



# Law Enforcement Implementation of the Incident Command System

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## **All-Hazards Incident Management Teams Association**

The All-Hazards Incident Management Teams Association is a 501(c)3, not-for-profit professional association founded in 2010, comprised of incident management practitioners from multiple disciplines representing Federal, state, and local agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

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# Abstract

The 9/11 Commission Report (2004, July 22) includes one element focused on first responder activities and processes to generate a common language and common protocols for large multi-discipline or multi-agency crisis responses. The recommendation was the adoption of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), specifically use of the Incident Command System (ICS) for first responder agencies, most of which have adopted the principles of ICS and trained, exercised, and responded using ICS across the Nation. Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) at large have adopted ICS principles and protocols yet appear hesitant to expand into All-Hazards Incident Management Teams (AHIMTs), or fully adopt ICS methodologies for daily or special operations, thereby hindering efficiencies and collaborations on multi-disciplinary or multi-agency responses. The All-Hazards Incident Management Teams Association (AHIMTA), in cooperation with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), elected to attempt to understand and review the impediments of law enforcement adherence to ICS protocols and develop strategies to aid law enforcement to become stronger proponents of ICS. A group of dedicated and experienced Law Enforcement and ICS professionals, current and retired, worked together over the course of several months to understand and address these concerns. Five areas were identified that impact law enforcement's application and commitment to NIMS principles and ICS.

**The five areas are addressed in this document:**

- 1 Law enforcement focused NIMS/ICS training
- 2 Law enforcement executive support
- 3 Incident Action Plans replace departmental operations and event plans
- 4 ICS development through pre-planned events and incident shadowing
- 5 Enhanced partnerships with emergency management

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# Introduction

The AHIMTA initiated a project in September 2020 in collaboration with the IACP to understand the perceived hesitancy of LEA practice of and participation in AHIMTs and the correlating reluctance for implementing ICS principles into daily and special operations. LEAs are excellent in their abilities of command and control over rapidly developing and chaotic situations, thereby an existence of gravitation of agencies and officer to a system which encourages and refines the skills and abilities in response to these situations. However, LEAs have additional concerns, such as jurisdictional policies or procedures over high liability areas, such as arrest and detention or use of force.

The mission of the project as described by AHIMTA is clear: to identify the obstacles that inhibit the law enforcement community from embracing the advanced concepts of ICS, including the participation in and the use of AHIMTs. The process of the project included a series of meetings and discussions led by AHIMTA personnel with law enforcement and ICS professionals, including current and retired practitioners, as well as the involvement of frontline commanders, and policy level decision-makers.

Members of the working group included state police organizations, municipal police organizations, police commanders, firefighters, and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Integration Center (NIC) representation. The working group developed five topics over several meetings with the most substantial impact to law enforcement ICS implementation:

**The five areas are addressed in this document:**

- 1 Law enforcement focused NIMS/ICS training
- 2 Law enforcement executive support
- 3 Incident Action Plans replace departmental operations and event plans
- 4 ICS development through pre-planned events and incident shadowing
- 5 Enhanced partnerships with emergency management

Additionally, the working group underlined the importance to incorporate primary concepts of an After-Action Review (AAR) and how this benefits LEAs in evaluating responses, and an example of successful integration into multi-discipline and multi-agency responses. These items are included in the appendix.

## 1 Law Enforcement Focused NIMS/ICS Training

One obstacle identified by the working group was the integration of NIMS and ICS training into LEAs. ICS is not always considered a primary response protocol by LEAs, therefore, much of the ICS training is provided by external entities and individuals outside of law enforcement. While ICS is paramount to understanding the concept of an all-hazards response, law enforcement has not garnered complete acceptance of ICS as a response tool. One solution to combat this is to change the way ICS is presented in LEAs. The working group proposes two components for building a strong base of ICS knowledge in LEAs:

