

ICS Management Characteristics (FEMA)

ICS is based on the following 14 proven management characteristics that contribute to the strength and efficiency of the overall system:

1. Common Terminology
2. Modular Organization
3. Management by Objectives
4. Incident Action Planning
5. Manageable Span of Control
6. Incident Facilities and Locations
7. Comprehensive Resource Management
8. Integrated Communications
9. Establishment and Transfer of Command
10. Chain of Command and Unity of Command
11. Unified Command
12. Accountability
13. Dispatch/Deployment
14. Information and Intelligence Management

Common Terminology:

ICS establishes common terminology that allows diverse incident management and support organizations to work together across a wide variety of incident management functions and hazard scenarios.

This common terminology covers the following:

- **Organizational Functions:** Major functions and functional units with incident management responsibilities are named and defined. Terminology for the organizational elements is standard and consistent.
- **Resource Descriptions:** Major resources—including personnel, facilities, and major equipment and supply items—that support incident management activities are given common names and are “typed” with respect to their capabilities, to help avoid confusion and to enhance interoperability.
- **Incident Facilities:** Common terminology is used to designate the facilities in the vicinity of the incident area that will be used during the course of the incident.

Incident response communications (during exercises and actual incidents) should feature plain language commands so they will be able to function in a multijurisdictional environment. Field manuals and training should be revised to reflect the plain language standard.

Modular Organization:

The ICS organizational structure develops in a modular fashion based on the size and complexity of the incident, as well as the specifics of the hazard environment created by the incident. When needed, separate functional elements can be established, each of which may be

further subdivided to enhance internal organizational management and external coordination. Responsibility for the establishment and expansion of the ICS modular organization ultimately rests with Incident Command, which bases the ICS organization on the requirements of the situation. As incident complexity increases, the organization expands from the top down as functional responsibilities are delegated. Concurrently with structural expansion, the number of management and supervisory positions expands to address the requirements of the incident adequately.

Management by Objectives:

Management by objectives is communicated throughout the entire ICS organization and includes:

- Establishing overarching incident objectives.
- Developing strategies based on overarching incident objectives.
- Developing and issuing assignments, plans, procedures, and protocols.
- Establishing specific, measurable tactics or tasks for various incident management functional activities, and directing efforts to accomplish them, in support of defined strategies.
- Documenting results to measure performance and facilitate corrective actions.

Incident Action Planning:

Centralized, coordinated incident action planning should guide all response activities. An Incident Action Plan (IAP) provides a concise, coherent means of capturing and communicating the overall incident priorities, objectives, and strategies in the contexts of both operational and support activities. Every incident must have an action plan. However, not all incidents require written plans. The need for written plans and attachments is based on the requirements of the incident and the decision of the Incident Commander or Unified Command. Most initial response operations are not captured with a formal IAP. However, if an incident is likely to extend beyond one operational period, become more complex, or involve multiple jurisdictions and/or agencies, preparing a written IAP will become increasingly important to maintain effective, efficient, and safe operations.

Manageable Span of Control:

Span of control is key to effective and efficient incident management. Supervisors must be able to adequately supervise and control their subordinates, as well as communicate with and manage all resources under their supervision. In ICS, the span of control of any individual with incident management supervisory responsibility should range from 3 to 7 subordinates, with 5 being optimal. During a large-scale law enforcement operation, 8 to 10 subordinates may be optimal. The type of incident, nature of the task, hazards and safety factors, and distances between personnel and resources all influence span-of-control considerations.

Incident Facilities and Locations:

Various types of operational support facilities are established in the vicinity of an incident, depending on its size and complexity, to accomplish a variety of purposes. The Incident

Command will direct the identification and location of facilities based on the requirements of the situation. Typical designated facilities include Incident Command Posts, Bases, Camps, Staging Areas, mass casualty triage areas, point-of-distribution sites, and others as required.

Comprehensive Resource Management:

Maintaining an accurate and up-to-date picture of resource utilization is a critical component of incident management and emergency response. Resources to be identified in this way include personnel, teams, equipment, supplies, and facilities available or potentially available for assignment or allocation. Resource management is described in detail in Component III.

Integrated Communications:

Incident communications are facilitated through the development and use of a common communications plan and interoperable communications processes and architectures. The ICS 205 form is available to assist in developing a common communications plan. This integrated approach links the operational and support units of the various agencies involved and is necessary to maintain communications connectivity and discipline and to enable common situational awareness and interaction. Preparedness planning should address the equipment, systems, and protocols necessary to achieve integrated voice and data communications.

Establishment and Transfer of Command:

The command function must be clearly established from the beginning of incident operations. The agency with primary jurisdictional authority over the incident designates the individual at the scene responsible for establishing command. When command is transferred, the process must include a briefing that captures all essential information for continuing safe and effective operations.

Chain of Command and Unity of Command:

- Chain of Command: Chain of command refers to the orderly line of authority within the ranks of the incident management organization.
- Unity of Command: Unity of command means that all individuals have a designated supervisor to whom they report at the scene of the incident. These principles clarify reporting relationships and eliminate the confusion caused by multiple, conflicting directives. Incident managers at all levels must be able to direct the actions of all personnel under their supervision.

Unified Command:

In incidents involving multiple jurisdictions, a single jurisdiction with multiagency involvement, or multiple jurisdictions with multiagency involvement, Unified Command allows agencies with different legal, geographic, and functional authorities and responsibilities to work together effectively without affecting individual agency authority, responsibility, or accountability.

Accountability:

Effective accountability of resources at all jurisdictional levels and within individual functional areas during incident operations is essential. Adherence to the following ICS principles and processes helps to ensure accountability:

- Resource Check-In/Check-Out Procedures
- Incident Action Planning
- Unity of Command
- Personal Responsibility
- Span of Control
- Resource Tracking

Dispatch/Deployment:

Resources should respond only when requested or when dispatched by an appropriate authority through established resource management systems. Resources not requested must refrain from spontaneous deployment to avoid overburdening the recipient and compounding accountability challenges.

Information and Intelligence Management:

The incident management organization must establish a process for gathering, analyzing, assessing, sharing, and managing incident related information and intelligence.