6. The IC shall designate an officer in charge of each component. If a section is not activated for the incident, the IC shall be responsible for performing that function.
7. Incident personnel shall be activated and assigned at the discretion of the IC, or their designee, as warranted. Requests for additional agency personnel, specialized units, or assistance from other localities, shall be authorized by the IC following emergency operations plans, mutual aid agreements, or mutual aid as permitted by state law.
8. Command and General Staff shall report directly to the IC.

⁷ The arrival of a more qualified person does not necessarily mean a change in Incident Command. The more qualified individual may assume command according to agency guidelines, maintain command as it is and monitor command activity and effectiveness, or request a more qualified Incident Commander from the agency with a higher level of jurisdictional responsibility.

⁸ The Incident Commander or Unified Command makes the final determination regarding the scope and placement of the Intelligence/Investigations function within the command structure. The Intelligence/Investigations function can be incorporated as an element of the Planning Section, the Operations Section, within the Command Staff, as a separate General Staff Section, or in some combination of these locations, as necessary per incident needs.

9. The IC shall determine and establish the location of an Incident Command Post (ICP)⁹ or Incident Base (IB), if required.
10. The IC shall inform communications of the establishment of command and the ICP's specific location.¹⁰
11. The IC or Planning Section shall document major decision points, incoming and outgoing resources, and ensure the tracking of personnel.
12. The chief executive or their designee shall exercise command and control over all police resources committed to an incident or event that is multidisciplinary in nature.¹¹

F. Personnel Accountability

1. The IC, or designee, shall maintain strict personnel accountability and shall be continually updated by the section chiefs or the resource unit leader in order to keep an ongoing, accurate assessment of the entire operation.
2. If the IC establishes command after units are actively deployed, the IC should conduct a radio roll call to determine their positions. In ICS mode, the Operations Section Chief shall maintain and keep the IC apprised of the location of all deployed units.
3. The IC shall be cognizant of and limit self-deploying officers throughout the duration of the incident, as applicable.
4. During major incidents, the IC may appoint a safety officer who shall have the responsibility and authority to stop an operation or part of it if safety standards are not being met.
5. Depending on the size and duration of the incident, consideration should be given to relief, deployment, and provisions for operations personnel.

G. Transfer or Assumption of Command

1. Incident command can be transferred at any time, for many reasons, to include but not be limited to the following:
 - a. a jurisdiction or agency is legally required to take command;
 - b. change of command is necessary for effectiveness or efficiency;
 - c. a need to relieve personnel on incidents of extended duration;
 - d. a higher-level incident management team (IMT) helping to maintain a manageable span of control; or
 - e. personal emergencies arise.
2. Prior to the transfer of command, the following actions are required by the incoming IC:
 - a. assess the current situation with the current IC,
 - b. receive a full briefing from the current IC and document the transfer,

⁹ This location should be carefully chosen based on such factors as incident size, need for security, proximity to the incident, and support issues such as communications, shelter from the elements, and related considerations. The ICP can be moved at a later time if necessary.

¹⁰ For example, the "ICP location will be in the service yard at the west end of the Washington Tunnel." If necessary, the IC will determine an incident designator to be used by all responders. This designator should be one or two geographical words, such as the street name or specific place name of the incident. Examples include "Hill Street Command," or "Washington Bridge Command." The designator chosen should clearly distinguish the event place and not be easily confused with other locations.

¹¹ In some jurisdictions, this individual may hold political significance and therefore, as dictated by policy, shall remain independent of the IC.

- c. determine an appropriate time for the transfer of command,
 - d. notify communications of the change in IC, and
 - e. re-assign current IC to another assignment (such as deputy IC) or provide relief from duty.
3. The incoming IC shall ensure everyone on-scene, all affected personnel, and agencies are informed of the change in command.
4. There shall be a transfer of command briefing wherein all sections are briefed and all involved personnel are advised of the new command.