- 1. Instructor cadre
- 2. Actual training requirements

Building an instructor cadre of law enforcement professionals is a critical component for increasing and maintaining a strong ICS knowledge base in LEAs. The first exposure to ICS for law enforcement officers should occur in the early stages of a career, such as entry-level training at an academy. Instruction must include first responders with a law enforcement background as well as other additive responder disciplines. ICS courses facilitated primarily by firefighters have reinforced the misconception that ICS is a fire service-centric program, that would be countered with law enforcement professionals as instructors. Whenever possible to further the concept of all-hazards response, law enforcement personnel teamed up with other first responder instructors would create a holistic approach to teaching ICS. Additionally, the instructors from the law enforcement community must be knowledgeable and experienced in the practical application and advanced concepts of ICS. This can be challenging for many local LEAs, and a nationwide list of law enforcement ICS instructors should be developed and shared across the law enforcement enterprise. The instructors on the nationwide list would meet an identified set of criteria to ensure they possess

the requisite knowledge, skills, and experience satisfy the minimum requirements necessary for the needed level of instruction.

The actual training requirements for law enforcement personnel is the other critical component to building a strong knowledge base. The FEMA NIMS training program is based on an individual's level of incident responsibility rather than the individual's rank. However, within LEAs, ICS training more often correlates to an individual's rank or as a requirement for promotion. This creates a dichotomy of purpose and practice between the actual ICS principles and the expectations within LEAs. In practice, LEAs work with small teams across an array of scenarios where the team leader is not necessarily the individual with the highest rank. Expansion of this concept into a AHIMT would align law enforcement with ICS principles and increase participation opportunities in IMTs.

The introduction of ICS early in a law enforcement career could be implemented at a basic academy using law enforcement instructors with the inclusion of Introduction to ICS (ICS 100) in the training curriculum and within one year of their start date receive the next level of training, Basic ICS for Initial Response (ICS 200). These initial courses should be presented in-person rather than through online, independent study versions to ensure understanding and commitment to the principles. Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents (ICS 300) and Advanced ICS for Command and General Staff in Complex Incidents (ICS 400) could be delivered based upon expectations of officers or command staff as they move into larger incident management scenarios or working with IMT and would include a mixed instructor cadre to foster the all-hazards response concept.





## 2 Law Enforcement Executive Support

High profile commitments and priorities combined with budgetary constraints often push law enforcement executives into difficult decisions regarding training and response protocols. LEAs are heavily burdened with operational tempo and constantly balancing the demands and expectations between vast training requirements, needs, and other priorities. To implement a program or process permanently into a LEA, the initiative must have value to the organization and the chief executive officer.

The organizational culture of today's law enforcement environment should emphasize the value of ICS as it provides a consistent and proven method to plan for events or respond to expanding incidents. The practice of ICS is also valuable for daily incidents such as special operations or pre-planned events. Incorporating ICS into every incident or special event builds habits of thought and habits of action that allows incidents of all complexity to be the managed

in a more deliberate manner. The addition of NIMS/ICS as a required policy practice in an accreditation review would incentivize the implementation by LEAs. The NIMS/ICS integration process could include a demonstrated understanding of ICS into promotional examinations and evaluations. Additionally, LEAs could demonstrate proficiency through a debriefing process of critical incidents in the analysis of ICS in the incident management and response to identify the benefits. Although NIMS/ICS are considered as fire service-centric, in reality ICS can greatly assist LEAs to plan special events and respond to expanding incidents. Embracing ICS by a LEA executive, police chief or sheriff, will lead to better coordination and cooperation of first responders between agencies across multiple disciplines with the benefit to the community of increasing efficiencies for public safety, and ultimately strengthening all-hazards incident responses.

## 3 Incident Action Plans Replace Operations and Event Plans

Incident Action Planning is a principal element of ICS as the process formulates the Incident Action Plan (IAP) that outlines the tasks and expectations of operational periods to attain the incident commanders' intent for resolution of the response. Normalizing IAPs as the method for documenting and planning operations in LEAs creates a strong foundation for ICS in the agency. Planned and unplanned responses both lend to perfect opportunities for ICS to become ingrained culturally within LEAs.

