

The History of the Incident Command System in the United States*

The Incident Command System (ICS) resulted from the obvious need for a new approach to the problem of managing rapidly moving wildfires in the early 1970's. At that time, emergency managers faced a number of problems, many of these have yet to be universally resolved. These problems include:

- ♥ Too many people reporting to one supervisor.
- ♥ Different emergency response organizational structures.
- ♥ Lack of reliable incident information.
- ♥ Inadequate and incompatible communications.
- ♥ Lack of structure for coordinated planning between agencies.
- ♥ Unclear lines of authority.
- ♥ Terminology differences between agencies
- ♥ Unclear or unspecified incident objectives.

Designing a standard emergency management system to remedy the problems listed above took several years and extensive field-testing. ICS was developed by an inter-agency task force through a cooperative local, State and federal effort called FIRESCOPE (Fire Fighting Resources of Southern California Organized for Potential Emergencies). The early developmental process recognized and keyed on several requirements for the system that exist today. These include:

1. The system must be organizationally flexible to meet the needs of incidents of any kind and size.
2. Agencies must be able to use the system on a day-to-day basis for routine situations as well as for major emergencies.
3. The system must be sufficiently standard to allow personnel from a variety of agencies and diverse geographical locations to rapidly meld into a common management structure.
4. The system must be cost-effective.

Initial ICS applications were designed for responding to disastrous wildland fires. It is interesting to note that the characteristics of these wildland fire incidents are similar to those seen in many law enforcement, hazardous materials and other kinds of situations.

- No advanced notice
- Unchecked, they may grow in size and complexity
- Involve many agencies with some on-scene responsibility
- Often have high public and media visibility
- Cost of a response is always a major consideration
- They develop rapidly
- Personal risk for response personnel can be high
- They can become multi-jurisdictional
- Risk of life and property loss can be high

ICS continues to expand in application from emergency and event planning and execution to increased system users who are learning the many attributes of ICS in work with people from all areas of emergency management.

Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary NIMS/NRP/ICS Training**

On February 28, 2003, the President issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-5, Management of Domestic Incidents, which directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and administer a National Incident Management System (NIMS). This system provides a consistent nationwide template to enable Federal, State, local, and tribal governments and private-sector and nongovernmental organizations to work together effectively and efficiently to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity, including acts of catastrophic terrorism.¹

The NIMS represents a core set of doctrine, concepts, principles, terminology, and organizational processes to enable effective, efficient, and collaborative incident management at all levels. The National Response Plan (NRP), using the comprehensive framework provided by the NIMS, provides the structure and mechanisms for national-level policy and operational direction for Federal support to State, local, and tribal incident managers and for exercising direct Federal authorities and responsibilities as appropriate under the law.¹

HSPD-5 requires all Federal departments and agencies to adopt the NIMS and to use it in their individual domestic incident management and emergency prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation programs and activities.¹ On December 29, 2004, the Coast Guard issued the US Coast Guard NIMS/NRP Implementation Plan. This plan lays the framework for the Coast Guard response to Incidents of National Significance and the work that must be done to successfully integrate the NIMS/NRP concepts into existing CG plans, procedures, policies and training.²

It is within the USCG NIMS/NRP Implementation Plan that the training requirements, including that required of the CG Auxiliary are defined. Since that time, additional guidance has been published modifying the dates for training requirements, but not the spirit of the intent of the requirement. It is hoped that this training will bring the Auxiliary membership to a new level of readiness; prepared to participate as needed in domestic incidents, large and small.

References:

*Extracted from:

- Stumpf, J: Incident Command System: The History And Need. *The Internet Journal of Rescue and Disaster Medicine*. 2001. Volume 2 Number 1.

**Extracted from:

- National Incident Management System (NIMS), 01 March 2004
- USCG National Incident Management System (NIMS) and National Response Plan (NRP) Implementation Plan, 29 December 2004