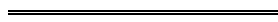# The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

Law Enforcement Advancement in the Use of the Incident Command System since September 11, 2001

An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College

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ABSTRACT

Advancement by law enforcement in the use of the Incident Command System since September 11, 2001 is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of the possibility of another terror attack on the United States. Formal use of the Incident Command System prior to September 11, 2001 was rarely used during small to medium scale incidents. Law enforcement would deploy officers to various locations during these incidents and these officers would maintain control of the situation until the completion. Since September 11, 2001 law enforcement has become more versed on the Incident Command System and has began to utilize it to the systems fullest potential.

The purpose of this research is to show how use of the Incident Command System by law enforcement prior to September 11, 2001 has advanced remarkably to where we are today. The research will show how the fire services have used the Incident Command System for many years and how law enforcement has only been formally using the system since 2001.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a review of several articles, internet sites, books, the researcher's personal knowledge and experience in the use of the Incident Command System, information the researcher gained from continuing education courses on the Incident Command System, a survey distributed to 22 different agencies, and personal interviews.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not law enforcement's

use of the Incident Command System has evolved since the tragedy of September 11, 2001.

Prior to September 11, 2001, many law enforcement agencies throughout the country did not

formally use the Incident Command System on medium to large scale incidents. The Fire

Services however, have used and trained on the use of the Incident Command Systems for many

years, where law enforcement has only begun training on the formal use of the Incident

Command System within the past few years. Proper use of the Incident Command System is

essential in maintaining public trust and protecting citizens during an emergency situation.

The purpose of this research is to examine the advancement made by law enforcement in

both the training of officers and administrators, and use of the Incident Command System. This

research will show how law enforcement has been behind the times as compared to the fire

departments in the use of the Incident Command System. Not only is law enforcement behind

the times, the Incident Command System also combines many other departments within city

governments on how each department will work in unison in the event of an emergency

situation. These other departments within a city have usually had no training in the use of the

Incident Command System, thus causing another problem within itself.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not law enforcement has

advanced in the use of the Incident Command System post September 11, 2001. The research

will show how fire departments have utilized the system for many years. The intended method

of inquiry includes a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, personal interviews,

training material obtained from classes that were attended by the author and sponsored by the

U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The

researcher will distribute a survey to 22 different law enforcement agencies on their use of the system prior to September 11, 2001 as compared to their use of the Incident Command System today.

The intended outcome of this research will show how law enforcement was lacking in the use of the Incident Command System compared to fire services, prior to September 11, 2001. Another intended outcome or intended finding of the research will show how far law enforcement has advanced in the use of the Incident Command System and the understanding of the system since September 11, 2001. Another intended finding will be to show law enforcement's understanding and use of the National Incident Management System.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research because the research will show how the Incident Command System has been used successfully for many years by the fire services. The Incident Command System has been a proven to enable law enforcement to manage large scale incidents in order to maintain control of the situation. Since September 11, 2001, President Bush signed "Presidential Directive 5," which mandates the development of the National Incident Management System, further advancing the use of the Incident Command System whereby all phases of emergency services will have the ability to work in unison in the event of another major disaster.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Incident Command System was developed in the 1970's in response to a series of major wild fires in southern California. (CDP, 2003) The personnel assigned to determine the causes of these outcomes studied the case histories and discovered that response problems could rarely be attributed to lack of resources or failure of tactics. Surprisingly, studies found that response problems were far more likely to result from inadequate management than from any

other single reason. (FEMA, 2005) The definition of the Incident Command System according

to the United States Department of Homeland Security, Office for Domestic Preparedness is a

"standardized on-scene emergency management concept specifically designed to allow its user(s)

to adopt an integrated organizational structure equal to the complexity and demands of single or

multiple incidents, without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries." (CDP, 2003)

The Incident Command System is the model tool for command, control and coordination

of an emergency type of response. The system provides a means to coordinate individual

agencies' efforts as they work toward the common goal of stabilizing the incident and protecting

life, property, and the environment. The Incident Command System uses principles proven to

increase efficiency and effectiveness in business settings and applies these principles to

emergency response. (CDP, 2003) A basic premise of the Incident Command System is that it is

widely applicable. It is used to organize both near-term and long-term field –level operations for

a broad spectrum of emergencies, from small to complex incidents, both natural and manmade.

(FEMA, 2005)

From the inception in the 1970's, the fire services have primarily used the system and

have modified the system more often than law enforcement. Fire Services use the system to help

them coordinate their efforts on fighting fires and maintaining control and command of the

firefighters on the scene. Fire services maintain documentation on the scene which shows the

commander where each firefighter is located and what actions the firefighter is taking to help in

controlling the situation. Historically, law enforcement has not used this type of documentation

at the scene of an incident.