Traditionally, LEAs use a military-based planning process to prepare for or respond to contingencies or potential concerns during a pre-planned event. These plans are not normally standardized and do not immediately correlate with other first responder entities. By transitioning to Incident Action Planning for both pre-planned events and unplanned emergency incidents, the focus can shift to the intentional decision-making process that occurs in the development of a plan. The outcome of that process is a written IAP on ICS forms that contain the essential elements of information needed for operational staff that was developed by subject matter experts. The IAP is in a standardized format, making information readily accessible to personnel from multiple disciplines and multiple agencies with clearly defined tasks and objectives. All response personnel versed in ICS will know where to look to find the information in the IAP that is important for them to accomplish their assigned mission. In addition to a written IAP, the operational period briefing, a step of the Incident Action Planning process, provides the tactical resources on the incident the information needed to accomplish the mission in a standardized format.

Transitioning to IAPs on ICS forms can be accomplished by starting with pre-planned events and utilizing personnel who have attended intermediate and advanced ICS training, or if possible, ICS position specific training. Working through the Incident Action Planning process

for pre-planned events will not only develop the plan but assist with staff development. The AHIMTA will provide templates of ICS forms for various types of incidents and events with examples of law enforcement specific objectives, work assignments, and safety messages, to give law enforcement planners a guide to completing these forms. Examples of types of events to use IAPs include traditional patrol-based events such as crime suppression, overtime operations, or DUI checkpoints. By using the ICS format often on smaller incidents, the agency staff becomes accustomed to reading the plans and finding the information they need to accomplish the mission. Through progressive steps in staff development, larger event plans can be documented on ICS forms. As a LEA becomes more comfortable with the implementation of ICS forms, the development of IAPs for pre-planned events and complex incidents will become habits of thought and habits of action.





## 4 ICS Development through Pre-Planned Events and Incident Shadowing

ICS is designed not only to help agencies manage single and complex incidents, but also to assist in the integration of other agencies and emergency services. ICS provides a scalable and robust system to help law enforcement leaders manage critical incidents of all types. Just as LEAs adopted the concept of field training for new officers, ICS could be part of a post academy training program where officers learn from more experienced colleagues. Concepts taught in the academy are reinforced in the field and tactics are honed through the implementation of real-world incidents. This experiential learning program allows new officers to learn and make mistakes under supervision for growth and development as officers. While field training is nearly universal in LEAs around the country, few small and mid-sized agencies conduct similar training for new supervisors or commanders. Often the promotion process itself is the only supervisory training that new supervisors receive. Furthermore, most new supervisor and commander training schools focus on administrative topics such as liability, performance evaluations, public relations, or discipline. A curriculum review of three prominent command level schools, the FBI National Academy (FBI.gov, 2022) Northwestern University School of Police Staff (SPS.northwestern.edu, 2022) and Command, and the University of Louisville Command Officers Development Course (Louisville.edu, 2022), shows that only one of three teaches incident command, inferring supervisors and commanders do not receive sufficient incident command training.

In many small and mid-sized LEAs, the first time a supervisor is exposed to ICS is at a large expanding chaotic scene, thus complicating learning new concepts and systems. The Major Cities Chiefs Association reported over 8,700 demonstrations in 2020, each of which required a response from law enforcement with support from other emergency services. (MCCA.org, 2021). Many of these protests were spontaneous and necessitated

the rapid implementation of ICS, however effective use of ICS by untrained personnel only adds to the level of uncertainty and stress to those supervisors tasked with managing complex incidents. Comparable to a new officer field training program, a tiered approach is required to adequately train new supervisors and commanders in ICS:

- Require ICS training in all new supervisor orientation training.
- Encourage command level schools to teach training exercise new commanders in the implementation and use of ICS.
- Develop an ICS field training program with the participation of supervisors and commanders.
- Collaborate with other jurisdictional emergency services to design and implement ICS and unified command strategies prior to an incident.
- Shadow other agencies adept at implementing ICS with state and federal partners during the planning and response phases of large-scale incidents.
- Foster the implementation of ICS doctrine by supervisors in planning routine special events such as parades, public gatherings, and community events.

