

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Incident Command System:
Training and Use in Law Enforcement and Emergency Services**

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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February 2017**

ABSTRACT

Law enforcement and emergency services should mandate and continue training in the use of the incident command system. The implementation of the incident command system in law enforcement and other emergency services is very important. Law enforcement and other emergency services, at times, are uneasy with the application of the incident command system for several reasons. Some of the reasons are that the agency does not want to lose control of the incident and the agency has been trained in the incident command system but they just do not use it or continue to train in the aspects of the system to become comfortable in using it. The incident command system will save lives, money, and show accountability. The incident command system in emergency services should not only be used in catastrophic incidents but also in planning events from a small town parade to a major event. With continued training in the system, the agencies should have exercises with not only their agency but include other emergency services in the area. Exercising the system will let an agency know where their problem areas are. It is better to make errors in training than in a real life emergency.

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INTRODUCTION

There have been several problems with the use of the incident command system within law enforcement and emergency services. Emergency services entail fire departments, emergency medical services, and include public works. The major problem has been training and the proper use of the system. It has been proven over the years that the incident command system is a working tool, and with proper training and practice, it has saved money, time, and reduced the deployment of unneeded resources. The incident command system was developed in the 1970s following a series of catastrophic fires in California's urban interface. These fires cost more than \$233 million in property loss and several people were injured or killed. This damage would equal to \$1.26 billion today. Riecker (2015) found that a lack of resources or failure of tactics was not the major issue. The problem was far more likely the result of inadequate management.

Preparedness is the main key for maintaining the security and resiliency of the United States by using a systematic preparation for the threats. This is the reason President George W. Bush signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 and Presidential Policy Directive 8, National Preparedness. On February 28, 2003, the President issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5), "Management of Domestic Incidents. The president directed the secretary of homeland security to come up with a plan, National Incident Management System (NIMS), which will get all forms of government, federal, state, local, and tribal to learn, train, and work an incident the same way. When working an incident, no matter the size or complexity of the incident, where an agency needs outside resources to assist, there will be no questions

on how the incident is being worked. This plan requires non-governmental agencies to adopt it. Samples of non-governmental agencies are the American Red Cross, Texas Baptist men's group, and any other group that will respond to an incident. NIMS is not a plan but a template that can be formatted to the agency in charge of the incident; however, the fundamentals are the same across the board (U.S. DHS, 2013a). The directives are made to have all agencies trained the same way.

Law enforcement and emergency services should mandate and continue training on the use of the incident command system. Over the past 13 years, there has been a major increase in major crimes such as active shooters, bomb threats at major locations, and so on (U.S. DOJ, 2013). The incident command system can be used in these types of incidents, along with natural disasters. In law enforcement, this system would also be useful at special events and big crime scenes.

POSITION

The incident command system is a part of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). This is a system put in place by the United States Department of Homeland Security. President George W. Bush signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 on February 28, 2003 (Bush, 2003). President Bush realized the need to protect the United States against terrorism, both foreign and domestic. The Department of Homeland Security adopted the incident command system with the assistance of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (U.S. DHS, 2016). This system is a standardized on-scene emergency management concept that allows its user(s) to manage all types of incidents whether the incident is a motor vehicle crash or an act of terrorism (Bush, 2003).

Law enforcement and other emergency services are required to receive training in the incident command system. All emergency service persons are required to have the minimum of two classes. One class is called the ICS-700 National Incident Management System, An Introduction. After this class is completed, personnel are required to take the ICS-100 Introduction to Incident Command System. ICS-100 breaks into seven different disciplines: law enforcement, schools, Food Drug Administration, federal workers, healthcare workers, higher education, and public works. As a person promotes in his/her agency, they are required to take an additional four classes: ICS-200 Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents, ICS-800 National Response Framework, An Introduction, ICS 300 Intermediate Incident Command System for Expanding Incidents, and the last class is ICS 400 Advanced Incident Command System for Command and General Staff (Bush, Presidential Policy Directive 8, 2011)

These classes are required by agencies to be what FEMA calls NIMS compliant. If an agency is not NIMS compliant, the agency may not be eligible for federal grants or re-imbursement from the government (U.S. DHS, 2016). Agency administrators require their staff to take the classes (Bush, 2003). The first four classes are online, and the students can pass the answers to the test to each other and they do not necessarily read or watch the videos online. Without classroom interaction, students do not have a chance to interact with a professional instructor of NIMS. FEMA has taken steps in helping prevent the passing of test answers by creating a test question pool where the test questions are mixed up and not the same. This has required students to take the complete class online. The ICS-300 and ICS-400 classes are classroom instructed and

require not only a written exam but include practical exercises each student must participate in. Once the student has taken all the required class, they are considered NIMS Compliant.

