Unit 6: Unified Command

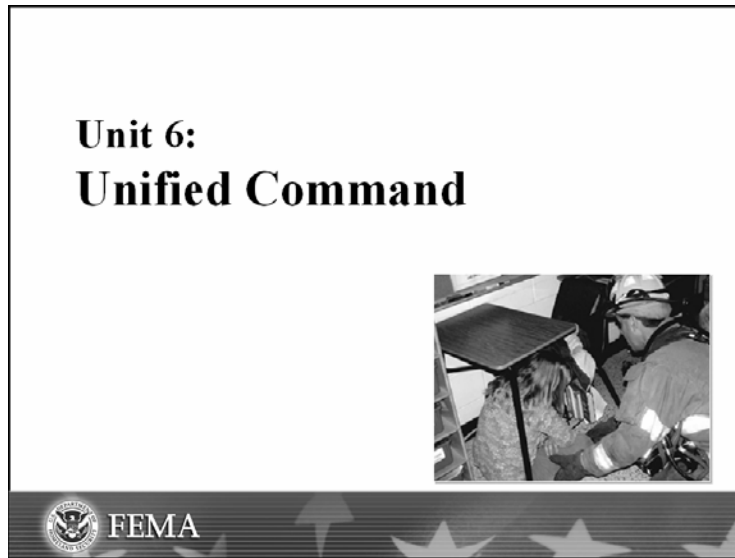**Topic**   **Unit Introduction**

Visual 6.1

Unit 6:
Unified Command

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Visual Description: Unit Introduction

Key Points

- The previous lessons covered the Incident Command Systems (ICS) fundamentals. This lesson introduces you to a more advanced concept, called **Unified Command**.

- Unified Command:
    - Applies ICS in incidents involving multiple jurisdictions or agencies.
    - Enables schools and agencies with different legal, geographic, and functional responsibilities to coordinate, plan, and interact effectively.

Topic	Unit Objectives

Visual 6.2

Visual Description: Unit Objectives

Key Points

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Define Unified Command.
- List the advantages of Unified Command.
- Identify the primary features of Unified Command.
- Describe the roles and reporting relationships between school personnel and emergency responders under a Unified Command.

| Topic | Activity: Optimal Strategy |

Visual 6.3

Activity: Optimal Strategy

Instructions: Read the scenario below and select the optimal strategy in your Student Manual.

Scenario: A high school football team is returning home from a State tournament in two buses. The first bus is involved in an accident on State Highway 1 right at the county line. Most of the bus is in Franklin County. However, the front part of the bus is in Revere County (the team's home county). First responders from both counties and the State have arrived on the scene. The Athletic Director was on the second bus and assumed command until first responders arrived.

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Visual Description: Activity: Optimal Strategy

Key Points

Instructions: Read the scenario below and select the optimal strategy that provides the best solution.

Scenario: A high school football team is returning home from a State tournament in two buses. The first bus is involved in an accident on State Highway 1 right at the county line. Most of the bus is in Franklin County. However, the front part of the bus is in Revere County (the team's home county). First responders from both counties and the State have arrived on the scene. The Athletic Director was on the second bus and assumed command until first responders arrived.

Select the optimal strategy.

☐ Divide the incident along geographic and functional lines so that each county, the State, and the school can establish its own ICS organization with well-defined areas of responsibilities.

☐ Create a single ICS incident structure that allows for an effective multijurisdictional or multiagency approach.

Topic   **Unified Command Definition and Benefits**

Visual 6.4

Visual Description: Unified Command

Key Points

Unified Command:

- Applies ICS in incidents involving multiple jurisdictions or agencies.
- Enables schools and agencies with different legal, geographic, and functional responsibilities to coordinate, plan, and interact effectively.

The Incident Commanders within the Unified Command make joint decisions and speak as one voice. Any differences are worked out within the Unified Command.

Unity of command is maintained. Each responder reports to a single supervisor within his or her area of expertise. Within a Unified Command the police officer would not tell the firefighters how to do their job nor would the police tell school personnel how to manage parent-student reunification.

| Topic | Unified Command Definition and Benefits |

Visual 6.5

Unified Command Benefits

- A shared understanding of priorities and restrictions.
- A single set of incident objectives.
- Collaborative strategies.
- Improved internal and external information flow.
- Less duplication of efforts.
- Better resource utilization.