ICS is a great response and incident management tool, but only if it is understood and the training is embedded and implemented within a LEA.



## 5 Enhanced Partnerships with Emergency Management

Law enforcement often manages incidents not requiring an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activation or involvement of emergency management personnel. Law enforcement incident commanders regularly respond to high-risk incidents and should become familiar with and understand the role of the EOC and emergency managers. Incidents involving multiple jurisdictions or disciplines, conducted over multiple operational periods, with high public and media interest, or displacement and evacuation of the public are typical for the employment of EOCs.

Incident commanders must understand the principles of ICS for the charged management of an incident by the

delegation of authority and responsibility for the objectives, strategies, and tactics unless specified otherwise. When an incident commander identifies expanding complexities and the potential for cascading consequences or growth beyond the management structure in place, the decision for increasing the incident management resources and expertise to include an IMT should be evaluated.

Table 1 indicates examples of actions, functions, and processes by incident management, support, and coordination in the performance of duties applicable to an incident to further understand the responsibilities correlating to roles of a unified response.



Table 1

Incident Management, Support, and Coordination

Incident Management Team	Emergency Operations Center	Emergency Management
Incident and Responder Management	Incident Support	Incident Coordination
Determines Incident Objectives with AHJ and Creates Strategies for Delegated Area	Monitors Incident Inside Delegated Area, Manages Incident Outside of Area	Creates Pre-Disaster AOP, EOP, and Annexes (e.g., Sheltering, Debris Management)
Directs Field Operations Strategies and Tactics	Emergency Support Function Coordination	Monitors Community Lifelines
Requests Resources from the EOC	Provides Resource Support for Incident	Sources Resources from ESFs and EOCs
Develops and Executes Incident Action Plan	Coordinates Policy with AHJ	Provides Pre-Planning and Mitigation Information
Tracks Operational Resources	Coordinates Disaster Declarations	Develops and Maintains Resource Lists
Coordinates with AHJ on Information Policy and JIC with Information Releases	Coordinates Sheltering and Evacuation Points	Advises AHJ on Disaster Declaration Implications
Provides Incident Information to the Public	Tracks Public Information	Coordinates with MACC
Develops and Executes Evacuation Plans in Coordination with LE/EOC/EM	Assists with Public Warning	Provides Pre-Developed Evacuation Plans
Provides Field Incident Situation to EOC/AHJ	Maintains Situational Awareness Beyond Incident	Provides Overall Incident Situation to AHJ
Responsible for Incident/Responder Safety	Coordinates Volunteers and Donations	Coordinates with NGOs
Develop and Maintain GIS Based Incident Information	Provides GIS Support to the Incident	Maintains GIS Based Incident Information
Liaise with Stakeholders	Link to County & State	Provides Stakeholders Policy Input
Collects and Compiles Incident Records	Assists with Transportation Coordination	Maintains Incident Records
Tracks, Projects, and Reports Costs	Assists with DAFN Issues	Compiles and Reports Costs
Develops Lease Agreements and Contracts	Provides Resource Contacts	Maintains Historical Lease Agreements, and Contracts
Develops Demobilization Plans in Coordination with EOC	Coordinates Phone Bank	Manages and Tracks Payment/ Reimbursement Submission
Demobilizes Incident	Short-Term Recovery Coordination	Prepares for Incident Recovery phase

