ONSITE CATEGORIZATION/CLASSIFICATION DECISION MAKER AND INTEGRATION WITH NIMS

QUESTION: Does DOE O 151.1C require that an emergency categorization/ classification decision-maker remain onsite on a 24-hour/7-day per week basis? How does emergency categorization/classification decision-making integrate with the National Incident Management System (NIMS)?

ANSWER: The requirements for prompt decision-making and notification are based on the need to make decisions quickly so that appropriate protective actions can be put in place to mitigate the impact of an event on workers or the public. DOE O 151.1 (1995) contained a requirement for the —(e)stablishment of criteria for determining quickly if an event is an Operational Emergency. "This same requirement appears in DOE O 151.1C (2005) with an additional requirement that an —event must be categorized as an Operational Emergency as promptly as possible, but no later than 15 minutes after event recognition/identification/ discovery."

None of the above requirements specifically state that the decision maker must be available onsite 24/7. However, it is clear that the decision-making capability must be available 24/7 to ensure that a prompt categorization is accomplished. Some sites use an on-call duty officer system. In these situations, the decision-making criteria typically have been written in sufficient detail that the on-call duty officer can make the event categorization/classification decision immediately, without having to travel to the site, given that relevant and sufficient information is available from the incident scene. This requires that a means of communication be promptly and effectively established between the duty officer and the first responders at the event scene. After establishing this link, the first responders must transmit information needed for categorizing/classifying the event to the duty officer.

Many sites have chosen to place the initial decision-making responsibility in a trusted position that is already staffed on a 24/7 basis, such as a shift superintendent, a fire department officer, or security force officer. In effect, this person assumes the role of a duty officer and is often trained to serve as the initial Incident Commander (IC), in either the NIMS Incident Command System (ICS) or the ICS used by the surrounding local jurisdictions. Generally, this dual role should only be implemented if it can be demonstrated that the categorization/classification decision-making process and the response tasks of the initial IC at the event location do not interfere, causing substantial adverse effect on the performance of one or the other.

For an established NIMS ICS at the event location, the overall responsibility for providing information to the event categorization/classification authority may be logically placed within the Planning Section of the NIMS ICS structure. This section of the ICS is responsible for collecting, evaluating, and disseminating tactical information

pertaining to the incident. This tactical information provides the data for categorization/ classification decision-making.