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Visual Description: Unified Command Benefits

Key Points

In a Unified Command, schools and responding agencies blend into an integrated, unified team. A unified approach results in:

- A shared understanding of priorities and restrictions.
- A single set of incident objectives.
- Collaborative strategies.
- Improved internal and external information flow.
- Less duplication of efforts
- Better resource utilization.

Topic   **Unified Command Features**

Visual 6.6

Unified Command Features

- A single integrated incident organization
- Collocated (shared) facilities
- One set of incident objectives, single planning process, and Incident Action Plan
- Integrated General Staff – Only one Operations Section
- Coordinated process for resource ordering

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Visual Description: Unified Command Features

Key Points

Features of Unified Command include:

- **A Single Integrated Incident Organization:** As a team effort, Unified Command overcomes much of the inefficiency and duplication of effort that can occur when agencies from different functional and geographic jurisdictions, or agencies at different levels of government, operate without a common system or organizational framework.

- **Collocated (Shared) Facilities:** In a Unified Command incident facilities are collocated or shared. There is one single Incident Command Post.

- **One Set of Incident Objectives, Single Planning Process, and Incident Action Plan:** Unified Command uses one set of incident objectives and a single planning process, and produces one Incident Action Plan (IAP). The planning process for Unified Command is similar to the process used on single jurisdiction incidents.

Topic   **Unified Command Features**

Features of Unified Command include: (Continued)

- **Integrated General Staff:** Integrating multijurisdictional and/or multiagency personnel into various other functional areas may be beneficial. For example:

    - In Operations and Planning, Deputy Section Chiefs can be designated from an adjacent jurisdiction.
    - In Logistics, a Deputy Logistics Section Chief from another agency or jurisdiction can help to coordinate incident support.

    Incident Commanders within the Unified Command must concur on the selection of the General Staff Section Chiefs. The Operations Section Chief must have full authority to implement the tactics within the Incident Action Plan.

- **Coordinated Process for Resource Ordering:** The Incident Commanders within the Unified Command work together to establish resource ordering procedures that allow for:

    - Deployment of scarce resources to meet high-priority objectives.
    - Potential cost savings through agreements on cost sharing for essential services.

Topic   **Unified Command Organization**
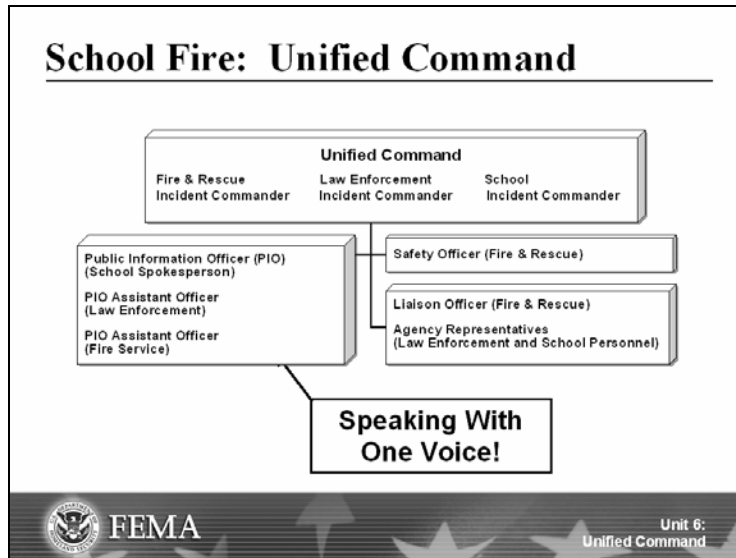
Visual 6.7

