

The National Incident Management System is a structure for management large-scale or multi-jurisdictional incidents. It is being phased in at the federal, state and local levels. Eventually, any jurisdiction seeking federal Homeland Security grant money will have to demonstrate that it is NIMS compliant.

The following NIMS FAQ was prepared by NIMS on-line, which has additional information at www.nimsonline.com.

What is NIMS?

NIMS is the first-ever standardized approach to incident management and response. Developed by the Department of Homeland Security and released in March 2004, it establishes a uniform set of processes and procedures that emergency responders at all levels of government will use to conduct response operations.

Developed by the Secretary of Homeland Security at the request of the President, the National Incident Management System (NIMS) integrates effective practices in emergency response into a comprehensive national framework for incident management.

The NIMS will enable responders at all levels to work together more effectively and efficiently to manage domestic incidents no matter what the cause, size or complexity, including catastrophic acts of terrorism and disasters.

Federal agencies also are required to use the NIMS framework in domestic incident management and in support of state and local incident response and recovery activities.

The benefits of the NIMS system will be significant:

- Standardized organizational structures, processes and procedures;
- Standards for planning, training and exercising;
- Personnel qualification standards;
- Equipment acquisition and certification standards;
- Interoperable communications processes, procedures and systems;
- Information management systems with a commonly accepted architecture;
- Supporting technologies – voice and data communications systems, information systems, data display systems, specialized technologies; and
- Publication management processes and activities.

How long do jurisdictions have to adopt the NIMS?

The NIC will be developing additional NIMS compliance guidance as time progresses and jurisdictions will be provided resources to help them through the NIMS compliance process. The

NIMS should be seen as a living document that will require continuous maintenance by the jurisdictions implementing it.

Is the adoption of the NIMS a requirement for Department of Homeland security funds?

As mandated by Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5, beginning in FY 2005, adoption of NIMS will be a condition for the receipt of federal preparedness funds, including grants, contracts and other activities.

How will jurisdictions be measured, evaluated and assessed?

In the short term, jurisdictions will be considered to be in compliance the NIMS by adopting the Incident Command System and NIMS principles and policies. Other aspects of the NIMS will require additional development and refinement to enable compliance at a future date.

How will compliance be measured against NIMS evaluation criteria?

Compliance protocols, standards and guidelines for determining whether jurisdictions are compliant are currently under development. NIC customers will be notified and these materials are completed and posted on the [NIMS Integration Center Web page](#).

How will jurisdictions be measured against NIMS during the period 2005 to 2009?

The NIC will be developing additional NIMS compliance guidance as time progresses and jurisdictions will be provided resources to help them through the NIMS compliance process. The NIMS should be seen as a living document that will require continuous maintenance by the jurisdictions implementing it.

Do NIMS standards currently exist?

Standards are currently being developed specifically for NIMS by the NIC, however, there currently exist several standards for incident command or incident management systems, and these are being reviewed for consideration by the NIC. As NIMS standards are developed they will be posted on the NIC Web page and jurisdictions will be notified through information bulletins.

What is the NIC?

The NIMS Integration Center was established by the Secretary of Homeland Security to provide “strategic direction for and oversight of the National Incident Management System... supporting both routine maintenance and the continuous refinement of the system and its components over the long term.”The NIMS Integration Center is a multi-jurisdictional, multidisciplinary entity made up of federal stakeholders and state, local and tribal incident management and first responder organizations. It is situated in the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The organization of the Center includes the following branches:

- Standards and Resources
- Training and Exercises

- System Evaluation and Compliance
- Technology, Research and Development
- Publications Management

The acting director of the NIMS Integration Center is Gil Jamieson, at DHS/FEMA.

Operations of the Center are currently in Phase I, which includes the development of NIMS awareness training, education and publications; NIMS training and guidance and tools to help participants understand and comply with NIMS; and the identification of existing capabilities, initiatives and resources for NIMS and the NIMS Integration Center. Phase I also will see the establishment of an Advisory Committee, functional working groups and the preparation of programs and processes.

