Homeland
Security

NIMS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

What is the National Incident Management System (NIMS)?
NIMS is a comprehensive, national approach to incident management that is applicable at all jurisdictional levels and across functional disciplines. It is intended to:

- Be applicable across a full spectrum of potential incidents, hazards, and impacts, regardless of size, location or complexity.
- Improve coordination and cooperation between public and private entities in a variety of incident management activities.
- Provide a common standard for overall incident management.

Why do we need NIMS?
NIMS provides a consistent nationwide framework and approach to enable government at all levels (Federal, State, tribal, and local), the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to work together to prepare for, prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents regardless of the incident's cause, size, location, or complexity.

Consistent application of NIMS lays the groundwork for efficient and effective responses, from a single agency fire response to a multiagency, multijurisdictional natural disaster or terrorism response. Entities that have integrated NIMS into their planning and incident management structure can arrive at an incident with little notice and still understand the procedures and protocols governing the response, as well as the expectations for equipment and personnel. NIMS provides commonality in preparedness and response efforts that allow diverse entities to readily integrate and, if necessary, establish unified command during an incident.

What are the Components of NIMS?
NIMS Components link together and work in unison to form a comprehensive incident management system. NIMS Components include:

- Preparedness
- Communications and Information Management
- Resource Management
- Command and Management
- Ongoing Management and Maintenance

To whom does NIMS apply?
NIMS is applicable to State, tribal and local governments, private sector organizations, critical infrastructure owners and operators, nongovernmental organizations and other organizations with an active role in emergency management and incident response. Elected and appointed officials, who are responsible for jurisdictional policy decisions, must also have a clear understanding of their emergency management roles and responsibilities to better serve their constituency.

How does NIMS relate to the National Response Framework (NRF)?
The NIMS and NRF are companion documents and are designed to improve the Nation's incident management and response capabilities. While NIMS provides the template for the management of incidents regardless of size, scope or cause, the NRF provides the structure and mechanisms for national level policy of incident response. Together, the NIMS and the NRF integrate the capabilities and resources of various governmental jurisdictions, incident management and emergency response disciplines, non-governmental organizations, and the private-sector into a cohesive, coordinated, and seamless national framework for domestic incident response.

How does NIMS relate to local incident command?
A basic premise of NIMS is that all incidents begin and end locally. NIMS does not take command away from State and local authorities. NIMS simply provides the framework to enhance the ability of responders, including the private sector and NGOs, to work together more effectively. The Federal Government supports State and local authorities when their resources are overwhelmed or anticipated to be overwhelmed. Federal departments and agencies respect the sovereignty and responsibilities of local, tribal, and State governments while rendering assistance. The intention of the Federal Government in these situations is not to command the response, but rather to support the affected local, tribal, and/or State governments.

What is the role of Elected and Appointed Officials during an incident?
Elected and appointed officials are responsible for ensuring the public safety and welfare of the people of that jurisdiction. Specifically, these officials provide strategic guidance and resources during preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Elected or appointed officials must have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities for successful emergency management and response. At times, these roles may require providing direction and guidance to constituents during an incident, but their day-to-day activities do not focus on emergency management and response. Their awareness of NIMS is critical to ensuring cooperative response efforts and minimizing the incident impacts.

What role does Preparedness have in NIMS?
Preparedness is essential for effective incident and emergency management and involves engaging in a continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective action to achieve and maintain readiness to respond to emergencies. As such, the NIMS Preparedness Component serves as a baseline concept that links all the NIMS Components. Preparedness spans jurisdictions, governments, agencies and organizations. Though individuals certainly play a critical role in preparedness and are expected to prepare themselves and their families for all types of potential incidents, they are not directly included in NIMS preparedness. NIMS primarily discusses the preparedness role for governments, organizations geared specifically toward preparedness, elected and appointed officials, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

What is a Common Operating Picture?
A common operating picture (COP) offers a standard overview of an incident, thereby providing incident information that enables the Incident Commander/Unified Command and any supporting agencies and organizations to make effective, consistent, and timely decisions.

Compiling data from multiple sources and disseminating the collaborative information COP ensures that all responding entities have the same understanding and awareness of incident status and information when conducting operations.

What is Interoperability?
Interoperability allows emergency management/response personnel and their affiliated organizations to communicate within and across agencies and jurisdictions via voice, data, or video-on-demand, in real-time, when needed, and when authorized - this includes equipment and the ability to communicate. If entities have physical communications systems that are able to directly communicate, those systems are considered to be interoperable. This can be a function of the actual system or the frequency on which the system operates.

What is Resource Management?
Resource management involves the coordination, oversight, and processes necessary to provide timely and appropriate resources during an incident. Utilization of the standardized resource management concepts such as the typing, inventorying, ordering, and tracking of resources will facilitate their dispatch, deployment, and recovery before, during, and after an incident.

