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**INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM**

**NATIONAL TRAINING CURRICULUM**

**PRINCIPLES AND  
FEATURES OF ICS**

**MODULE 2**

**I-200**



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## CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

on behalf of the

NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP

*The following training material attains the standards prescribed for courses developed under the interagency curriculum established and coordinated by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. The instruction is certified for interagency use and is known as:*

Principles and Features of ICS

Member NWCG and Training Working Team Liaison

Chair, Training Working Team

Date 11/7/94

Date 12/24/94

## Description of the Performance Based System

The Wildland Fire Qualifications System is a “performance based” qualifications system. In this system, the primary criteria for qualification is individual performance as observed by an evaluator using approved standards. This system differs from previous wildland fire qualifications systems which have been “training based.” Training based systems use the completion of training courses or a passing score on an examination as a primary criteria for qualification.

A performance based system has two advantages over a training based system:

- Qualification is based upon real performance, as measured on the job, versus perceived performance, as measured by an examination or classroom activities.
- Personnel who have learned skills from sources outside wildfire suppression, such as agency specific training programs or training and work in prescribed fire, structural fire, law enforcement, search and rescue, etc., may not be required to complete specific courses in order to qualify in a wildfire position.

1. The components of the wildland fire qualifications system are as follows:

- a. Position Task Books (PTB) contain all critical tasks which are required to perform the job. PTB's have been designed in a format which will allow documentation of a trainee's ability to perform each task. Successful completion of all tasks required of the position, as determined by an evaluator, will be the basis for recommending certification.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Training requirements include completion of all required training courses prior to obtaining a PTB. Use of the suggested training courses or job aids is recommended to prepare the employee to perform in the position.

- b. Training courses and job aids provide the specific skills and knowledge required to perform tasks as prescribed in the PTB.
- c. Agency Certification is issued in the form of an incident qualification card certifying that the individual is qualified to perform in a specified position.

2. Responsibilities

The local office is responsible for selecting trainees, proper use of task books, and certification of trainees, see the Task Book Administrators Guide 330-1 for further information.

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# **PREFACE**

This module is one of seventeen modules which comprise the Incident Command System (ICS) National Training Curriculum. The entire curriculum has been developed by an interagency steering group and a contract consultant. The curriculum was sponsored by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, and development was directed and supported by the National Interagency Fire Center, Division of Training. The Steering Group was represented by several application areas (Search & Rescue, Law Enforcement, Structural Fire, Wildfire, etc.) which guided the work of the contractor in the development of this package.

The Steering Group was:

David P. Anderson - USDA, Forest Service  
Mike Colgan - Orange County Fire Department  
Dave Engle - USDI, Bureau of Land Management  
Dan Francis - California Department of Forestry  
Ken Mallette - New Jersey State Police  
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The Contract Consultant was:

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This module briefly describes the principal features which constitute the Incident Command System. Collectively, these features identify the unique quality of the ICS as an incident or event management system.

Objectives:

Describe and explain the use of:

- Primary management functions
- Management by Objectives
- Unity and Chain of Command
- Establishment and transfer of command
- Organizational flexibility
- Unified Command
- Span of control
- Common terminology
- Personnel accountability
- Integrated communications
- Resources management
- The Incident Action Plan

## I. The Features of ICS

The Incident Command System is a management system. The information that you acquire from this training module will help to sharpen your management skills, and better equip you to be fully effective incident or event managers.

The ICS has a number of attributes or system features.

Because of these features, ICS has the flexibility and adaptability to be applied to a wide variety of incidents and events both small and large.

It is these features working together which make ICS a real management system.

ICS is more than just an organizational chart. The organization is just one of ICS's major features.

In this module, twelve of the major features of the system will be briefly introduced. All of these will be covered in more detail in later modules.

## II. Primary ICS Management Functions

- Command
- Operations
- Logistics
- Planning
- Finance/Administration

The individual designated as the Incident Commander (IC) has responsibility for all functions. That person may elect to perform all functions, or delegate authority to perform functions to other people in the organization. Delegation does not, however, relieve the Incident Commander from overall responsibility.

