

ICS 100 – Lesson 1: ICS Overview

Lesson Overview

The **ICS Overview** lesson introduces you to:

- The background and development of ICS.
- ICS as the standard for emergency management across the country.
- ICS as interdisciplinary and organizationally flexible.
- Applications of ICS.

This lesson should take approximately **30 minutes** to complete. **Remember, you must complete the entire lesson to receive credit.**

The Incident Command System (ICS)

An incident is an occurrence, either human caused or by natural phenomena that requires action by emergency service personnel to prevent or minimize loss of life or damage to property and/or natural resources.

Examples of incidents include:

- Fire, both structural and wildfire
- Hazardous material situations
- Search and rescue
- Oil spills
- Pest eradication
- Control of animal diseases
- Planned events, such as parades or political rallies just to name a few.

Because of today's budget constraints, limited staffing of local, State, and Federal agencies, it's not possible for any one agency to handle all the management and resource needs for the increasing numbers of incidents nationwide. Local, State, and Federal agencies must work together in a smooth, coordinated effort under the same management system.

The Incident Command System or ICS is a standardized, on-scene, all-risk incident management concept. ICS allows its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single or multiple incidents without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries.

ICS has considerable internal flexibility. It can grow or shrink to meet different needs. This flexibility makes it a very cost effective and efficient management approach for both small and large situations.

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History of the Incident Command System (ICS)

The Incident Command System (ICS) was developed in the 1970s following a series of catastrophic fires in California's urban interface. Property damage ran into the millions, and many people died or were injured. The personnel assigned to determine the causes of this disaster studied the case histories and discovered that incident failures could rarely be attributed to lack of resources or failure of tactics.

What were the lessons learned? Surprisingly, studies found that incident failures were far more likely to result from inadequate management than from any other single reason.

Weaknesses in incident management were often due to:

- Lack of personnel accountability, including unclear chains of command and supervision.
- Poor communication due to both inefficient uses of available communications systems and conflicting codes and terminology.
- Lack of an orderly, systematic planning process.
- No common, flexible, predesigned management structure that enables commanders to delegate responsibilities and manage workloads efficiently.
- No predefined methods to integrate interagency requirements into the management structure and planning process effectively.

A poorly managed incident response can be devastating to our economy, the food supply, and our health and safety. With so much at stake, we must effectively manage our response efforts. The Incident Command System, or ICS, allows us to do so. ICS is a proven management system based on successful business practices. This course introduces you to ICS and the vital role that you can play.

ICS Built on Best Practices

ICS is:

- A proven management system based on successful business practices.
- The result of decades of lessons learned in the organization and management of emergency incidents.

This system represents organizational "best practices," and has become the standard for emergency management across the country.

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What ICS Is Designed To Do

Designers of the system recognized early that ICS must be interdisciplinary and organizationally **flexible** to meet the following management challenges:

- Meet the needs of incidents of any kind or size.
- Be usable for routine or planned events such as conferences, as well as large and complex emergency incidents.
- Allow personnel from a variety of agencies to meld rapidly into a common management structure.
- Provide logistical and administrative support to ensure that operational staff, such as entomologists or veterinarians, can meet tactical objectives.
- Be cost effective by avoiding duplication of efforts.

ICS has been tested in more than 30 years of emergency and nonemergency applications, by all levels of government and in the private sector.

Activity

Scenario: The Texas counties bordering Mexico have suffered an outbreak of bloody water disease (a.k.a. Texas Cattle Fever) carried by cattle crossing the border. The disease, which is carried by ticks, is readily transferred from infested cattle to herds that have not been dipped in pesticide. U.S. cattle lack immunity to the disease, and U.S. ranchers do not ordinarily dip their herds because of cost. Because of the ease and rapidity with which this disease spreads, and the fact that there is no cost-effective cure, prevention through dipping is the only viable control alternative. All herds within a 25-mile distance of the border have been ordered dipped. It is estimated that 40 herds ranging from several hundred to more than 1,000 cattle will need to be treated in the next 10 days. The process will be repeated 14 days later to break the lifecycle of the tick. Until this has been accomplished, cattle cannot be shipped off their ranges for any reason.