Agencies across the United States are NIMS compliant, but the question is regarding whether they are practicing or training what they learned. Every day, law enforcement and fire services use the incident command system. This is known, because each call law enforcement has is assigned an incident commander, i.e. supervisor. Each call also has an operations section chief, patrol officers, and they even have a planning/logistics section chief, i.e....dispatcher. This is done on every call. The problem is that when a complex incident occurs, the training has been forgotten. As an example, pretend there is an active shooter at the mall. There are 10 persons dead and 30 injured. Without the incident command system, responders do not know who is responding, who is in charge, or where the command post is. The only way responders will know the answers to these questions is if they are trained and have a set plan in place. An administrator should not think in terms of "if" it happens but "when" it will happen, and law enforcement must be prepared for it.

Training has always been a big issue with law enforcement and emergency services. Ask any emergency service personnel how they like training on the incident command system, and they will say they hate it. They say they do not understand it, they will never use it, and they just do not like it. Emergency service agency administrators feel that the problem with the incident command system is that FEMA is telling them to give up their authority. The truth is that agency keeps all authority at all

times. As the agency administrators train and use the incident command system, they will understand this.

The purpose in using the incident command system is that it helps ensure the safety of responders and others, the achievement of tactical objectives, and the monitoring of efficient use of resources. The number one goal for any response to an incident is safety for all the responders (U.S. DHS, 2012). If safety measures are not in place and responders get hurt or killed, they are no help to the public or other responders.

When an agency adopts the use of the incident command system, they must start at the beginning. The administrators must believe in the system and take ownership. If an agency administrator talks negatively or demeans the system, the people under him or her will not follow and the system will be a failure. An agency administrator needs to lead the training by making sure his or her staff has all the training they need. The administrator need not limit the staff to the minimum training but require staff to take all the training, including ICS-700, ICS-100, ICS-200, ICS-800, ICS-300, and ICS-400. If the staff takes all the classes, it implies that they have bought into the system (Bush, 2011).

After all the classroom sessions are complete, an agency needs to continue to train on the incident command system. FEMA (2016) stated that agencies need to have tabletop exercises to discuss the types of incidents that may occur in the area. Team exercises help cement the learning and knowledge that the officers are getting from their classes, and building on each exercise is effective training. An initial exercise to be undertaken is the tabletop exercise. This type requires the main personnel to

informally talk about different scenarios an agency may experience. This can be especially beneficial for them because they have the opportunity to assess and examine various plans, policies, and procedures. Next, the agency should commit to a functional exercise, which is where they evaluate the process of coordinating between various agencies and determine command and control for an incident. This may involve several agencies or centers, but there is no real-time “boots on the ground” reality to the exercise yet. The last exercise builds on the tabletop and functional exercises. It is a full-scale exercise. This will be a multi-agency, multi-discipline, multi-jurisdictional exercise incident that includes a “boots on the ground” response that incorporates the real actions and reactions by the participants. Finally, after the full-scale exercise, the agency should create an after action report that is a reflection on how the incident went, what actions were taken, and any overall information that can be taken to improve upon (U.S. DHS, 2016). These training exercises will help the agency know what the weaknesses and the strengths of the incident command system are.

The use of the incident command system in an actual incident has proven to be a major asset to law enforcement (Sacramento State, 2004). This system is being used in criminal investigations, crime scenes, and events such as holiday celebrations and parades. Many law enforcement agencies have written policies on the use and the training of the incident command system, and this includes the management of the system. Agencies must train the first responders due to them being the first on the scene and needing to take control. When first responders arrive on scene, they need to have the skills and knowledge to take on the incident. As in the Columbine High School shooting, when the first officers arrived on scene, they did as trained in the past. They

held the scene until SWAT arrived. During this time, students were being shot in the school and everyone was looking at the police to do something. The after action report on the Columbine Shooting detailed that the need for training was important ("Deputies," n.d.). Not only in the active shooter situation but also in setting up an incident command post for all responders to report to.

Another example is that when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, the mayor did not act (Miller, McNamara, & Jui, 2005). The people of New Orleans were looking at the city administrators for help and none came. Now New Orleans has the training, knowledge, and equipment needed to handle another storm (Miller, McNamara, & Jui, 2005). The use of the incident command system in New Orleans for hurricanes is now in place, and they have used tabletop exercises over and over in the use of the plan. Research in the use of the incident command system has proven to be cost effective and saves lives (Jones, 2013). The Texas wildfires in 2011 is proof that planning and training are important. Even with the loss of 4 million acres and 2,947 homes, the response and the resources dispatched saved more homes and lives and reduced loss (Jones, 2013). An example of where an incident command system was not used is the stated in the West, Texas explosion. The after action report found the following: "The lack of adherence to nationally recognized consensus standards and safety practices for the fire department exposed firefighters to excessive risks and failed to remove them from a critically dangerous situation" ("Report Released," 2014, para. 2). It went on to say, "The strategy and tactics utilized by the West Volunteer Fire Department were not appropriate for the rapidly developing and extremely volatile situation, and exposed the firefighters to extreme risks" ("Report Released," 2014, para 3).