Visual Description: School Fire: Unified Command

Key Points

Unified Command results in a single integrated incident organization. Below is a sample Command Staff organizational chart for a school bus accident that occurs on a highway that is the boundary between two political jurisdictions. Notice that the Unified Command is composed of the agencies involved: Fire & Rescue, Law Enforcement, and School, and that personnel from the different agencies often are assigned as Assistant Officers.
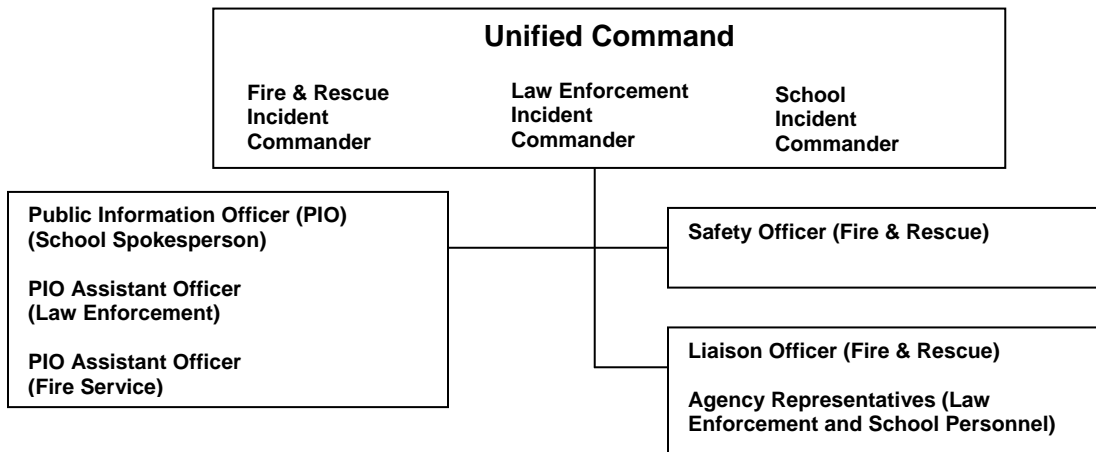
The combined Public Information approach ensures that the responders will speak with one voice.

| Topic | Unified Command Organization |
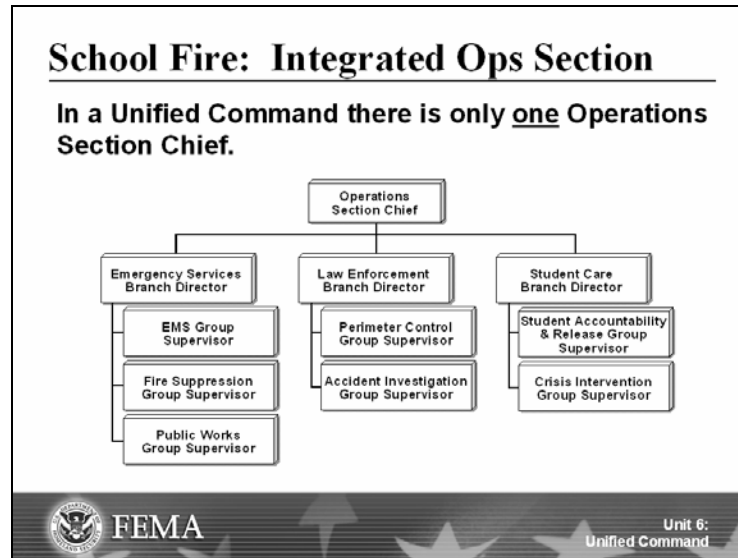
Visual 6.8

Visual Description: School Fire: Integrated Ops Section

Key Points

In a Unified Command there is <u>only one</u> Operations Section Chief. The Operations Section Chief should be the most qualified and experienced person available. Below is a sample Operations Section organizational chart for a school fire where arson is suspected.

Topic	Unified Command Strategies

Visual 6.9

Overcoming Barriers to Unified Command

What are the potential barriers to school personnel being included in the Unified Command?

How can you overcome these barriers?

