

JAMAICA FIRE BRIGADE. TRAINING DEPARTMENT



THE INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM MODULE

NOTES ON THE INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

The Incident Command System is a development of accepted concepts for handling emergencies. This system is not unique to the Fire Brigade but is widely accepted by other entities including business as a systematic way of approaching emergencies.

The Incident Command System is the work of a multi-agency task force developed after a number of large fires in Southern California in 1970. Because of the number of agencies that had to inter-relate, it was recognized that especially when more than one agency is involved, there was need to have a system that allows them to work harmoniously towards a common goal in an effective and efficient manner.

The system was also designed to be effective where a single agency is involved.

The system consists of procedures for controlling personnel, facilities, equipment and communications. It is designed to begin developing from the time an incident occurs until the requirement for management and operations no longer exists.

The "Incident Commander" is a title which can apply equally to any rank depending on the situation as it is the situation that determines who is in charge.

OPERATING REQUIREMENTS

The design requirements for the incident command system are that it can provide for the following kinds of operations:

- single jurisdiction/single agency involvement
- single jurisdiction with multiple-agency involvement
- multi-jurisdiction/multi-agency involvement

It must be able to expand in a logical manner from an initial attack situation. It must be simple enough to ensure low operational maintenance cost as it should allow for the maximum application and use of already developed qualifications and standards.

COMPONENTS OF THE ICS

The ICS has a number of components which must work interactively to provide for an effective operation:

- Common terminology
- Modular organization
- Integrated communication
- Unified command structure
- Consolidated actions plans
- Manageable span of control
- Designated incident facilities
- Comprehensive resource management

ORGANISATION AND OPERATIONS

There are five major areas of the Incident Command System:

- i. Command
- ii. Operations
- iii. Planning
- iv. Logistics
- v. Finance

THE INTEGRATED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (IEMS)

The Integrated Emergency Management System is a long term, all hazard concept for improving the programme implementation and development of emergency management capabilities at the divisional and national level.

The specific objectives as it relates to the Fire Brigade are:

- i. Save lives and property threatened by hazards.
- ii. Reduce duplication of efforts and resources.
- iii. Increase jurisdictional flexibility in upgrading the capacity to handle potential hazards.

THE NEED FOR A MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

At any emergency, small or large, involving fire department response, **one person must be in command**; assessing the situation and available resources, determining an appropriate incident action plan, monitoring the plan's effectiveness, and continually modifying the plan to meet the realities of the situation.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES APPLIED TO EMERGENCY INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

Task that business managers and leaders perform include planning, directing, organizing, coordinating, communicating, delegating and evaluating. This form of management is equally applicable to Incident Commanders.

The responsibilities of the IC include gathering and evaluating information relative to preplanning and size up, as well as development and communication of plans.

The IC must be involved with directing available resources to accomplish incident goals through operational and command responsibilities.

The IC must be able to communicate effectively within the organization and assess feedback from all of an incident. In a multi-agency response it is critical that the terms used must be understood by all.

Overall effectiveness of the incident action plan must be evaluated continually based on the results of previous operational decisions.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Although many similarities exist between business and emergency management, several factors make emergency management more difficult. One factor unique to emergency management is **danger to life and property**.

Among the health risks for firefighters are hepatitis B, AIDS and other infectious diseases. Cancer producing carcinogens are also a potential danger for firefighting forces and civilians.

Emergency management, both fire and non-fire-related, is carried out in a constantly changing environment. Although the situation may get better or worse, it seldom stays the same. The dynamics of a constantly changing environment present additional challenges to the incident commander. Effectiveness of the incident action plan depends on a building's construction and contents; factors which may be difficult to assess or confirm. Danger increases due to flashover, backdraft, or the presence of hazardous contents. Dynamics of the incident may create difficulty in gathering accurate and current information especially due to the limited time available at an incident scene.

A dynamic situation may require frequent shifts from offensive to defensive mode. **Offensive mode is used for aggressive interior attack and direct**

attack. Defensive mode includes exposure protection, resource gathering and the operations from offensive to defensive operations.