Since September 11, 2001, the incident command system has proven by research to be effective in many ways. The use of it in major incidents has saved lives and money by the resources ordered. The use of the incident command system in events from local parades to the Super Bowl makes sure all the resources are needed and every one responding to the event knows their duties and whom they report to. With a standard set of rules set out by the National Incident Management System, the use of common terminology has also proved that responders know what needs to be done to achieve the objectives set out by the incident commander.

COUNTER POSITION

One reason why agencies hesitate to use the incident command system is that the incident grows the incident command system organizational structure. Agencies believe they will be required to activate every part of the system when an incident occurs. However, one of the key principals of the system is that the incident commander needs to activate only the positions needed to manage the incident. While the incident commander may feel the need to fill all eight of the command and general staff positions, with training and experience, an incident commander will know what positions to fill on minor to complex incidents. FEMA classifies incidents from a type 5 to a type 1. On a smaller type incident, type 5, the incident commander only needs to appoint the positions needed. As the incident grows, the incident commander can start filling the command or general staff positions, and as the incident gets smaller, the incident commander will start demobilizing the staff (Sacramento State, 2004). When an incident commander is running a mid-size incident that may only take a few hours to complete, the commander will not need to fill the positions not needed. For example,

the commander can hold the position of incident commander and operations section chief (U.S. DHS, 2013b).

Another reason agencies may hesitate to incorporate this system is that they believe the administrator arriving on scene should immediately be the only person in charge. With the implementation of NIMS, the highest-ranking person on scene is not always in command. The command or the operations section should always go to the most qualified person on scene. If an incident is to the degree of needing to fill several command and general staff positions, the highest-ranking person can take the command and have the most qualified person take over as the operations section chief. An example of this will be a major motor vehicle crash involving death and several people injured; if there is a crash reconstructionist on scene, the commander will make this person in charge of the operations section and the administrator will take over the commander position (U.S. DHS, 2013b).

However, as an incident gets larger and more complex, where outside resources are needed, it can get overwhelming for one person. NIMS recommends a unified command system. The unified command is two or more persons in the incident command system who share the duties but work as one unit (U.S. DHS, 2013a). FEMA has teams across the United States called incident management teams. These teams are highly qualified to assist and manage an incident (U.S. DHS, 2012). Incident management teams do not come in and just take over; they are there to assist. The only way an incident management team will take full control is if the agency requests it or if the agency's full infrastructure is lost (U.S. DHS, 2012). A variety of incidents can

be rapidly managed due to the flexibility the command system provides. This allows it to be able to be used for any event, either large or small (U.S. DHS, 2016).

Finally, anecdotal evidence indicates that agencies feel the cost of training in the incident command system is too much. However, what they do not understand is the cost of the training is free. FEMA has training that is free. FEMA will even pay for travel, boarding, and tuition for training at the Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Agency administrators will not publicly say they will not use the system due to the loss of or slow reimbursement of federal funds after an incident (U.S. DHS, 2016).

RECOMMENDATION

The use and the training of the incident command system in law enforcement and emergency services is very important. Before September 11, 2001, law enforcement did not really use or understand the incident command system. Even today, there are numerous law enforcement agencies, emergency services, and cities that have not totally bought into the incident command system. Anecdotal evidence indicates that some agencies may choose not to use the incident command system because they have not encountered the need for the incident command system in a major or complex incident. As with any style training, if the bosses do not buy into the system, their staff will not.

The agencies that train on the incident command system do the minimum training and then forget the information they gained. Agencies need to conduct follow-up training with FEMA and the Texas Division on Emergency Management out of the Texas Department of Public Safety. The follow-up training class for agencies is called

the ICS 402: Incident Command System Overview for Executives/Senior Officials. This training is a total recap of the ICS 300 and ICS 400 classes.

In many local government meetings (town/village/city council, select board, etc.), the topic of emergency management (or anything related to it) is generally not on the agenda. Some may have a formal briefing by department heads, which would include the fire department or police department (if they have one), but these are usually fairly general statements. Because of the depth of discussion that can take place, monthly governance meetings are not the right venue for most discussion. It has been suggested that jurisdictions have a separate meeting, at least quarterly, to discuss emergency management in depth, with all department heads, elected officials, and others present and participating. Preparedness should be discussed across the spectrum of all mission areas (Riecker, 2015). Law enforcement and emergency services should mandate and continue training and use of the incident command system.

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