



1. WHAT IS AN INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM (ICS)?

The Incident Command System (ICS) is highly standardized, top-down, military-based management structure that supersedes the management structure of every other agency that responds to an event. This management tool is used to meet the demands of small or large emergency and nonemergency situations. It represents best practices, and has become the standard for emergency management across the country.

ICS standardizes position titles, responsibilities, and terminology. It uses titles that aren't necessarily used in regular jobs, and it's very clear about what responsibilities are. Benefits of the system are that it establishes common processes for planning and managing resources, and that it allows for the integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organization structure. In an emergency, you may not be working for your day-to-day supervisor, or you may be working in a different location. Thus, emergency response operations are not "business as usual."

In summary, the Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized approach to incident management that:

- Helps multiple agencies (your health center, fire, police, city or county agencies) work together;
- Establishes common processes for planning and managing resources;
- Allows for the integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure.

Simply put, ICS is a standardized management tool that allows better coordination, communication and use of resources.

2. WHY USE ICS?

Disaster can strike anytime, anywhere. It takes many forms—a tsunami, an earthquake, a flood, a fire or a hazardous spill, or an act of terrorism. An incident can build over days or weeks, or hit suddenly, without warning.

A poorly managed incident response can undermine our safety and well-being. With so much at stake, we must effectively manage our response efforts both internal (our staff) and external (fire, police, etc.).

As partners, we must respond together in a seamless, coordinated fashion.

3. MAKING ICS WORK

Effective incident management relies on a tight command and control structure for managing resources, making decisions, and assigning tasks. Although information is exchanged freely through the ICS structure, strict adherence must be paid to this top-down management approach when managing incidents in the field.

To make ICS work, each of us must commit to following this command and control approach.

4. 5 BASIC FUNCTIONS OF ICS

The Command Staff consists of the Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer, who all report directly to the Incident Commander. There are 5 basic functions of the Incident Command System include:

Command	Sets the incident objectives, strategies, and priorities and has overall responsibility for the incident.
Operations	Conducts operations to reach the incident objectives. Establishes tactics and directs all operational resources.
Planning	Supports the incident action planning process by tracking resources, collecting/analyzing information, and maintaining documentation.
Logistics	Arranges for resources and needed services to support achievement of the incident objectives.
Finance & Administration	Monitors costs related to the incident. Provides accounting, procurement, time recording, and cost analyses.

The Incident Commander has overall authority and responsibility for conducting incident operations. An Incident Commander may assign staff to assist with managing the incident. When we arrange these functions into a “Chain of Command” or line of authority, the basic structure looks like this:



Remember . . . *The ICS structure is modular and has the capability to expand or contract to meet the needs of the incident. During a larger incident, the Incident Commander may create Sections and delegate the Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance/Administration functions. The Incident Commander only creates those Sections that are needed. If a Section is not staffed, the Incident Commander will personally manage those functions.*

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5. ICS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

a. Incident Commander:

The Incident Commander must have the authority to manage the incident and must be briefed fully. In some instances, a written delegation of authority should be established. Personnel assigned by the Incident Commander have the authority of their assigned positions, regardless of the rank they normally hold within their organizations. In addition to having overall responsibility for managing the entire incident, the Incident Commander is specifically responsible for:

- Ensuring overall incident safety;
- Providing information services to internal and external stakeholders, such as disaster survivors, agency executives, and senior officials;
- Establishing and maintaining liaison with other agencies participating in the incident.

b. Section Chiefs:

Under the Incident Commander are four (4) Section Chiefs, they are referred to as the General Staff. The responsibilities of each Section Chief are:

- i. Operations Section Chief: is responsible for developing and implementing strategy and tactics to accomplish the incident objectives. This means that the Operations Section Chief organizes, assigns, and supervises all the tactical or response resources assigned to the incident. Additionally, if a Staging Area is established, the Operations Section Chief would manage it.
- ii. Planning Section Chief: oversees the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of operational information related to the incident. It is the Planning Section's responsibility to prepare and disseminate the Incident Action Plan, as well as track the status of all incident resources. The Planning Section helps ensure responders have accurate information and provides resources such as maps and floor plans.
- iii. Logistics Section Chief: is responsible for providing facilities, services, and material support for the incident. Logistics is critical on more complex incidents. The Logistics Section Chief assists the Incident Commander and Operations Section Chief by providing the resources and services required to support incident activities. During an incident, Logistics is responsible for ensuring the well-being of responders by providing sufficient food, water, and medical services. Logistics is also responsible for arranging communication equipment, computers, transportation, and anything else needed to support the incident.
- iv. Finance and Administration Section Chief: is responsible for all the financial and cost analysis aspects of an incident. These include contract negotiation, recording personnel and equipment time, documenting and processing claims for accidents and injuries occurring at the incident, and keeping a running tally of the costs associated with the incident.

c. Command Staff:

Depending upon the size and type of incident or event, the Incident Commander may designate personnel to provide information, safety, and liaison services. The Command Staff reports directly to the Incident Commander. In a complex incident, Assistant Officers may be assigned to each of the Command Staff functions. A Command Staff may not be necessary at every incident, but every incident requires that certain management functions be performed.

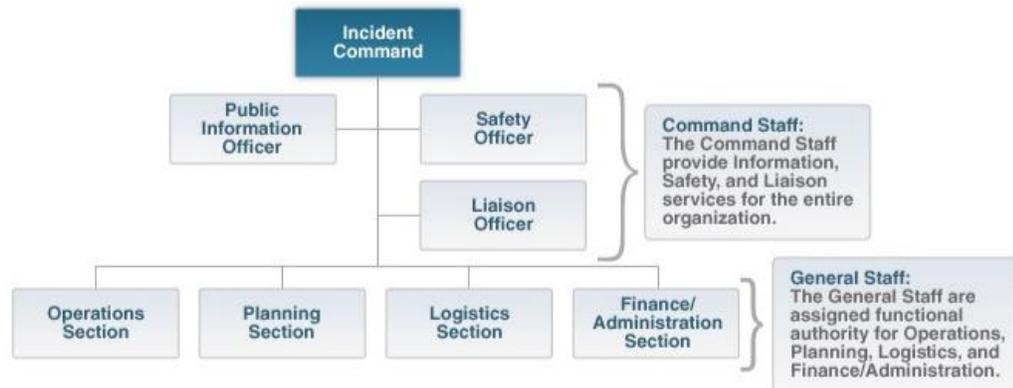
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An effective Command Staff frees the Incident Commander to assume a leadership role. The following personnel comprise the Command Staff:

- i. Public Information Officer: serves as the conduit for information to internal and external stakeholders, including the media, stakeholders, and the public.
- ii. Safety Officer: monitors safety conditions and develops measures for ensuring the safety of all incident personnel.
- iii. Liaison Officer: serves as the primary contact for other agencies assisting at an incident.

The expanded ICS, with Section Chiefs and Command staff would look like this:



In summary, the Incident Command System, or ICS, helps ensure integration of our response efforts. ICS is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazards approach to incident management. ICS allows all responders to adopt an integrated organizational structure that matches the complexities and demands of the incident while respecting agency and jurisdictional authorities. Although ICS promotes standardization, it is not without needed flexibility. For example, the ICS organizational structure can expand or contract to meet incident needs. Depending on the incident, additional staff may be needed to expand either the Command or General Staff.