H. Demobilization

1. The IC or Planning Section shall develop a demobilization plan for the incident.
2. When the incident has been resolved or stabilized to such a point that command is no longer necessary, the IC shall notify communications that the incident command is being terminated.
3. Communications shall rebroadcast the message, and officers will return to their normal supervisory chain of command unless otherwise advised.

I. After-Action Review

1. As soon as reasonably possible after the incident, this agency shall conduct an after-action review with essential personnel involved in the incident. The review should identify response operations that worked well in addition to areas of potential improvement to include whether changes in operational protocols, policy, or training may be warranted.
2. The final IC shall ensure a documented after-action report is submitted for all major incidents outlined in agency policy. Major incidents include, but are not limited to the following:
 - a. IC activations where a death is involved;
 - b. active attacks;
 - c. barricade incidents;
 - d. hostage incidents;
 - e. mass casualty events;
 - f. incidents or events involving a joint or coordinated response by this agency and one or more other government agencies (for example, police, fire, military);
 - g. Large-scale protests, demonstrations, riots, and/or acts of civil disobedience, etc.; and
 - h. Large-scale pre-planned events, such as festivals, rallies, marathons, etc.
3. If a documented after-action report is submitted, it shall include the following:
 - a. the date, time, and duration of the incident;
 - b. a description and outcome of the incident;
 - c. a statement of personnel, agencies, and equipment utilized;
 - d. cost analysis to include salaries, equipment, food, and incidentals;
 - e. a copy of incident/event logs and all submitted reports;
 - f. any maps, forms, or related documentation;
 - g. a summary of deaths and injuries;
 - h. an assessment of damage to private and public property;

- i. any information relating to the status of criminal investigations and subsequent prosecutions;¹² and
 - j. A final evaluation and any subsequent conclusions relating to the agency's overall response, to include the following:
 - i. any problems or challenges encountered regarding personnel, equipment, resources or multiagency response;
 - ii. suggestions to revise policy or improve training and equipment; and
 - iii. any other consideration that would improve the agency's response to critical incidents or events in the future.
4. All documented after-action reports shall be forwarded without delay to the chief executive or their designee upon completion.
 5. Documented after-action reports are not required but recommended, at the discretion of the IC, for small-scale ICS incidents.