What management challenges does this scenario present that could be addressed by using ICS?

Using ICS to manage this response could help to:

- Manage multiagency and multijurisdictional resources (including Federal, State, and local personnel as well as Mexican resources) assigned over a widespread geographic area.
- Meet incident objectives including the rapid assessment of herds that are at risk of contracting Texas Cattle Fever.
- Handle logistics such as the purchase of the pesticide dip.
- Provide logistical support so that qualified personnel are freed up to oversee the treatment.

Remember, ICS:

- Allows personnel from a variety of agencies to meld rapidly into a common management structure.
- Is cost effective and ensures that resources are deployed where most needed.
- Provides the logistical and administrative support to ensure that operational staff can meet incident objectives.

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Applications for the Use of ICS

Applications for the use of ICS have included:

- Routine or planned events (e.g., celebrations, parades, and concerts).
- Fires, hazardous materials, and multicasualty incidents.
- Multijurisdiction and multiagency disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and winter storms.
- Search and rescue missions.
- Biological pest eradication programs.
- Biological outbreaks and disease containment.
- Acts of terrorism.

ICS and USDA

Dr. Bill Smith **USDA, Veterinary Services**

“The first time I really used ICS was in Harrisonburg, Virginia, in response to a low path influenza outbreak.

The ICS allows us to organize and plan to make sure all the major tasks that need to be done are identified and someone is charged to make sure it’s done and then with that, with the hierarchy with the organization structures, who you report to is done and we can organize it. So, it’s flexible in that you can use them for small outbreaks, big outbreaks. It has a self contained organizational system built into it, can be used for any, any type of animal health event, it doesn’t have to be disease of magnitude. It could be as simple as moving an area office if you will or a Federal office or moving people, so on and so forth. One disease outbreak or a huge disease outbreak, it doesn’t matter, that’s how I would define the beauty of the flexibility of it.”

Dr. Carey Floyd **Oklahoma Department of Agriculture**

“We first started with our training with ICS during the time that the foot and mouth outbreak was going on in England because it was apparent that an outbreak like that would be too big for us to handle as we’d always handled disease outbreaks here in the United States and so we did training, we put together a team here in Oklahoma that has both State and Federal employees on it and we were able to use our training when we had a herd of elk that had chronic wasting disease so we used our ICS training to plan the depopulation of those animals.

The best thing is it’s very clear who is in charge of each part of the response. There’s not any doubt about the responsibilities of each individual in each of those positions and what they are supposed to do. So it’s very clear who does which part of the response.”

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Van Bateman
USDA, Forest Service

“The way the system is built it is very good at gathering the information that you need to do the job. The problem they had at the World Trade Center is a long campaign for FDNY is, they are on the fire 24 hours, 36 hours. When we got there they had no way to gather information or plan and that’s basically what we did for them. It took us a while to get our foot in the door but once we got our foot in the door and showed them that we could plan out the next 24 hours, the next 36 hours, if something happened out there, they would know who’s working in that area, what equipment they had, what equipment they didn’t have, what they needed and once they saw that what became a reluctant partnership became a very strong partnership.

Since the World Trade Center there’s been a group of us last year that went back and we’re training the entire Fire Department of New York in it. Also we did do some training with the Department of Agriculture from Oklahoma, not the Federal but the State. That’s when hoof-and-mouth disease was big and they were thinking maybe they were going to have to use it in hoof-and-mouth disease.”

ICS Features

In this course, you will learn about the following ICS features:

- ICS organization
- Incident facilities
- Incident action Plan
- Span of control
- Common responsibilities

Lesson Summary

You have completed the **ICS Overview** lesson. This lesson addressed how:

- ICS is a standardized management tool designed to allow its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure flexible enough to meet the demands of small or large emergency or nonemergency situations.
- Identification of areas of management weakness resulted in the development of ICS.
- ICS represents organizational “best practices,” and has become the standard for emergency management across the country.
- Designers of ICS recognized early that it must be interdisciplinary and organizationally flexible.
- Applications of ICS have included planned events, natural disasters, and acts of terrorism.

The next lesson will provide an overview of the ICS organization and introduce the Incident Commander and Command Staff.