

SECTION 9: WORKING WITHIN THE INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

This section provides information about working in an Incident Command System (ICS) environment. This is a summary for use by ARES personnel, and is intended to provide only a basic understanding of terminology and concepts associated with ICS. This training module does not replace or supersede formal ICS training provided in your region or by your served agencies.

During smaller incidents, a subset of ICS's full structure will likely be used.

In some regions, ICS is modified or combined with other protocols (for example, with Emergency Site Management protocols in New Brunswick), and there are significant deviations from standard ICS practices.

Once you complete this section, you will be able to:

- Describe how ICS works
- Understand how radio communications fits within the ICS structure.

ABOUT ICS

ICS is an organizational system used to help manage planned or unplanned events that require a response by emergency service or disaster response personnel to minimize loss of life or damage to property or natural resources. The system features a standardized approach to incident management, a modular, scalable organizational structure, and common terminology and practices. It develops from the top down, based on the size and complexity of the incident. In fact, ICS is used to manage incidents ranging from small, everyday events to massive disasters.

The system increases the efficiency and effectiveness of mutual aid while maximizing safety and minimizing opportunities for confusion. It also provides for an orderly escalation, if needed. ICS can be scaled up to include several thousand people without compromising effective supervision.

Unified command

The Incident Commander (IC) sits at the top of the IC organizational structure. The IC manages the incident and defines operational objectives. The IC has overall responsibility for the incident, though some duties may be delegated to others.

Unity of command

Unity of command means that each worker has only one supervisor. This eliminates confusion and the possibility of conflicting orders.

Span of control

Span of control means that no one individual is required to supervise or manage more than seven other individuals (and ideally, only five). Chain of command

Chain of command

Chain of command means that there is a clear line of authority, with lower levels subordinate to and connected to higher levels. In most cases, the chain of command consists of:

- Command
- Resource.

As responses expand, the chain of command also expands to include, from the top down:

- Command
- Sections
- Branches
- Divisions or groups
- Units
- Resources.

Unified command and multiple jurisdictions

Unified command allows multiple jurisdictions to agree on objectives and strategies. ICS makes this possible without any loss of authority, responsibility or accountability. Under unified command:

- 1 There is only one IC for any event.
- 2 A single, coordinated Incident Action Plan (IAP) is used, including the following elements:
 - What are the objectives of the team or what do we want to do?
 - Who is responsible for accomplishing what tasks?
 - How does the team communicate?
 - What is the team safety plan or how do we take care of a person who becomes injured?
- 3 One Operations Section Chief will have responsibility for implementing the IAP.
- 4 One Incident Command Post (ICP) will be established.

Management functions

The success of ICS relies on two key elements:

- Management by objectives
- Organizational structure



ICS positions fall into five types of management:

Command

The IC is responsible for all activity. The size and complexity of the incident determines which other management functions are needed. The command staff assists the IC and reports directly to the IC.

Operations

Operations directs tactical actions. There is only one Operations Chief (if activated by the IC), but the Chief may have deputies.

Planning

The Planning function collects, evaluates and reports information about the incident. Planning also keeps track of resources, and prepares the IAP and other documentation.

Logistics

Logistics ensures that adequate services and support are available to responders and other ICS personnel.

Finance & Administration

Finance & Administration manages incident-related costs, tracks personnel, and maintains equipment records. It also administers any procurement contracts associated with the response.

Scalable organization

Each functional area of ICS can grow into additional organizational units with any delegation of authority. In turn, elements that are no longer needed are deactivated. The size of the ICS organization is determined through the IAP process.

Each activated functional group must have a designated supervisor. A single supervisor may initially be in charge of more than one unit.

Personnel and roles

The following personnel report to the IC:

- Command staff
- Safety Officer (command staff)
- Liaison Officer (command staff)
- Public Information Officer (command staff)
- Operations Chief
- Planning Chief
- Logistics Chief, responsible for
 - Communications
 - Medical unit
 - Food unit.
- Finance/Administration Chief

ICS locations

ICS locations include:

- Incident Command Post (ICP): The field location at which the primary tactical-level, on-scene incident command functions are performed. The ICP may be collocated with the incident base or other incident facilities.
- Base: The location at which primary Logistics functions for an incident are coordinated and administered. There is only one base per incident. (Incident name or other designator will be added to the term *base*.) The Incident Command Post may be collocated with the base.
- Staging Area: Location where resources can be placed while awaiting a tactical assignment.
- Camp: A geographical site, within the general incident area, separate from the Incident Base, equipped and staffed to provide sleeping, food, water, and sanitary services to incident personnel.

Incident documentation

Incident action plan (IAP)

The IAP provides supervisors with instructions to guide them throughout the response. The IAP may be written or verbal (but written plans are preferred).

Communications plan

The communications plan can be very simple or even verbal, or it could be complex enough to become part of the written IAP. The communications plan lists the communications methods to be used for the response.

After action report

While you are on assignment, keep notes on what you did while there so you can provide your team leader or sponsoring agency with information for an After Action Report or Review (AAR).

An AAR typically contains:

- Tasks/duties or items to keep
- Task/duties or items to change
- Task/duties or items to add
- Task/duties or items to delete.

When providing your input to the AAR, be honest and sincere. However, do not take your frustrations out on the team leader or on sponsoring agency employees.

RADIO COMMUNICATIONS WITHIN ICS

ICS does not alter the way any unit (including ARES) performs its internal function. ICS does not dictate how the police does its policing, how firefighters fight fires, nor how communications units accomplish their tasks. ARES methods and procedures remain unchanged.

However, ICS does provide an organization and reporting structure, with a clearly defined chain of command and span of control. Within ICS, communications falls under Logistics.

Within the ICS communications team, there will be a Communications Unit Leader (COML), who manages:

- A Communications Technician (COMT)
- An Incident Communications Centre Manager (INCM)
- A Radio Operator (RADO).

Not all of these positions will be filled during every response.

This structure allows for the management of any incident, regardless of size. ICS also allows for the expansion of the organization if needed to maintain the span of control (providing between three and seven – ideally five – subordinates per supervisor).

An ARES operator may be assigned to the COML, or they may be assigned as a Technical Specialist in another area. ARES operators may also be asked to perform non-ARES activities, and could conceivably be assigned anywhere. If an operator is assigned to a non-ARES unit, operators need to comply with the directions of the unit supervisor, understand the mission, and report actions back to that unit supervisor.

Amateur radio groups deployed as units should be structured into groups of three to five operators under one ARES unit supervisor. For example, if a unit has 20 members, the leadership needs to break the unit down into four or five units. This could be based upon geography (where the units will be deployed), time of day (shifts), specific function (HQ unit, field unit 1, field unit 2, etc.), or any other reasonable, manageable division of labor. Instead of one ARES leader getting status or providing direction to 20 members, the one leader interacts with only four subordinates, and those four interact with three to five operators. This allows a much faster and more manageable method of communications and control. Smaller units are also able to be re-assigned and moved more quickly than large units, so the smaller units also give ICS more flexibility in the use of overall resources.

ICS requires the use of plain English in all communications. Avoid special codes, prowords or jargon.