What is Command and Management?
The Command and Management component within NIMS is designed to enable effective and efficient incident management and coordination by providing a flexible, standardized incident management structure. To institutionalize these activities within a formal structure, command and management includes three fundamental elements: the Incident Command System (ICS), Multiagency Coordination Systems (MACS), and Public Information. These fundamental elements provide standardization through consistent terminology and established organizational structures.

Why is ICS needed?
When an incident requires response from multiple local emergency management and response agencies, effective cross-jurisdictional coordination using common processes and systems is critical. The Incident Command System (ICS) provides a flexible, yet standardized core mechanism for coordinated and collaborative incident management, whether for incidents where additional resources are required or are provided from different organizations within a single jurisdiction or outside the jurisdiction, or for complex incidents with national implications.

What is ICS Designed To Do?
The ICS is a widely applicable management system designed to enable effective, efficient incident management by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure. ICS is a fundamental form of management established in a standard format, with the purpose of enabling incident managers to identify the key concerns associated with the incident—often under urgent conditions—without sacrificing attention to any component of the command system.
It represents organizational "best practices" and, as an element of the Command and Management Component of NIMS, has become the standard for emergency management across the country. 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.
- Allow personnel from a variety of agencies to meld rapidly into a common management structure.
- Provide logistical and administrative support to operational staff.
- Be cost effective by avoiding duplication of efforts.

ICS consists of procedures for controlling personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications. It is a system designed to be used or applied from the time an incident occurs until the requirement for management and operations no longer exists.

How does an EOC relate to MACS?

MACS is designed to facilitate the process of multiagency coordination, which allows all levels of government and all disciplines to work together more efficiently and effectively. Multiagency coordination can and does occur on a regular basis whenever personnel from different agencies interact in such activities as preparedness, prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation. More specifically, the primary function of MACS is to coordinate activities above the field level and to prioritize the incident demands for critical or competing resources, thereby assisting the coordination of the operations in the field. MACS consists of a combination of elements: personnel, procedures, protocols, business practices, and communications integrated into a common system.

Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) are one of several system elements included within the Multiagency Coordination System(MACS). EOCs are intended to facilitate MACS functions, and may provide support to Area Command, Incident Command, or Unified Command when resource needs exceed local capabilities.

What is the relationship between an Incident Command Post and an EOC/MAC Group?

The Incident Command Post is a physical location that administers the on-scene incident command and the other major incident management functions. An EOC is a physical location that is located separately from the on-scene Incident Command Post and supports the on-scene response by providing external coordination and securing of additional resources. A MAC Group does not have any direct incident command involvement and will often be located some distance from the incident site(s). EOC/MAC Groups do not command the on-scene level of the incident, but rather supports the Incident Command Post's command and management efforts.

What is the difference between Area Command and MACS?

Area Command is an organization that oversees the management of multiple incidents handled individually by separate incident command organizations or to oversee the management of a very large or evolving incident engaging multiple incident management teams. Area Command should not be confused with the functions performed by MACS as Area Command oversees management coordination of the incident(s), while a MACS element (such as a communications/dispatch center, EOC, or MAC Group) coordinates support.

What does Public Information, within NIMS, include?

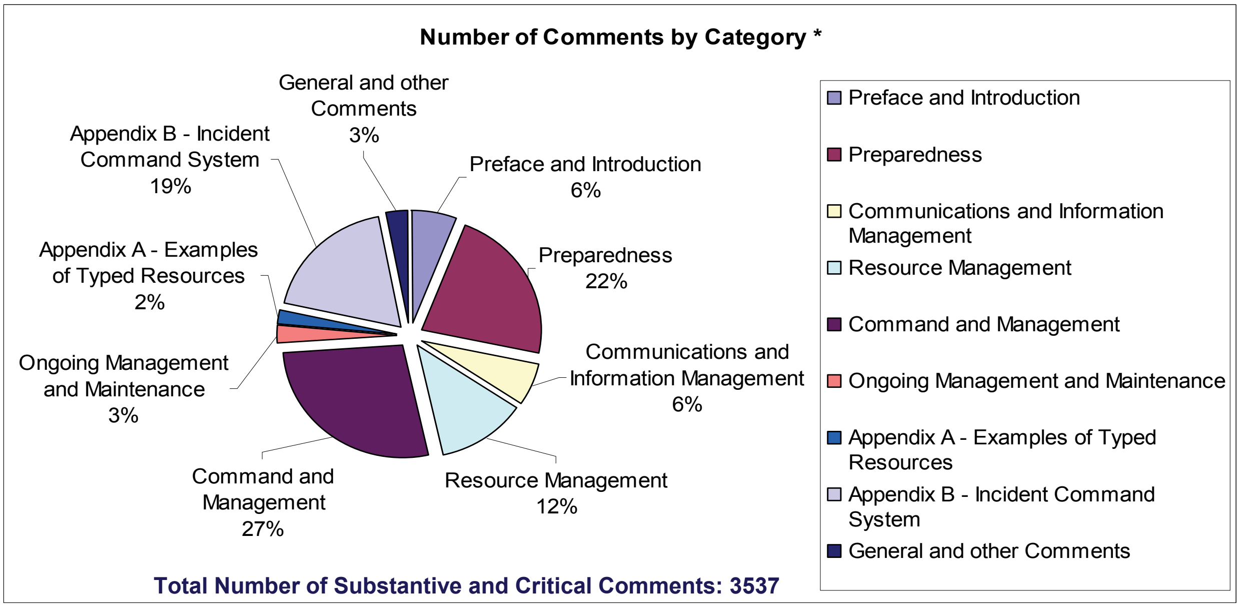
Public Information consists of the processes, procedures, and systems to communicate timely, accurate, and accessible information on the incident's cause, size, and current situation to the public, responders, and additional stakeholders (both directly and indirectly affected). Public information must be coordinated and integrated across jurisdictions and organizations involved in the incident to include, Federal, State, tribal, and local governments, private sector entities and NGOs. In order to facilitate that process, Public Information includes three major systems/components - Public Information Officers (PIOs), the Joint Information System (JIS), and the Joint Information Center (JIC).