What national standards will the NIC develop?

The NIC will facilitate the development of national standards needed in a range of areas to increase the effectiveness of incident response operations. For example, it will facilitate the development of national standards to ensure interoperability of equipment and communications and the certification of emergency response and incident management personnel. This means it will work on the development of standardized criteria for the qualification, training and certification of response personnel. It will promote compatibility among NIMS national level standards and those developed by other public, private and professional groups. And it will facilitate the development of a system of typed and categorized resources, to include equipment, teams and personnel

Why must organizations conduct National Incident Management System (NIMS) training and exercises?

HSPD-5 requires federal departments and agencies to make adoption of NIMS by state and local organizations a condition for federal preparedness assistance by FY 2005. Organizations and personnel at all governmental levels and in the private sector must be trained to improve all-hazard incident management capability. These organizations and personnel must also participate in realistic exercises to improve integration and interoperability.

How will the NIMS Integration Center (NIC) assist jurisdictions in meeting NIMS training and exercise needs?

The NIMS Integration Center will:

- Facilitate the development of and the dissemination of national standards, guidelines and protocols for incident management training;
- Facilitate the use of modeling and simulation in training and exercise programs;
- Define general training requirements and approved training courses for all NIMS users, including instructor qualifications and course completion documentation; and
- Review and approve, with the assistance of key stakeholders, discipline-specific training requirements and courses.

What role does the NIC have in determining emergency response personnel NIMS qualification and certification?

Under NIMS, preparedness is based on national standards for qualification and certification of emergency response personnel. Managed by the NIC, standards will help ensure that the participating agencies' and organizations' field personnel possess the minimum knowledge, skills and experience necessary to perform activities safely and effectively.

Will NIMS training be one of the NIMS-related standards?

Yes. The standards will include training, experience, credentialing, currency and physical and medical fitness. Personnel who are certified to support interstate incidents will be required to meet national qualification and certification standards.

What NIMS training is currently available to jurisdictions?

The Emergency Management Institute (A DHS/FEMA component) has developed a Web-based course that is entitled The National Incident Management System, an Introduction. The course is available free of charge to U.S. residents via the FEMA training website <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is700.asp>.

The course describes the purpose, principles, key components and benefits of NIMS. Also included in the course are on-line "Planning Activity" tools that help the user to measure how compliant his/her organization is with NIMS.

What information does the National Incident Management System, an Introduction course provide?

After completing the course, participants will be able to:

- Describe the key concepts and principles underlying NIMS;
- Identify the benefits of using ICS as the national incident management model;
- Describe when it is appropriate to institute an Area Command;
- Describe when it is appropriate to institute a Multiagency Coordination System;
- Describe the benefits of using a Joint Information system (JIS) for public information;
- Identify the ways in which NIMS affects preparedness;
- Describe how NIMS affects how resources are managed;
- Describe the advantages of common communication and information management systems;
- Explain how NIMS influences technology and technology systems; and
- Describe the purpose of the NIMS Integration Center.

What is the Resource Typing System?

The NIC has developed a national Mutual Aid Glossary of Terms and Definitions as well as Resource Typing definitions for some of the most commonly used resources during a response. Resource typing is an integral component of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). It enhances the ability of emergency responders to find needed resources during a disaster. In compliance with NIMS and in support of the Incident Command System (ICS), the Resource Typing Definitions and Mutual Aid Glossary of Terms and Definitions also help promote common terminology of descriptions, standards, and types of local, state and federal response assets.

Resource typing definitions provide emergency managers with the information they need to request and receive the resources they need during an emergency or disaster. Typed definitions for 120 response resources have been completed. Like the Glossary, the Resource Typing Definitions will be continuously updated, revised, and expanded.

Eight groups representing key functional disciplines consisting of federal, state and local specialists were part of the effort to develop the definitions. Resources are classified by 'Category' which refers to function and 'Kind,' to include teams, personnel, equipment, and supplies. Information about level of capability is referred to as 'Type,' which is a measure of minimum capabilities to perform the function. Type I implies a higher capability than Type II. The metrics shown for each resource are measurements of standards and are applicable to like resources.