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Unified Command
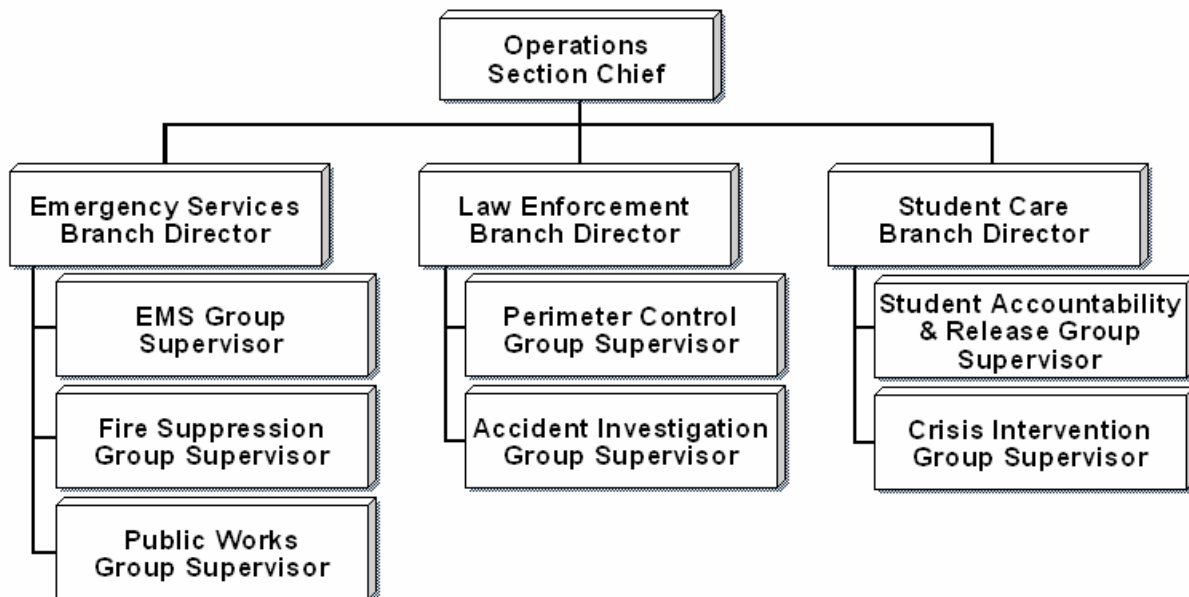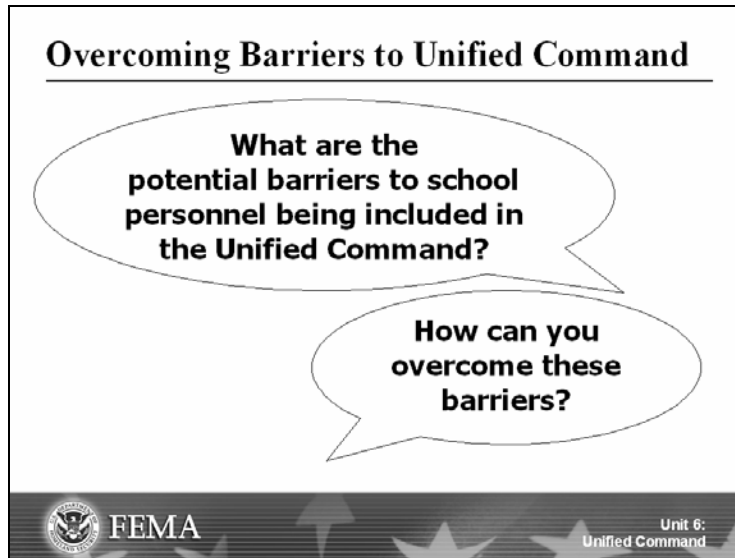
Visual Description: Overcoming Barriers to Unified Command

Key Points

Discussion Questions

What are the potential barriers to school personnel being included in the Unified Command?

How can you overcome these barriers?

| Topic | Unified Command Strategies |

Visual 6.10

Making Unified Command Work

- Include key community response personnel as part of the school emergency planning process.
- Make sure that first responders know what the school's legal and ethical responsibilities are during an event.
- Learn ICS so that you can blend into the response structure.
- Practice together during exercises and planned events.

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Visual Description: Making Unified Command Work

Key Points

For Unified Command to be used successfully, it is important that schools and agencies prepare by:

- Including key community response personnel as part of the school emergency planning process.

- Making sure that first responders know what the school's legal and ethical responsibilities are during an event.

- Learning ICS so that they can blend into the response structure.

- Practicing together during exercises and planned events.

Turn to the next page for testimonials from three people who were involved in Unified Command situations in schools.

Mark Openshaw
Fire Chief
Gila River, Indian Community located in Arizona

"As a fire chief I don't know a lot about educating students and don't really know how to handle a lot of kids. I assumed that my kids were listening to me when I was raising them but at the same time I don't think the school principal is expected to know how to fight fires, do technical rescue, hazardous materials or be a paramedic so we each have our own area of expertise and again that's part of working as a team but that incident command structure allows us to do that in a coordinated fashion."