REVISION PROCESS QUESTIONS

Why was the NIMS document revised?
HSPD-5 directed the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop, administer and periodically update the NIMS. The document, originally released in March 2004, was revised and released in 2008 to incorporate current best practices and lessons learned from recent incidents. It was intended to be revised periodically to reflect changes in national homeland security policy and doctrine. The NIMS revision clarified concepts and principles and refined processes and terminology throughout the document. No major policy changes were made to NIMS during the revision.

Were NIMS stakeholders part of the revision process?
The NIMS document review and revision process began in May 2006. This revision, led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA's) National Integration Center (NIC) Incident Management Systems Integration Division, incorporated stakeholder input throughout the process in the form of working groups (representing over 100 entities from Federal, State, tribal and local governments, the private sector and NGOs). Furthermore, stakeholders represented a broad spectrum of emergency management and incident response disciplines.

Three national comment periods were used to gather widespread and diverse stakeholder input for the NIMS document. During the comment periods, more than 280 individuals and organizations provided approximately 6,000 comments. This process allowed the NIC to receive and incorporate a wide range of feedback from stakeholders, while maintaining the core concepts of NIMS. The chart below illustrates the number of substantive comments by NIMS category:



* The numbers and percentages reflected in the category summaries only incorporate substantive and critical comments.

UPDATES AND CHANGES

Were any major policy changes made?
No major policy changes were made to NIMS during the revision. The revision clarified concepts and principles and refined processes and terminology throughout the document.

What were the general updates and changes to the NIMS document?

- Eliminated redundancy
- Reorganized document to emphasize that NIMS is more than the ICS
- Increased emphasis on planning and added guidance on mutual aid
- Clarified roles of private sector, NGOs, and chief elected and appointed officials
- Expanded the Intelligence/Investigation function
- Highlighted relationship between NIMS and NRF

Why was the ordering of the NIMS Components changed?
The reordering of the components within the NIMS document emphasizes the role of preparedness and is designed to mirror the progression of an incident. This reorganization also lessens the perception that NIMS is only ICS, and emphasizes the fact that NIMS is an all-encompassing systematic approach to incident management, of which ICS is just one component.

What is the Intelligence/Investigations Function? How is it different from the Information/Intelligence Function?
The purpose of the Intelligence/Investigations Function is to ensure all intelligence and investigative operations, functions and activities within the incident management and incident response are properly managed, coordinated, and directed. The Intelligence/Investigations

Function is only established if there is a need for intelligence/investigations activities. It is a system for the collection, analysis, and sharing of information.

The Intelligence/Information Function was renamed the Intelligence/Investigations Function in order to clarify the difference between general and specialized information. Intelligence and investigative information is defined as information that either leads to the detection, prevention, apprehension, and prosecution of criminal activities, including terrorist incidents, or information that leads to determination of the cause of a given incident such as public health events or fires with unknown origins.

The Intelligence/Investigations Function can be embedded in several places within the ICS organization, depending on the incident and the needs of the IC/UC, for example:

- Within the Planning Section
- As a Separate General Staff Section
- Within the Operations Section
- Within the Command Staff

Were key Command and Management concepts significantly changed?
No, most concepts and principles within the Command and Management Component were not altered. Rather, it was revised to add clarity and better explain Command and Management concepts and principles.