Since there is no guarantee that adequate resource will be available for every incident, preparation to handle every incident, regardless of size or complexity, with available resources is needed.

Control the situation, or it will control YOU!

Fire personnel must consider the physical environment, command structure and proper ICS procedures during **preplanning**.

Incident outcomes may be forecast by thinking ahead about the situation while preplanning as well as during an incident.

The complexity of an incident complicates emergency management.

Multiple priorities of life safety, incident stabilization and property conservation must be maintained, often with limited resources.

Time constraints may cause confusion. Where business managers may have weeks or months to devise strategies, **the IC has only seconds**. Persons calling for assistance are sometimes unable to fully describe the scope of the incident. If emergency service dispatchers do not understand the value of information received, they may withhold critical facts and information.

COMPONENTS OF AN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

ICS organizational structure develops in modular fashion from the top down at any incident. Five functional areas, which are implemented as the need develops, are Command, Operations, Logistics, Planning and Finance. **The command function is always established.** Specific ICS organizational structure for any incident is based on the incident's management needs.

For example, a simple incident does not require staffing sections to manage each major functional area. However, a complex incident may require staffing sections to manage each major functional area and the number of resources committed may require delegating management functions.

Effective two-way communication is essential to effective incident management. **Not only is it important that messages are received, but it is also important that they are acknowledged properly.**

The command function within ICS may be conducted in two general ways. **Single command may be applied when there is not overlap of jurisdictional**

boundaries or when a single IC is designated by the agency with overall management responsibility for the incident.

Unified command may be applied when the incident is within one jurisdictional boundary, but more than one agency shares management responsibility

The concept of **unified command** should not be confused with **unity of command**. **Unified command** is shared responsibility for overall incident management as a result of a multi-jurisdictional or multi-agency incident. **Unity of command** indicates that each individual reports to only one supervisor.

Another important component of an effective management system is a manageable span of control. **Span of control is defined as the number of subordinates one supervisor can manage effectively.**

Comprehensive resource management when performed effectively should maximise resource use, consolidate control of large number of single resources and reduce the communication load. Knowledge of the status of resources is critical to effective resource management.

SUMMARY

There are many reasons to implement and use an emergency management system. The primary reason is to provide for the safety of operating forces.

INCIDENT COMMANDER'S RESPONSIBILITY

The following list outlines the basic responsibilities of the IC at every incident.

The Incident Commander

- Assesses the incident priorities.
- Determines the incident's strategic goals and tactical objectives.
- Develops or approves and implements the incident action plan.

- Develops an incident command structure appropriate for the incident.
- Assess resources needs and orders, deploys and releases needed resources.
- Coordinates overall emergency activities
- Serves as the ultimate incident safety officer; responsible for preventing firefighter injuries and/or death.
- Coordinates activities of outside agencies.
- Authorizes information release to the media.

1. ASSESSING INCIDENT PRIORITIES

The three incident priorities are:

- Life Safety
- Incident Stabilization
- Property Conservation

Life Safety (First priority)

The IC must consider life safety issues for all firefighters, other emergency workers, occupants, and bystanders at an incident. Life safety **must** come before all other considerations.

Incident Stabilization (Second priority)

The IC is responsible for determining the strategy that will minimize the impact that any incident may have on the surrounding area and his or jurisdiction.

The size and complexity of the command system developed and implemented by the IC should be directly proportional to the magnitude and complexity of the incident.

The ICS structure must match the complexity of the incident, not the size.

Property Conservation (Third priority)

Property conservation means achieving our goals and objectives at an incident while minimizing the property damage. Judicious application of water, coupled with effective ventilation and meaningful salvage operations, will ensure that the goal of the property conservation is met.

2. DETERMINING STRATEGIC GOALS AND TACTICAL OBJECTIVES

The efforts of the resources available for handling any incident must be properly directed to minimize the damage. This is accomplished when the

IC determines the broad strategic goals for the incident and then transforms these goals for the incident and then transforms these goals into obtainable practical objectives.

3. DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE INCIDENT ACTION PLAN

The IC is the primary developer of the incident action plan. On most simple incidents, the action plan will be organized completely by the IC and may not need to be written down. In more complex incidents, the action plan will be a written document developed by a staff, headed by the IC. In the fire business, conditions rarely remain constant. They are almost always dynamic.

4. DEVELOPING AN APPROPRIATE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The organization structure is not based on the size or area of involvement; it depends on the **complexity** of the incident.

For instance, an incident involving structural collapse, hazardous materials, several exposures and considerable fire may not be large, yet the ICS organization would be expanded due to the numerous functions that must be staffed.

5. MANAGING RESOURCES

The IC must continually evaluate and adjust the development or resources at all incidents. Initial assessment of the incident and the needed resources is only the first step. As soon as the IC determines the incident's strategic goals and tactical objectives and then evaluates the resource needs to meet those goals and objectives, one of two actions will occur. Either the initial action plan will be successful or it will need to be revised.

Effective resource management requires that personnel safety be given the highest priority. Taking unnecessary risks with the lives of firefighting personnel when there is nor appreciable benefit is irresponsible,

6. COORDINATING OVERALL EMERGENCY ACTIVITIES

Coordinating is essential to effective incident management. Without it, resources will be wasted performing tasks that are not necessary to the overall success of the incident.

7. ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The Incident Commander normally handles three other responsibilities at minor incidents. As incidents escalate, these functional responsibilities must be delegated or the IC will spend valuable incident management time handling scene safety, liaison effort with outside agencies and dissemination of incident information to the news media.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE IC

The effective IC must be pro-active, decisive, objective, calm and a quick thinker. To handle all the responsibilities described earlier, the IC needs to be adaptable, flexible and realistic about his or her limitations.

NEED FOR A COMMAND POST

Although Command Posts (CP) may vary in type and size at different incidents, a CP provides a central, stationary location to assist the IC in incident command and control. The CP is a field office for management functions, such as gathering, analyzing and disseminating information.

A CP generally is established because of an incident's size or complexity, such as a high-hazard operation or long-term incidents.

It should be isolated from noise and confusion associated with the incident.

The CP location should be announced as soon as possible so that individuals with certain functional assignments know where to report.

EXPANDING ICS APPLICATION

Normally the ICS starts small and grows as an incident escalates. The exception to the norm occurs when a large-scale emergency develops rapidly.

STAGING

As the incident escalates and the IC requests additional resources, the additional responding companies need to be given assignments. The problem is that the IC may not know immediately which companies to assign which tasks. The answer to the problem is simple. Establish a Staging Area and tell the companies to report to Staging and wait for their assignments.

What Is A Staging Area?

It is a resource-marshalling area where units report while waiting for a specific assignment. They should be ready for immediate deployment. Companies in Staging are under the control of a Staging Area manager. If Operations is not staffed, Staging would report directly to the IC. An incident may have more than one Staging Area. In incidents requiring both fire and EMS resources, it is not uncommon to have Staging Area for fire apparatus and a separate Staging Area for ambulances.

A properly run Staging Area provides significant advantages. It allows for firefighter safety and personnel accountability, prevents premature deployment of companies and prevents freelancing. All these advantages are made possible because companies are logged in and given assignments, maintaining control of resources. Staging also makes it possible to minimize communications and reinforce unity of command.

SAFETY

The individual given the Safety Officer's assignment must monitor and assess the safety hazards and unsafe situations to develop measures for ensuring personnel safety.

INFORMATION OFFICER

The Information Officer is responsible for interface with the media and other appropriate agencies. This function is implemented to relieve the IC

of needing to work with media, taking him/her away from command responsibilities. The Information Officer must coordinate all releases of significant information with the IC.

Summary

Strategic goals are the overall plan that will be used to control the incident. Strategic goals are broad in nature and are achieved by the completion of tactical objectives.

Tactical objectives are the specific operations that must be accomplished to achieve strategic goals. Tactical objectives must be specific and measurable.