Emergency managers at all levels, on a day-to-day basis, strive to mitigate (prevent or lessen the effects of), prepare for (including planning, training, exercising, and equipping), respond to, and recover from disasters and large-scale emergencies in the community. To accomplish this, emergency managers develop and maintain a jurisdictional Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) to identify and assess risk then build and sustain core capabilities against prioritized threats and hazards. Consideration must account for all-hazards before, during, and after disasters with identified impacts on a community while incorporating stakeholders. The THIRA helps understand risks and determine the level of capability needed in order to address those risks. Sound risk management principles (hazard identification, risk analysis, and impact analysis) are incorporated in assigning priorities and resources. Unity of effort among all levels of government and the whole community includes support of ICS training and development. The creation and sustainment of broad and sincere relationships among individuals and organizations promotes trust, advocacy of a team atmosphere, consensus building, and communications facilitation. The activities of all relevant stakeholders are

synchronized to achieve a common purpose and use creative and innovative approaches in solving disaster challenges, to include a science and knowledge-based approach based on education, training, experience, ethical practice, public stewardship, and continuous improvement.

During an incident, as necessary, emergency management personnel manage and staff an EOC. Generally, brief periods and limited scope of the management of field operations occurs from the EOC. Across the Nation, EOCs are unique in structure, but generally conform to an ICS or ICS-like, Incident Support Model, or Departmental structures. Table 1 provides examples of common tasks and responsibilities performed within the EOC and the relationship to incident commanders.

It is encouraged to familiarize incident management, in this particular case law enforcement, with their emergency management counterparts through relationship building, training, and exercising to develop a collective understanding management and support of incidents. Law enforcement leadership should work closely with emergency managers in their jurisdiction and develop cross training opportunities to fully engage and expand partnerships.



# Conclusion

First responder agencies have operated under ICS for decades, with an increased acceptance and reliance following 9/11 and the 9/11 Commission Report. LEAs are well known for their capabilities relating to command and control of rapidly developing or chaotic scenes, and provide direction and control for safety, evacuation, rescue, and investigation. Following ICS principles is natural in these instances, but law enforcement may not always use a common terminology, operate under specific objectives, or practice incident command in daily operations, yet are still highly successful in their responses. The suggestion from AHIMTA and IACP supported by research for this document is that law enforcement could be more efficient, more scalable, and foster closer partnerships for multi-discipline and multi-agency responses if focused resources are directed to training and fully implementing ICS principles. The systematic change should include the development and implementation of internal IMTs and participation in AHIMTs at local or regional levels.

Concerted acceptance and adherence to ICS principles and protocols increases law enforcement capabilities to partner with and mutually support other response agencies. There is intense pressure on LEAs to meet daily operational and training standards and any addition must align with agency and jurisdictional priorities. This recommendation comes with the acknowledgement of those pressures while suggesting a stronger adherence and implementation of ICS in daily operations and crisis responses can be accomplished.

The five topics for law enforcement ICS implementation outlined:

**The five areas are addressed in this document:**

- 1 Law enforcement focused NIMS/ICS training
- 2 Law enforcement executive support
- 3 Incident Action Plans replace departmental operations and event plans
- 4 ICS development through pre-planned events and incident shadowing
- 5 Enhanced partnerships with emergency management

The recommended topic areas provide a pathway for law enforcement to fully implement ICS while maintaining jurisdictional priorities and policies. Management, support, and coordination of incidents, regardless of size or complexity, across disciplines and agencies, using ICS has proven to be effective, efficient, and economical. The time is now for law enforcement to fully implement NIMS/ICS in the daily and crisis responses faced by LEAs and to build and participate on AHIMTs.

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# Appendix

## List of Acronyms

AAR	After-Action Review	IACP	International Association of Chiefs of Police
AHIMT	All-Hazards Incident Management Team	IAP	Incident Action Plan
AHIMTA	All-Hazards Incident Management Teams Association	ICS	Incident Command System
AHJ	Authority Having Jurisdiction	IMT	Incident Management Team
AOP	Annual Operating Plan	LEA	Law Enforcement Agency
DAFN	Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs	MACC	Multi-Agency Coordination Center
EM	Emergency Management	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
EOC	Emergency Operations Center	NIC	National Integration Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan	NIMS	National Incident Management System
ESF	Emergency Support Function	THIRA	Threat Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation		
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency		
GIS	Geographic Information System		