The principal ICS management functions are:

**Command** - The Incident Commander is responsible for all incident or event activity. Although other functions may be left unfilled, there will always be an Incident Commander.

**Operations** - The Operations Section is responsible for directing the tactical actions to meet incident objectives.

**Planning** - The Planning Section is responsible for the collection, evaluation, and display of incident information, maintaining status of resources, and preparing the Incident Action Plan and incident-related documentation.

**Logistics** - The Logistics Section is responsible for providing adequate services and support to meet all incident or event needs.

**Finance/Administration** - The Finance/Administration Section is responsible for keeping track of incident-related costs, personnel and equipment records, and administering procurement contracts associated with the incident or event.

Each of these functional areas can be expanded as needed into additional organizational units with further delegation of authority.

### III. Management by Objectives

Within ICS, Management by Objectives covers four essential steps. These steps take place on every incident regardless of size or complexity.

1. Understand agency policy and direction
2. Establish Incident objectives
3. Select appropriate strategy
4. Perform tactical direction (applying tactics appropriate to the strategy, assigning the right resources, and monitoring performance)

A detailed discussion of these steps is included in Module 7.

#### IV. Unity and Chain of Command

In ICS, Unity of Command means that every individual has a designated supervisor.

Chain of Command means that there is an orderly line of authority within the ranks of the organization with lower levels subordinate to, and connected to, higher levels.

In probably ninety-five percent of the incidents, the organizational structure for operations will consist of:

- Command
- Single Resources

However, as incidents expand the Chain of Command is established through an organizational structure which can consist of several layers as needed.

- Command
- Sections
- Branches
- Divisions/Groups
- Units
- Resources

#### V. Establishment and Transfer of Command

Command at an incident is initially established by the highest ranking authority at the scene that has jurisdiction for the incident.

Transfer of Command at an incident may take place for the following reasons:

1. A more qualified person assumes command.

2. The incident situation changes over time to where a jurisdictional or agency change in command is legally required, or it makes good management sense to make a transfer of command.
3. Normal turnover of personnel on long or extended incidents.

## VI. Organizational Flexibility

The ICS organization adheres to a "form follows function" philosophy. In other words, the organization at any given time should reflect only what is required to meet planned tactical objectives.

The size of the current organization and that of the next operational period is determined through the incident action planning process.

A number of organizational elements may be activated in the various sections without activating sectional chiefs.

Each activated element must have a person in charge of it. In some cases a single supervisor may initially be in charge of more than one unit.

Elements which have been activated and are clearly no longer needed should be deactivated to decrease organizational size.

## VII. Unified Command

Unified Command is an ICS management process which allows all agencies who have jurisdictional or functional responsibility for the incident to jointly develop a common set of incident objectives and strategies.

This is accomplished without losing or giving up agency authority, responsibility, or accountability.

Unified Command is an important feature of ICS. It allows agencies having a legitimate responsibility at an incident to be part of the Incident Command function.

Under Unified Command, the following always applies:

- The incident will function under a single, coordinated Incident Action Plan.
- One Operations Section Chief will have responsibility for implementing the Incident Action Plan.
- One Incident Command Post will be established.

There are a number of other considerations involved in Unified Command, and these are covered in Module 13.

## VIII. Span of Control

Span of control pertains to the number of individuals one supervisor can effectively manage. Maintaining an effective span of control is particularly important on incidents where safety and accountability have top priority.

In ICS, the span of control for any supervisor falls within a range of 3 to 7. If a supervisor has fewer than three people reporting, or more than seven, some adjustment to the organization should be considered.

The rule of thumb for span of control in ICS is one supervisor to five subordinates.

## IX. Common Terminology

In the ICS, common terminology is applied to:

- Organizational elements.
- Position titles.
- Resources.

- Facilities.

**Organizational Elements** - There is a consistent pattern for designating each level of the organization (e.g., sections, branches, etc.).