Anna Parrill
Principal
**Soule Elementary School**
Salem, New Hampshire

"The fire alarms had gone off in the school. The students were evacuated. We set up our ICS command post and when the fire and the police showed up we met at the command post and immediately set up a unified command at that point in time and we're able to talk about the situation and be able to meet the different roles. Obviously my role being the students at that point in time and fire and police, we talked about entering the building and what their needs were so we were able to talk and communicate and have that common language when they showed up on site."

Rose Colby
Former Principal
Mountain View Middle School
Goffstown, New Hampshire

"We had an incident where our fire horn went off and it was clear when the students were evacuating the building, it was a very cold day in January. It was 11 degrees outside with a wind chill factor that brought it below zero and as the fire chief in responding to the building realized that as the students were coming in that we were going to have to continue the emergency response because of, the students were definitely chilled and immediately when he came into the building was setting up an incident command for the fire department to organize the ambulance that would be arriving to the school. It was a mutual aid response. We had a number of ambulances coming in from surrounding towns and the fire chief and I spoke very briefly and established the fact that, that our response is a unified command post and as such he was able to understand that we already had set up the incident command system within our school and probably responded to the whole incident much more efficiently. We shared the responsibilities. We were able to share with him the information we knew about our students and learned quite a lot in responding in that way with that unified command so it was a very important part to that particular response."

| Topic | Applied Exercise |

Visual 6.11
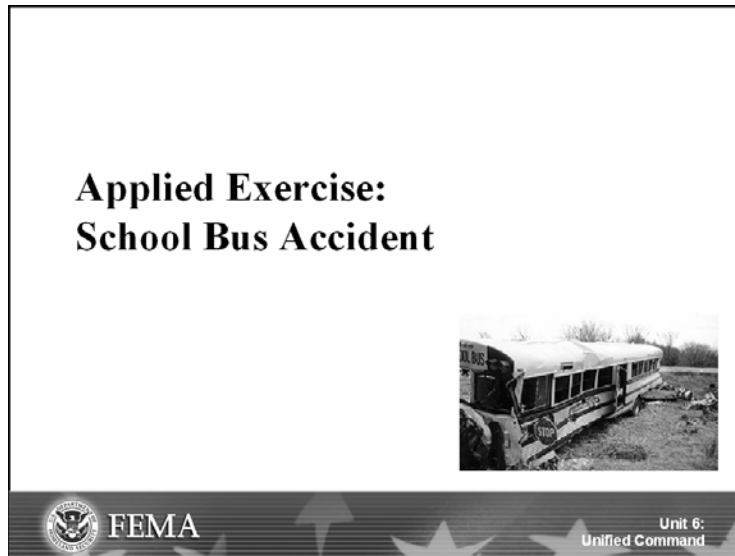
Visual Description: Applied Exercise: School Bus Accident

Key Points

- The scenario involves a school bus accident on a highway that occurs at the boundary between two political jurisdictions.

- The exercise applies the key learning points and the objectives for this unit.

Topic	Applied Exercise

Visual 6.12

Applied Exercise (1 of 2)

Instructions:

1. Working as a team, review the scenario and scenario map located in your Student Manual.

2. Answer the following questions:
   - Which agencies/organization should be included in the Unified Command structure?
   - Which ICS positions/Sections will be activated?

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Visual Description: Applied Exercise (1 of 2)

Key Points

Instructions:

1. Working in teams, review the scenario and scenario map.

2. Assuming that a Unified Command will be established (see the quick reference guide following the exercise for assistance) answer the following questions:

   - **Which agencies/organization should be included in the Unified Command structure?**

   - **Which ICS positions/Sections will be activated?**

| Topic | Applied Exercise |

Visual 6.13

Applied Exercise (2 of 2)

Continue answering the following questions:

- How many Operations Section Chiefs will be assigned representing each of the agencies?
- What is one example of an incident objective that the Unified Command group might establish?