Law enforcement, for the most part, did not use the Incident Command System the same

as the fire services from the 1970's until the events of September 11, 2001. Instead, law

enforcement used a simplified version of the system to control officers and the incident scene. They did this by simply remembering the locations and actions of the officers, but had no formal way of keeping track of the situation. Law enforcement would rely on the help from the communication section of the law enforcement agency in keeping the documentation on the officers involved in the incident. One other reason law enforcement did not use the system to the fullest potential is that on most incidents there were less police officers involved than firefighters. With less people involved it was easier for law enforcement supervisors to keep track of their officers and their actions.

For many years, law enforcement agencies have been operating without a policy or procedure in place relating to the Incident Command System, or have been inconsistent in its use. Not having an Incident Command System policy, or standard operating procedure, can lead to poorly managed incidents. This, in turn, creates a situation that may result in a negative, or less than desired outcome. (Hawkins, 2002) Because of this, law enforcement agencies are writing and enforcing policies and standard operating procedures regarding their proper use of the Incident Command System.

Since September 11, 2001, law enforcement has started to utilize the formal or standard version of the Incident Command System to manage medium to large scale incidents. In doing so, they have found the Incident Command System to be an effective tool in maintaining control of an incident scene. Law enforcement has learned that the first arriving officer or fire unit assumes incident command responsibilities based on the tasks at hand and conducts a size-up or assessment that includes relaying information on to others responding to the scene. (DeCapua, 2006) This unit will then establish command of the incident until he/she is relieved of this duty by another officer or supervisor.

Law enforcement agencies have begun to recognize the importance of the Incident Command System and have started training both supervisory staff and line officers in the use of the system. With this training law enforcement has started to progress in the use of the Incident Command System. Since September 11, 2001, many law enforcement agencies have identified many potential targets within their jurisdiction that could be targets for some type of terrorist attack. Agencies identify locations and gather information on the services they should provide. With this information law enforcement can begin to develop plans on how to protect the location(s). Depending on the situation, law enforcement will use different tactics when responding to calls, which could range from a suspicious person or persons, to a known terror attack.

The Incident Command System can be employed in responding a number of different types of criminal incidents, and can also be used in non-criminal incidents such as hazardous material spills, search and rescue and planned events such a holiday celebrations and parades. (Hawkins, 2002) Decisions to employ the Incident Command System need to be on a case-by-case basis and can have plans made previously in order to expedite the service.

Many law enforcement agencies have written policies or directives on the use of the Incident Command System, to include training line officers and management on the proper use of the System. Agencies must train line officers since they will be the first responders and will need to take control of the incident when they arrive.

In February 2003, President George W. Bush signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5), an order mandating the development of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). HSPD-5 assigned the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as the "principal Federal Officer for domestic incident management," bearing the

responsibility for coordinating all federal response efforts in a terrorist attack. The NIMS requires that all public safety responders, including law enforcement officers, learn and regularly use the ICS and the multi-agency coordination system. (Herron, 2004) Part of the requirements of the NIMS are that agencies must maintain records that show their first responders have the minimum knowledge of how to use NIMS.

Then, Secretary Tom Ridge sent a letter to the governors of the 50 states in September 2004 outlining the details of NIMS compliance. (Dorn, 2005) The letter contained important information detailing what each State, territorial, tribal, or local government needed to do in order to be compliant with NIMS standards. One of the main stipulations that jurisdictions would need to be aware of is that compliance was not mandatory, however, grant money would be provided by Homeland Security with the stipulation that jurisdictions remain in compliance with their standards. Ridge (2004) in his letter explains the basic concept of the NIMS system:

> The NIMS is the nation's first-ever standardized approach to incident management and response. The NIMS unifies Federal, State, territorial, tribal, and local lines of government into one coordinated effort. This integrated system makes America safer by establishing a uniform set of processes, protocols, and procedures that all emergency responders, at every level of government, will use to conduct response actions. This system ensures that those involved in emergency response operations understand what their roles are and have the tools they need to be effective.

In the letter that Tom Ridge sent to the governors, he also gave details about the NIMS awareness course that is titled "IS 700." This course is a self study course that can be taken either in person through an accredited academy or on line through FEMA's web site. Completing this course is one of the requirements that are now placed on states, territorial, tribal,

and local entities to meet the requirements for NIMS. Mr. Ridge also provided information that outlined the time frame for these entities to meet the minimum compliance regulations in the NIMS system in order to be eligible to file for Federal grant money during Fiscal Year 2006.

