

National Emergency Responder Credentialing System

Federal Emergency Management Agency
NIMS Integration Center

Q1. What is credentialing?

As stated in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) document, credentialing involves “providing documentation that can authenticate and verify the certification and identity of designated incident managers and emergency responders. This system helps ensure that personnel representing various jurisdictional levels and functional disciplines possess a minimum common level of training, currency, experience, physical and medical fitness, and capability for the incident management or emergency responder position they are tasked to fill.”

Q2. What is the National Emergency Responder Credentialing System?

The National Emergency Responder Credentialing System is currently under development by the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s NIMS Integration Center. As a means to routinely identify and dispatch emergency responders, the National Emergency Responder Credentialing System will help mobilize the swift, safe and successful support of qualified responders who are called upon to assist communities across the nation. Ultimately, credentials verifying an emergency responder’s identity and qualifications may be documented through a nationally accepted form of identification and/or through a record-keeping system, as required by NIMS.

Q3. Why is a national credentialing system necessary?

A national credentialing system will improve the methods, capabilities and coordination of emergency responders to deal with domestic incidents. Mandated by NIMS and in accord with Homeland Security Presidential Directive – 5, *Management of Domestic Incidents*, this initiative will allow quick and accurate verification of emergency responders’ identities and qualifications.

Incidents such the Oklahoma City Bombing, the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the recent responses to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita highlight the need for a national system to verify the qualifications and identity of emergency responders.

A national credentialing system will *not* provide automatic access to an incident site. In fact, it can serve to prevent unauthorized (i.e., self-dispatched or unqualified personnel) access to an incident and help maintain perimeter control of and access to that incident, while ensuring that those requested to respond to an incident meet the required criteria for participating in such an effort.

Q4. Will a national credentialing system be established under the National Mutual Aid and Resource Management Initiative?

Yes. A national credentialing system is a component of the National Mutual Aid and Resource Management System. In recognition that these efforts must be nationally applicable and widely accepted, the NIMS Integration Center is working closely with existing state, local, territorial and federal partners, as well as discipline-specific stakeholders, to reach a national consensus on what constitutes acceptable criteria for participation in a multi-jurisdictional response.

Q5. Does certification differ from credentialing?

Yes. Personnel certification entails authoritatively attesting that individuals meet professional standards for the training, experience, and performance required for key incident management functions. Credentials may be issued as a result of certification through testing or evaluation.

Q6. What are the requirements for a national credentialing system?

A national credentialing system must:

- Function within existing federal, state, tribal and local identification and qualification protocols, where feasible;
- Not place undue burden on federal, state, tribal or local governments;
- Support (primarily) interstate augmentation of state and local resources;
- Conform to ICS protocols; and
- Use current credentialing emergency responder systems, where possible.

Q7. Will new training, qualifications, and certifications standards be developed for the nationwide credentialing system?

Yes. Existing training, qualifications, and certifications standards will be reviewed in light of a capabilities-based analysis of emergency responders' ability to achieve mission critical tasks.

Using the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) National Planning Scenarios as a starting point, seven discipline-specific working groups will identify critical activities needed to save lives and protect property in major incidents. The working groups will identify the specific types of emergency responders who would perform these tasks; assign titles to these roles; and detail their required professional qualifications, certifications, training, and education. Gaps in existing training, education and experiences will be identified for further review by the NIMS Center.

Additionally, NIMS awareness training for all levels will be incorporated in course curricula for credentialing personnel for selected incident management roles. Core curricula will include general awareness courses for all emergency management professionals such as NIMS training, ICS, and emergency management courses.

Q8. Will DHS/FEMA issue credentials?

No. Current governmental and non-governmental credentialing bodies at the federal, state, territorial and local levels will continue to issue credentials. Many of these credentialing systems are rooted in state licensure statutes and other well-established requirements and processes. Where no processes or requirements presently exist, those elements listed in Q6 will be important for participation in a national system.

Q9. Who can participate in the National Emergency Responder Credentialing System?

Responders from federal, state, territorial, tribal and local agencies, as well as qualified individuals from the private sector, are encouraged to participate in the National Emergency Responder Credentialing System. The purpose is to develop an integrated and comprehensive system that will assist emergency managers in acquiring those qualified resources necessary to deal with an incident when local resources are overwhelmed.

Q10. Why should a state, territory, tribal or local jurisdiction or private vendor participate in the National Credentialing Initiative?

As a critical component of NIMS, a national credentialing system will provide the nation with an increased capability to rapidly and easily deploy emergency responder during times of need. It will also ensure the capability, qualification and certification of any emergency responder called upon to assist dealing with an incident.

Q11. Is participation in the National Emergency Responder Credentialing System mandatory?

No. Participation in the National Emergency Responder Credentialing System is voluntary. However, emergency responders who volunteer must meet the requirements to support an incident.

Q12. Who is involved in the National Emergency Responder Credentialing System?

Federal, state and local officials, as well as subject matter experts from private non-governmental organizations and other emergency response management organizations and associations, are participating in this initiative.

Q13. Is the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) part of National Emergency Responder Credentialing System?

Yes. NEMA is actively involved in this credentialing initiative and is participating in the working group discussions. The credentialing initiative builds on a mutual-aid framework pioneered by NEMA through the establishment of the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).

Q14. What will happen to existing state or discipline-specific credentialing programs?

One requirement of this initiative is to work with the various disciplines in national, state, territory and/or local jurisdictions to bring current credentialing efforts into a national system while avoiding the duplication of efforts already in place.

Q15. Should state and local programs under development slow down or halt their progress until new standards and procedures are identified by the National Emergency Responder Credentialing System?

No. Though the NIMS Integration Center would like to know about ongoing or existing credentialing efforts, it encourages all credentialing efforts to proceed as normal. It is the intention of the Center to facilitate interstate mutual aid requests when local emergency responders are overwhelmed and request assistance from other jurisdictions.

Q16. What can communities or jurisdictions do to prepare for the implementation of the National Credentialing Initiative?

FY 2006 compliance actions for state and local jurisdictions include participation in and promotion of intrastate and interagency mutual aid agreements, to include agreements with the private sector and non-governmental organizations.

Future FY06 compliance activities include:

- Expanding mutual aid agreements beyond support services and equipment to include information sharing;
- Supporting and adopting the ongoing efforts of the NIMS Integration Center (NIC) to develop a national credentialing system; and
- Credentialing emergency responders in conformance with national standards.

The NIMS Integration Center is developing credentialing guidance. Throughout the development process, drafts will be posted on the NIMS Web page for review and comment by interested stakeholders.