3. Select a spokesperson and be prepared to present your work in 20 minutes.

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Unit 6:
Unified Command

Visual Description: Applied Exercise (2 of 2)

Key Points

Instructions: **(**Continued)

- **How many Operations Section Chiefs will be assigned representing each of the agencies?**

- **What is one example of an incident objective that the Unified Command group might establish?**

3. Select a spokesperson and be prepared to present your work in 20 minutes.

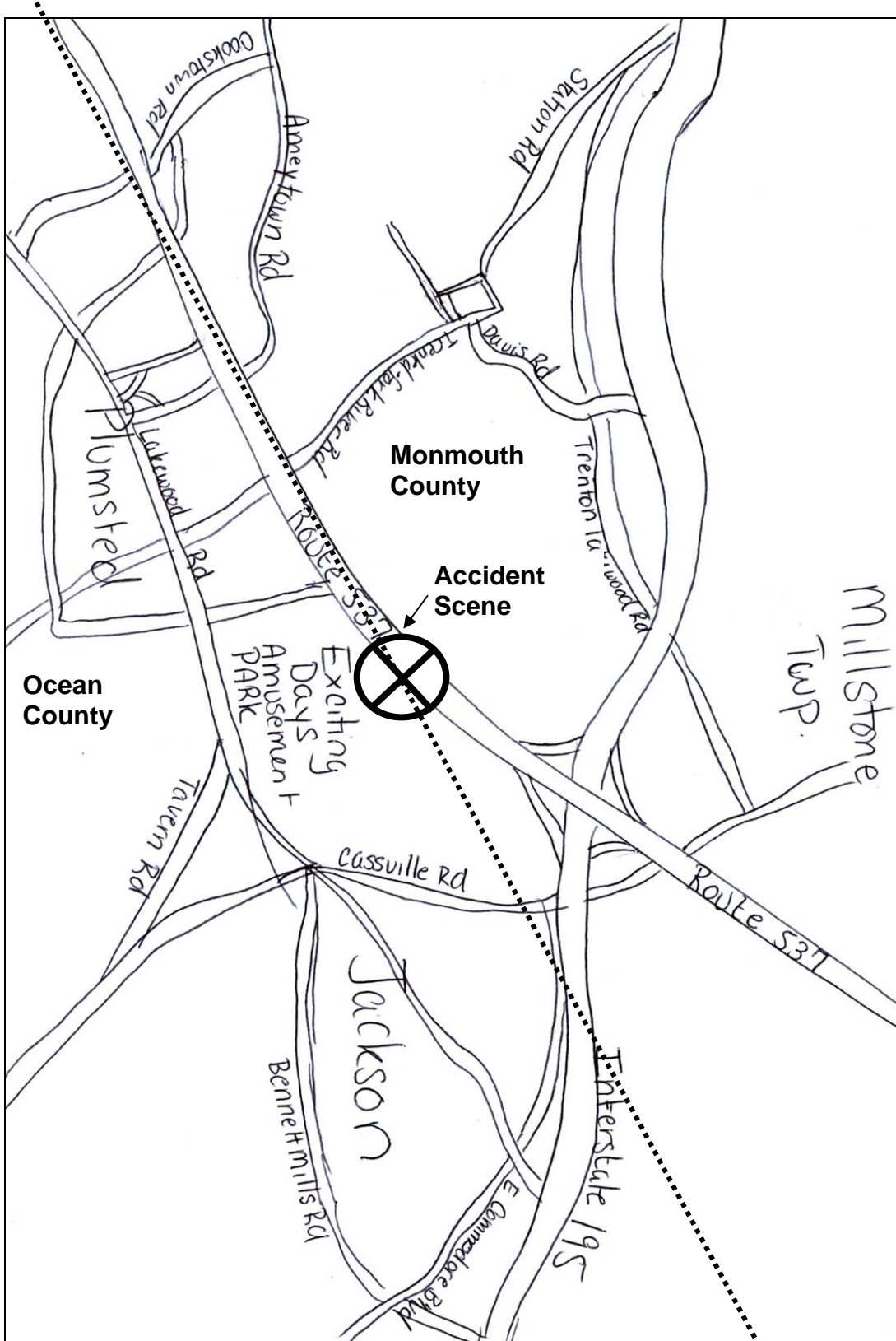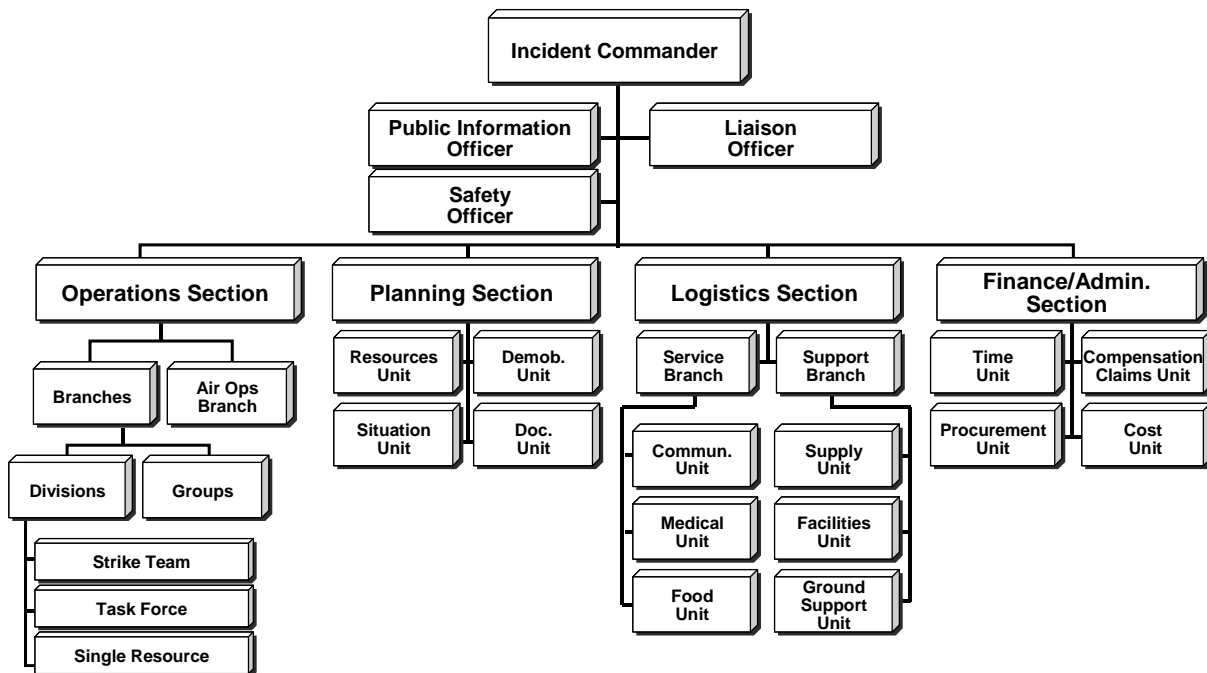| **Topic** | **Applied Exercise: Scenario** |

