

# Incident Command System

[Main Content](#)



## Incident Command System (ICS) Overview

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The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazards incident management approach that:

- Allows for the integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures and communications operating within a common organizational structure.
- Enables a coordinated response among various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private.
- Establishes common processes for planning and managing resources.

ICS is flexible and can be used for incidents of any type, scope and complexity. ICS allows its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single or multiple incidents.

ICS is used by all levels of government—federal, state, tribal and local—as well as by many nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. ICS is also applicable across disciplines. It is typically structured to facilitate activities in five major functional areas: Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance/Administration. All of the functional areas may or may not be used based on the incident needs. Intelligence/Investigations is an optional sixth functional area that is activated on a case-by-case basis.

As a system, ICS is extremely useful; not only does it provide an organizational structure for incident management but it also guides the process for planning, building and adapting that structure. Using ICS for every incident or planned event helps hone and maintain skills needed for the large-scale incidents.

[Click on this link to review the ICS management characteristics.](#)

## ICS Core Competencies

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In February 2005, the National Integration Center (NIC) gathered together several emergency management organizations to begin collaborating on NIMS implementation. From that meeting it became clear that core competencies for ICS positions were necessary. The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) took the lead to develop competencies for all ICS positions. In fall of 2005, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) added the development of wildland fire specific position competencies. USFA and NWCG prepared the ICS competencies for release. These competencies were announced online by FEMA for public comment in April of 2007. The public comment period ended on March, 2007.

In the spring of 2007 the NWCG brought together numerous interagency subject-matter expert groups to review the competencies and behaviors and begin revision of NWCG position task books. During these workshops additional edits to the competencies and behaviors were discovered and were proposed and accepted by the Competency Change Management Board (CCMB). A need was identified to create the CCMB. They met in August 2007 for adjudication of all comments.

Please reference the following ICS CCMB documents for any information regarding the CCMB's processes or the ICS competencies.

- ICS Core Competencies - Final [9/07] ([PDF](#) 2618K)
- CCMB Change Management Procedures [8/07] ([PDF](#) 38K)
- CCMB Charter [8/07] ([PDF](#) 110K)
- CCMB Key Messages [8/07] ([PDF](#) 29K)
- Public Comment Adjudication [8/07] ([PDF](#) 63K)

## Incident Management Teams

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An Incident Management Team (IMT) is a comprehensive resource (a team) to either augment ongoing operations through provision of infrastructure support, or when requested, transition to an incident management function to include all components/functions of a Command and General Staff.

An IMT:

- Includes command and general staff members and support personnel.
- Has statutory authority and/or formal response requirements and responsibilities.
- Has predesignated roles and responsibilities for members (Rostered and on-call: Identified and able to be contacted for deployment).
- Is available 24/7/365.

**Type 3 Incident Management Team.** In August 2003, the U.S. Fire Administration convened a focus group of stakeholders and experts from across the country to best determine the means to develop Type 3 IMTs nationwide. The focus group agreed to stay with the basic National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Incident Command System (ICS) training and typing models for the all-hazards emergency response community. [Click on this link for additional information on the Type 3 IMT Technical Assistance Program.](#)

## FAQs

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### **Q. How does NIMS relate to local incident command?**

*A: 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.*

### **Q. What is the role of Elected and Appointed Officials during an incident?**

*A: 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.*

### **Q. Why is ICS needed?**

*A: 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.*

### **Q. What is ICS Designed To Do?**

*A: 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.

**Q: In order to meet NIMS compliance, does it matter which brand of ICS is used (i.e. NIIMS, FIRESCOPE, NWCG)?**

**A:** To be NIMS compliant, you need to use the Incident Command System (ICS) structure described in the current version of NIMS. The foundation for ICS principles embedded in NIMS is derived from the National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS), Firefighting Resources of California Organized for Potential Emergencies (FIRESCOPE) and National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG).

**Q: Our 911 center, which receives and dispatches emergency and nonemergency calls, has told us that we may not use 10-codes at all. I gather we must use plain language when using NIMS ICS. Is that correct?**

**A:** Yes. When engaged in a multiagency/multijurisdictional incident using ICS, plain language is required. The value of using 10-codes for simplicity and speed is lost when members of the response team are unaware of their meanings, as may occur in a multiagency/multijurisdiction response event. As 10-codes used in one jurisdiction or agency are not the same as those used in another, it is important that responders and incident managers use common terminology to prevent misunderstanding in an emergency situation. While plain language is not required for internal operations, it is encouraged over 10-codes to promote familiarity within operational procedures used in emergencies.