What is the National Mutual Aid and Resource Management System Initiative?

The National Mutual Aid and Resource Management System is an initiative undertaken by the Department of Homeland Security through the National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) Integrations Center (NIC) and the Federal Emergency Management (FEMA), in cooperation with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). This system will enhance emergency readiness and response at all levels of government through a comprehensive and integrated system that will allow a jurisdiction to augment response resources if needed. The system will allow emergency management personnel to identify, locate, request, order and track outside resources quickly and effectively. It will allow them to obtain information on specific resource capabilities, location, cost and support requirements.

The key concepts of the National Mutual Aid and Resource Management System include:

- The use of pre-incident agreements (including mutual aid, Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), and others) by donor and requesting jurisdictions.
- Protocols for documenting and inventorying disaster response resources in terms of categories, kinds, components, metrics and typing definitions;
- A national deployable inventory of pre-identified credentialed, categorized and capability-typed resources. These resources would be entered into the system voluntarily by federal, state, tribal or local authorities, non-government, and/or private sector entities participating in mutual aid disaster response operations.
- An Automated Resource Management System (ARMS) to access and search the inventory/catalog to locate, request, order, and track resources requested by incident management personnel in need of assistance.

The initiative fosters a process for typing and inventorying federal, state and local resources. Officials at all levels currently are participating in the initiative and they are consulting key emergency management organizations and associations throughout the process.

Isn't FEMA already working on a National Mutual Aid and Resource Management System?

Yes. This FEMA initiative supports the NIMS and is part of the Center's Standards and Resources effort. The system's work team, the National Resource Management Working Group, has been working on a national protocol for typing response resources. The system will assist all federal, state and local jurisdictions locate, request and order resources through mutual aid agreements when local capabilities are overwhelmed.

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What is the Incident Command System (ICS)?

ICS is a standardized on-scene incident management concept designed specifically to allow responders to adopt an integrated organizational structure equal to the complexity and demands of any single incident or multiple incidents without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries.

In the early 1970s, ICS was developed to manage rapidly moving wildfires and to address the following problems:

- 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 among agencies;
- Unclear lines of authority;
- Terminology differences among agencies; and Unclear or unspecified incident objectives.

In 1980, federal officials transitioned ICS into a national program called the National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS), which became the basis of a response management

system for all federal agencies with wildfire management responsibilities. Since then, many federal agencies have endorsed the use of ICS, and several have mandated its use.

An ICS enables integrated communication and planning by establishing a manageable span of control. An ICS divides an emergency response into five manageable functions essential for emergency response operations: Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance and Administration. Figure 1 shows a typical ICS structure.

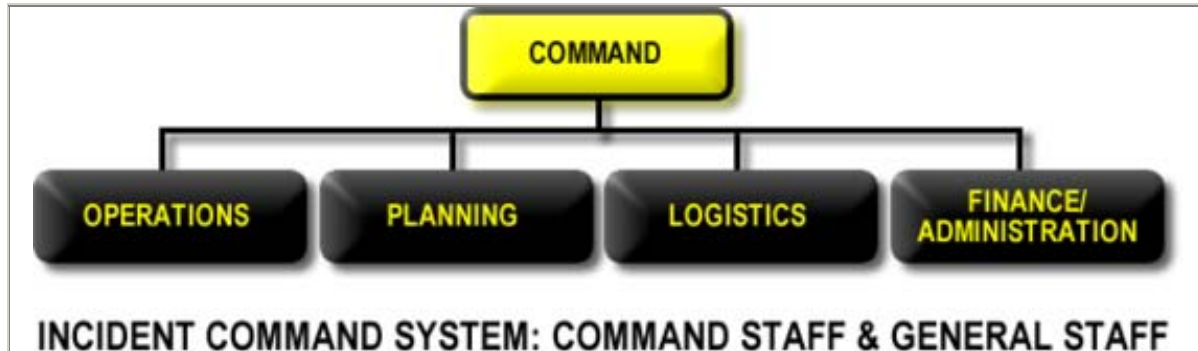


Figure 1

What is a Unified Command (UC)?