- Exciting Days Amusement Park lies within a heavily populated area of the State of New Jersey. This park is located one mile south of a major interstate highway on Route 537, a four-lane roadway that also serves as the border between Ocean and Monmouth Counties. Millstone Township lies to the north (Monmouth County), and Jackson and Plumsted Townships to the south (Ocean County). Ocean and Monmouth Counties are heavily populated with single-family homes. Many of the residents commute long distances to a major city for employment.

- It is late afternoon on a warm weekday in mid May. Traffic on Route 537 is heavy in both directions due to commuter traffic traveling southbound returning home from work and northbound traffic exiting the amusement park.

- A tanker, heading north on Route 537, suddenly loses control and crosses the center divider. A high school football team is returning home from a State tournament in two buses. The first bus that has just exited Interstate 195 is involved in an accident. The driver of the tanker is killed instantly as is the bus driver. After the impact, the tanker swerves across the southbound lanes of Route 537 and overturns. The first bus comes to rest in a ditch on the shoulder of the highway. Liquid sulfur begins leaking from the tanker. The second bus is not involved in the accident but is at the scene stuck in the traffic. The Athletic Director was on the second bus and assumed command until first responders arrived.

- Other vehicles are struck by the tanker as it swerves across the roadway. Several cars and another school bus cannot stop in time to avoid striking the damaged bus in the northbound lanes.

- Students in the first six rows of the first school bus are injured, some critically, and numerous injuries are reported in the second bus and automobiles that are involved in the collision.

- Traffic on Route 537 is brought to a standstill. The accident also affects the interstate highway hindering traffic flow on that roadway and blocking the exits to Route 537.

- The several thousand vehicles that remain inside the Exciting Days parking area are also trapped as exits from that facility are blocked as well.

- The emergency operations plans indicate that a Unified Command structure will be established where county jurisdictions overlap.