## Appendix

### Law Enforcement multi-discipline response example:

On October 26, 2020, at about 0647 hours, a wildland fire started in the Silverado Canyon Community in Orange County, California, named, the “Silverado Fire.” As the this burned at about 1432 hours, a second fire started in the City of Yorba Linda, California, named the “Blue Ridge Fire”, with the fires approximately 13 miles apart. The fires started in Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) and Orange County Sheriff’s Department (OCSD) jurisdiction. As these fires grew, they threatened other areas, and other stakeholders became impacted. Not only were Law Enforcement and Fire Services involved, but Orange County Public Works, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Orange County Animal Control, Southern California Edison (SCE), California State Parks, United States Forest Service (USFS), and the California Highway Patrol (CHP).

During wildland fires, Law Enforcement support the Fire Service by setting up and maintaining road closures, aiding with evacuations, and providing security. After the first response (each fire received four marked patrol units from the OCSD), a request for resources was made through Mutual Aid. Within the first 60 minutes, over fifty officers arrived, along with infrastructure assets.

The responding officers and resources checked in and were given a task (an ICS 204 assignment). An Incident

Management Team (IMT) managed the incident using an ICS structure. Officers and resources were assigned to staging and were available on scene for rapid deployment. The Planning Section produced an IAP with the incident objectives, as identified by the IC, and law enforcement officers were tasked with evacuations, maintaining road closures, and providing security. Additional resources were ordered through the Logistic Section in support of the incident objectives, such as personnel, safety equipment, barricades, vehicles, food, and fuel. The Operations section put the plan into action, while the Incident Commander oversaw the incident. A Public Information Officer and a Joint Information Center were established to provide the public/stakeholders with the most current and correct information. Finally, the Finance section managed costs and expenses ensuring time sheets and purchase orders were completed properly.

Due to the complexity of the incident, on October 28, 2020, a CALFIRE IMT received delegated authority to manage the incident. Without the implementation of the IMT, and using lessons learned through ICS, it would have been impossible to safely and efficiently manage these fires. The strong law enforcement presence at the incident demonstrates the intense need for law enforcement to understand the foundational elements of NIMS, ICS, and why it must become everyday operational standards rather than a crisis response.



## Appendix

### After-Action Reviews (AARs)

AARs are a standardized process, adopted by American military forces, emergency management, and part of the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) as a “best practice” to improve future readiness and response to incidents of all complexities. This process is a natural outgrowth of organizations that recognize the need for continuous improvement in order to become or remain effective High Reliability Organizations (HROs).

HROs are organizations that have succeeded in avoiding catastrophes in environments where normal “accidents” can be expected due to risk factors and complexity. Representative HROs “industries” include hospital/health, nuclear, aviation, structural and wildland fire, and military units. The Law Enforcement community has increasingly found itself in this category over the last few decades. (Definitions, background, and five key characteristics may be found at high reliability organization - Wikipedia, as well as multiple other websites)

Benefits of AARs to organizations, units, and individuals are numerous. Improvement in performance, safe practices, and successful outcomes are utmost, with the intent to identify areas for improvement, correct weaknesses, and sustain strengths. AARs should be implemented at all levels, but particularly at lower and intermediate command levels. The AAR process should

be fostered and encouraged by department leadership to develop a culture of learning and continuous improvement, particularly outside of a litigious environment.

#### Elements of successful AARs:

AARs must be conducted in an atmosphere in which participants openly and honestly discuss what transpired, in sufficient clarity and detail, so that all understand what did and did not occur and why. Critically, participants should leave with a strong desire to improve proficiency.

- Performed as immediately as possible by involved personnel.
- Leader’s role must ensure skilled facilitation of the AAR.
- Reinforce that respectful disagreement is acceptable. Focus on the “what”, not the “who”.
- Make sure everyone participates.
- End on a positive note.

#### Key points to be addressed in an AAR:

1. What was planned?
2. What actually happened?
3. Why did it happen?
4. What can/should we do next time?