**Position Titles** - Those charged with management or leadership responsibility in ICS are referred to by position title such as Officer, Chief, Director, Supervisor, etc. This is done to provide a way to place the most qualified personnel in organizational positions on multi-agency incidents without confusion caused by various multi-agency rank designations. It also provides a standardized method for ordering personnel to fill positions.

**Resources** - Common designations are assigned to various kinds of resources.

Many kinds of resources may also be classified by type, which will indicate their capabilities (e.g., types of helicopters, patrol units, engines, etc.).

For example, in ICS a vehicle that is used in fire suppression is called an engine. Recognizing that there is a variety of engines, a type classification is given based on tank capacity, pumping capability, staffing, and other factors.

## X. Personnel Accountability

Several procedures within ICS ensure personnel accountability.

- **Check-In** - Mandatory for all personnel upon arrival at an incident.
- **Unity of Command** - Ensures everybody has only one supervisor.
- **Resource Status Unit** - Maintains status of all assigned resources.

- **Division/Group Assignment Lists** - Identifies resources with active assignments in the Operations Section.
- **Unit Logs** - A record of personnel assigned and major events in all ICS organizational elements.

## XI. Integrated Communications

The ability to communicate within ICS is absolutely essential.

Communications can be looked at in at least three different ways.

- A. The "hardware" systems that transfer information.
- B. Planning for the use of all available communications frequencies and resources.
- C. The procedures and processes for transferring information.

Just as every incident requires an Incident Action Plan, every incident also needs a Communications Plan. Like the action plan, it can be very simple and stated orally, or it can be quite complex, and form a part of a written Incident Action Plan.

Several communication networks may be established depending upon the size and complexity of the incident. These may include:

- **Command Net** - Established to link supervisory personnel from Incident Commander down to and including division and group supervisors.



- **Tactical Nets** - Established in a variety of ways, e.g., by agency, department, geographical area, or function. Tactical nets may be established for each branch, or for divisions and groups, depending upon hardware and frequency availability, and specific incident needs.
- **Support Nets** - Established on larger incidents to handle logistics traffic and resource status changes.
- **Ground-to-Air** - Established to coordinate ground-to-air traffic.
- **Air-to-Air** - Assigned for coordination between aircraft assigned to an incident.

An awareness of available communications systems and frequencies, combined with an understanding of incident requirements, will enable the Communications Unit Leader to develop an effective Communications Plan for each operational period.

An essential part of an effective multi-agency incident management system is for all communications to be in clear text. That is, do not use radio codes.

## XII. Resources Management

Resources assigned to an incident are managed in one of the following ways:

- **Single Resources** - Single Resources include both personnel and their required equipment.

- **Task Forces** - A Task Force is any combination of single resources within span of control guidelines. They are assembled for a particular tactical need, with common communications and a leader. Task Forces can be pre-determined or assembled at an incident from available single resources.
- **Strike Teams** - A Strike Team is a combination of a designated number of the same kind and type of resources with common communications and a leader. The number of resources to be used in the team will be based on what is needed to perform the function. Span of control guidelines should apply. Strike Teams can be pre-determined or assembled at an incident from available single resources.

The use of Task Forces and Strike Teams:

- Maximizes effective use of resources.
- Reduces span of control.
- Reduces communications traffic.

Tactical resources assigned to an incident will always be in one of three status conditions.

**Assigned** - Resources performing an active assignment.

**Available** - Resources ready for deployment.

**Out of Service** - Resources not assigned or not available.

### XIII. The Incident Action Plan

Every incident needs an action plan.

- The purpose of the plan is to provide all incident supervisory personnel with appropriate direction for future actions.
- The plan may be oral or written.

Written plans should be used when it is essential that all levels of a growing organization have a clear understanding of the tactical actions associated with the next operational period. It is important to use written action plans whenever:

- Two or more jurisdictions are involved.
- The incident will overlap major changes in personnel changes or go into a new operational period.
- There is a partial or full activation of the ICS organization.

In ICS, an Incident Briefing Form is used on smaller incidents to record initial actions and list assigned and available resources. As incidents grow in complexity and/or size ICS provides a format for a written action plan.