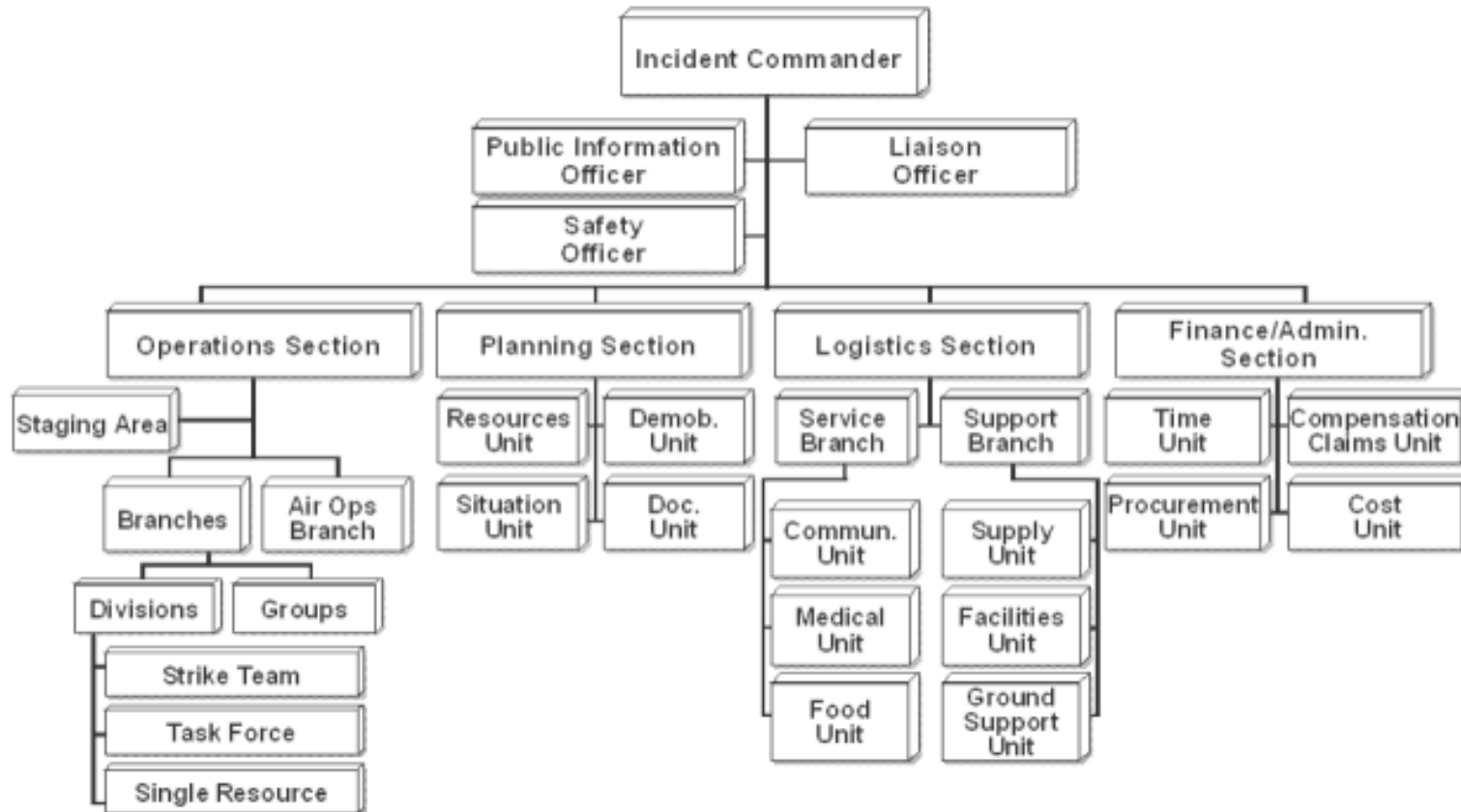
J. Evaluate and Improve

This agency shall conduct, at a minimum, an annual review of incidents where ICS structure was activated. This review shall be conducted with input from command and supervisory personnel with incident command and/or emergency management responsibilities.

1. This review shall include but is not limited to the following:
 - a. review of NIMS/ICS procedures,
 - b. public notification for awareness and safety,
 - c. notification of additional public safety agencies and other resources,
 - d. response to threats where lives are in imminent danger,
 - e. public sheltering and containment of the incident,
 - f. communications methods and systems,
 - g. evacuation methods, and
 - h. training and policy considerations.
2. The review and any recommendations shall be documented and submitted to the chief executive or their designee.
3. Updates to this agency's policies and procedures shall be implemented as required.

¹² Supplements to the after-action report should be considered at the conclusion of investigations and/or prosecutions.

APPENDIX A: ICS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART¹³



¹³ In ICS, the function may be accomplished in the Planning Section, Operations Section, Command Staff, as a separate General Staff Section, or in some combination of these locations. For more information see [ICS Organizational Structures and Elements](#).

Every effort has been made by the IACP Policy Center staff and advisory board to ensure that this document incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. However, police administrators should be cautioned that no model policy can meet all the needs of any given police agency. In addition, the formulation of specific agency policies must take into account local political and community perspectives and customs, prerogatives, and demands; often divergent police strategies and philosophies; and the impact of varied agency resource capabilities, among other factors. Readers outside of the United States should note that, while this document promotes procedures reflective of a democratic society, its legal basis follows United States Supreme Court rulings and other federal laws and statutes. Police administrators should be cautioned that each police agency operates in a unique environment of court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions, and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered and should therefore consult their agency's legal advisor before implementing any policy.

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