Topic | **Applied Exercise: Map**

| Topic | Quick Reference Guide: ICS Organization |

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                              ┌──────────────────────┐
                              │  Incident Commander  │
                              └──────────┬───────────┘
        ┌──────────────────────┐         │        ┌──────────────────┐
        │ Public Information    │         │        │   Liaison        │
        │ Officer               ├─────────┤        │   Officer        │
        └──────────────────────┘         │        └──────────────────┘
        ┌──────────────────────┐         │
        │ Safety               │         │
        │ Officer              ├─────────┤
        └──────────────────────┘         │
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| Operations Section | Planning Section | Logistics Section | Finance/Admin. Section |

Operations Section
- Branches
- Air Ops Branch
  - Divisions
  - Groups
    - Strike Team
    - Task Force
    - Single Resource

Planning Section
- Resources Unit
- Demob. Unit
- Situation Unit
- Doc. Unit

Logistics Section
- Service Branch
- Support Branch
  - Commun. Unit
  - Supply Unit
  - Medical Unit
  - Facilities Unit
  - Food Unit
  - Ground Support Unit

Finance/Admin. Section
- Time Unit
- Compensation Claims Unit
- Procurement Unit
- Cost Unit

- **Command Staff:** The Command Staff consists of the Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer. They report directly to the Incident Commander.

- **Section:** The organization level having functional responsibility for primary segments of incident management (Operations, Planning, Logistics, Finance/Administration). The Section level is organizationally between Branch and Incident Commander.

- **Branch:** That organizational level having functional, geographical, or jurisdictional responsibility for major parts of the incident operations. The Branch level is organizationally between Section and Division/Group in the Operations Section, and between Section and Units in the Logistics Section. Branches are identified by the use of Roman Numerals, by function, or by jurisdictional name.

- **Division:** That organizational level having responsibility for operations within a defined geographic area. The Division level is organizationally between the Strike Team and the Branch.

- **Group:** Groups are established to divide the incident into functional areas of operation. Groups are located between Branches (when activated) and Resources in the Operations Section.

- **Unit:** That organization element having functional responsibility for a specific incident planning, logistics, or finance/administration activity.

- **Task Force:** A group of resources with common communications and a leader that may be pre-established and sent to an incident, or formed at an incident.

- **Strike Team:** Specified combinations of the same kind and type of resources, with common communications and a leader.

- **Single Resource:** An individual piece of equipment and its personnel complement, or an established crew or team of individuals with an identified work supervisor that can be used on an incident.

Topic   **Quick Reference Guide: Position Titles**

At each level within the ICS organization, individuals with primary responsibility positions have distinct titles. Titles provide a common standard for all users. For example, if one agency uses the title Branch Chief, another Branch Manager, etc., this lack of consistency can cause confusion at the incident.

The use of distinct titles for ICS positions allows for filling ICS positions with the most qualified individuals rather than by seniority. Standardized position titles are useful when requesting qualified personnel. For example, in deploying personnel, it is important to know if the positions needed are Unit Leaders, clerks, etc.

Listed below are the standard ICS titles:

Organizational Level	Title	Support Position
Incident Command	Incident Commander	Deputy
Command Staff	Officer	Assistant
General Staff (Section)	Chief	Deputy
Branch	Director	Deputy
Division/Group	Supervisor	N/A
Unit	Leader	Manager
Strike Team/Task Force	Leader	Single Resource Boss

| Topic | Summary |

Visual 6.14

> ## Summary
>
> Are you now able to:
> - Define Unified Command?
> - List the advantages of Unified Command?
> - Identify the primary features of Unified Command?
> - Describe the roles and reporting relationships between school personnel and emergency responders under a Unified Command?
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Visual Description: Summary

Key Points

You should now be able to:

- Define Unified Command.
- List the advantages of Unified Command.
- Identify the primary features of Unified Command.
- Describe the roles and reporting relationships between school personnel and emergency responders under a Unified Command.

Note: The purpose of this unit was to familiarize you with Unified Command features. Additional ICS training is required to prepare you to implement Unified Command.

Remember that Unified Command:
- Applies ICS in incidents involving multiple jurisdictions or agencies.
- Enables schools and agencies with different legal, geographic, and functional responsibilities to coordinate, plan, and interact effectively.

The next unit focuses on putting together the information learned in this course to prepare to implement ICS.