Although a single Incident Commander normally handles the command function, an Incident Command System (ICS) organization may be expanded into a Unified Command (UC). The UC is a structure that brings together the "Incident Commanders" of all major organizations involved in the incident in order to coordinate an effective response while at the same time carrying out their own jurisdictional responsibilities. The UC links the organizations responding to the incident and provides a forum for these entities to make consensus decisions. Under the UC, the various jurisdictions and/or agencies and non-government responders may blend together throughout the operation to create an integrated response team.

The UC is responsible for overall management of the incident. The UC directs incident activities, including development and implementation of overall objectives and strategies, and approves ordering and releasing of resources. Members of the UC work together to develop a common set of incident objectives and strategies, share information, maximize the use of available resources, and enhance the efficiency of the individual response organizations.

We currently use the ICS for our incident response operations. How will our current ICS system relate to the NIMS?

The NIMS utilizes ICS as a standard incident management organization for the management of all major incidents. These functional areas include command, operations, planning, logistics and finance/administration. Additionally, the principle of unified command has been incorporated into NIMS to ensure further coordination for incidents involving multiple jurisdictions or agencies. This unified command component not only coordinates the efforts of many jurisdictions, but also provides for and assures joint decision on objectives, strategies, plans, priorities and public communications.

Is current Incident Command System (ICS) training applicable to NIMS?

The NIMS recognizes the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) ICS training as a model for course curricula and materials applicable to the NIMS:

ICS-100, Introduction to ICS
ICS-200, Basic ICS
ICS-300, Intermediate ICS
ICS-400, Advanced ICS

The USFA's National Fire Academy and Emergency Management Institute both follow this model in their ICS training curricula. At the local level, agencies may contact the fire department for information and training on ICS.

What is a mutual aid agreement?

Mutual-aid agreements are the means for one jurisdiction to provide resources, facilities, services, and other required support to another jurisdiction during an incident. Each jurisdiction should be party to a mutual-aid agreement (such as the Emergency Management Assistance Compact) with appropriate jurisdictions from which they expect to receive or to which they expect to provide assistance during an incident. This would normally include all neighboring or nearby jurisdictions, as well as relevant private-sector and nongovernmental organizations. States should participate in interstate compacts and look to establish intrastate agreements that encompass all local jurisdictions. Mutual-aid agreements are also needed with private organizations, such as the American Red Cross, to facilitate the timely delivery of private assistance at the appropriate jurisdictional level during incidents.

At a minimum, mutual-aid agreements should include the following elements or provisions:

- definitions of key terms used in the agreement;
- roles and responsibilities of individual parties;
- procedures for requesting and providing assistance;
- procedures, authorities, and rules for payment, reimbursement, and allocation of costs;
- notification procedures;
- protocols for interoperable communications;
- relationships with other agreements among jurisdictions;
- workers compensation;
- treatment of liability and immunity;
- recognition of qualifications and certifications; and
- sharing agreements, as required.

Authorized officials from each of the participating jurisdictions will collectively approve all mutual-aid agreements.

Why do we need regional mutual aid agreements?

The concept of regional mutual aid is based on consistency and simplicity and is borne out of the prospect of a large-scale incident (such as WMD) involving multiple jurisdictions in the response. Coordination of resources and response personnel across multiple counties will be more effective if similar agreements are in place, expectations are consistent, and reimbursement procedures have been negotiated with regional input prior to an event.

What if my jurisdiction already has a mutual aid agreement in place with another jurisdiction?

The regional mutual aid agreements are designed to enhance this region's response capability and are not designed to supplant existing agreements. However, in the case of an existing agreement including components that conflict with the regional agreements, the regional agreements will prevail for guiding response.