NIMS Alert: NIMS and Use of Plain Language [12/06] ([PDF](#) 26KB, [TXT](#) 3KB)

## NIMS Alerts

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- NIMS Alert 08-08: NIMS ICS Simulation Exercise Program for Multi-Discipline Emergency Responders [8/08] ([PDF](#) 36KB, [TXT](#) 3KB)
  - NIMS Alert 36-07: Updated IS-100 and IS-200 Classroom-Delivered Final Exams [12/07] ([PDF](#) 26KB, [TXT](#) 1KB)
  - NIMS Alert 28-07: Finalized ICS Core Competencies [9/07] ([PDF](#) 24KB, [TXT](#) 1KB)

- NIMS Alert 19-07: IS-100.SC Introduction to the Incident Command System, I-100 for schools [6/07] ([PDF](#) 32KB, [TXT](#) 1KB)
- NIMS Alert 09-07: NIMS ICS-300 and ICS-400 Training Requirements [3/07] ([PDF](#) 43KB, [TXT](#) 9KB)
- NIMS Alert 04-07: National Incident Management System (NIMS) Integration Center Announces ICS Core Competencies [2/07] ([PDF](#) 40KB, [TXT](#) 7KB)
- NIMS Alert 010-06: Incident Command System Overview for Executives and Senior Officials Training [7/06] ([PDF](#) 25KB, [TXT](#) 6KB)
- NIMS Alert 001-06: More NIMS Resources Now Online: ICS Instructor Guidelines, Integrating NIMS into State/Local EOPs and SOPs, FY06 Implementation Details [1/06] ([PDF](#) 35KB, [TXT](#) 8KB)
- NIMS Alert 006-05: NIMS Compliant ICS Training Guidelines Now Available Online [4/05] ([PDF](#) 20KB, [TXT](#) 5KB)

## Training

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Classroom versions of the following courses are available from the FEMA Emergency Management Institute (EMI):

- ICS-100: Introduction to ICS (EMI Course Number: [IS100.b](#))
- ICS-200: ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents (EMI Course Number: [IS200.b](#))
- ICS-300: Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents (EMI Course Number: G300)\*
- ICS-400: Advanced ICS Command and General Staff—Complex Incidents (EMI Course Number: G400)\*
- ICS-402: Incident Command System (ICS) Overview for Executives/Senior Officials (EMI Course Number: G402)

\* Note: ICS-300 and ICS-400 are administered by each State Emergency Management Agency. Persons interested in that training should contact their State Fire Academy or State Emergency Management Agency.

[Click this link to access the EMI web site.](#)

### Independent Study Courses

The Emergency Management Institute (EMI) offers more than 40 independent study courses. These are self-paced courses designed for people who have emergency management responsibilities and the general public. For most of our courses you will need to download and print the materials. Others are interactive courses that you can take directly over the internet on the NETC Virtual Campus. All are offered free of charge to those who qualify for enrollment. Each independent study course includes lessons with practice exercises and a final examination. Students who score 75 percent or better are issued a certificate of achievement from EMI.

- [IS-100.b - Introduction to the Incident Command System](#)
- [IS-100.HCb - Introduction to the Incident Command System for Healthcare/Hospitals](#)
- [IS-100.LEb - Introduction to the Incident Command System for Law Enforcement](#)
- [IS-100.PWb - Introduction to the Incident Command System for Public Works Personnel](#)
- [IS-100.SCa - Introduction to the Incident Command System for Schools](#)
- [IS-200.b - ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents](#)
- [IS-200.HC - Applying ICS to Healthcare Organizations](#)

[Click this link to access the FEMA Independent Study Program.](#)

## Additional Resources

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- [NIMS Appendix B](#): Incident Command System presents detailed information about the ICS organization, ICS Sections, Area Command, incident facilities and locations, and the

planning process. The appendix also includes examples of ICS forms and a summary of major ICS positions.

- The [ICS Resource Center](#) includes a summary of ICS principles, job aids, position checklists, forms, and reference materials.

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