Since the inception of the Incident Command System, several advancements have been made in the system. The use of the system has gained popularity and the use has now become a requirement for States, territorial, tribal, and local entities to become proficient in order to receive Federal money. The use of the system for the law enforcement field is relatively new compared to the fire services. However, with the new federal requirements, the law enforcement field will become used to the system and will use the system to its fullest extent.

METHODOLGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not law enforcement has advanced in the use of the Incident Command System since the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001.

The researcher hypothesizes that the law enforcement field did not use the Incident Command System to its full potential until the events on September 11, 2001. However, since this date, law enforcement has begun using the system.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, books, internet sites, periodicals, journals, personal interviews, and a survey distributed to twenty law enforcement agencies.

The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of law enforcement's advancement in the use of the Incident Command System since September 11, 2001 will include a survey provided to twenty law enforcement agencies.

The size of the survey will consist of six questions distributed to 22 survey participants from law enforcement agencies in Texas. The agencies will vary from having 15 sworn officers to an agency with over 2000 sworn officers.

The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in 20 of the survey agencies returning the survey with all six questions answered.

The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by the researcher to determine if law enforcement has advanced in the use of the Incident Command System since the events of September 11, 2001.

FINDINGS
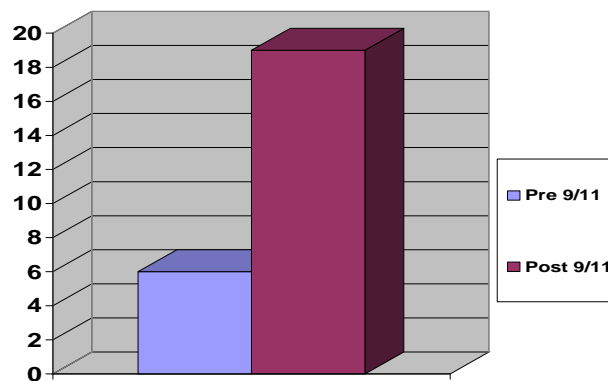
Use of the Incident Command System

A survey of 22 different law enforcement agencies were provided with a six question survey dealing with the use of the Incident Command System within their agencies. Out of the 22 agencies, 20 responded to the survey. Out of the 20 agencies there were six agencies that used the Incident Command System before the events on September 11, 2001. Since September 11, 2001 only one agency does not use the Incident Command System out of the 20 responding agencies.
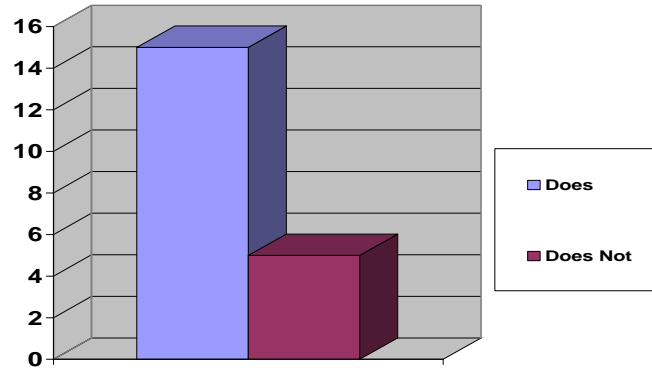
Actively seeks Incident Command Schools

The survey results show that 15 of the agencies actively seek out continuing education

classes for their employees in the use of the Incident Command System. The researcher has

experienced this type of activity in his current police department. Prior to the events of

September 11, 2001, nobody from the researcher's agency went to any schools on the use of the

Incident Command System. Since this time, every supervisor and many of the front line officers

have attended training on the system.
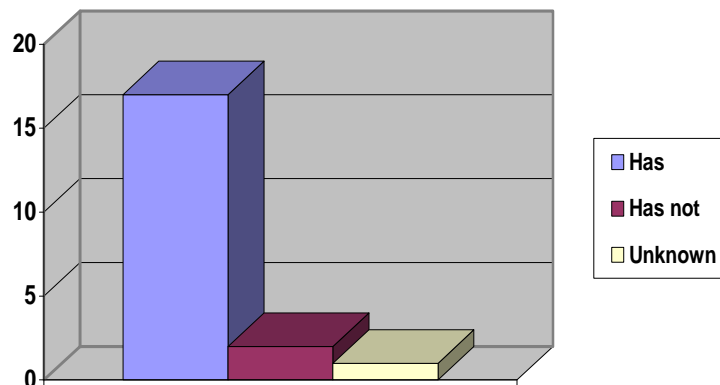
Supervisors/Officers that have attended training within the past year.

Seventeen survey agencies have sent either supervisors and/or officers to training schools on the use of the Incident Command System. Two of the 20 agencies have not sent anyone to training. Only one agency was unaware of whether or not anyone from their agency had attended training classes.
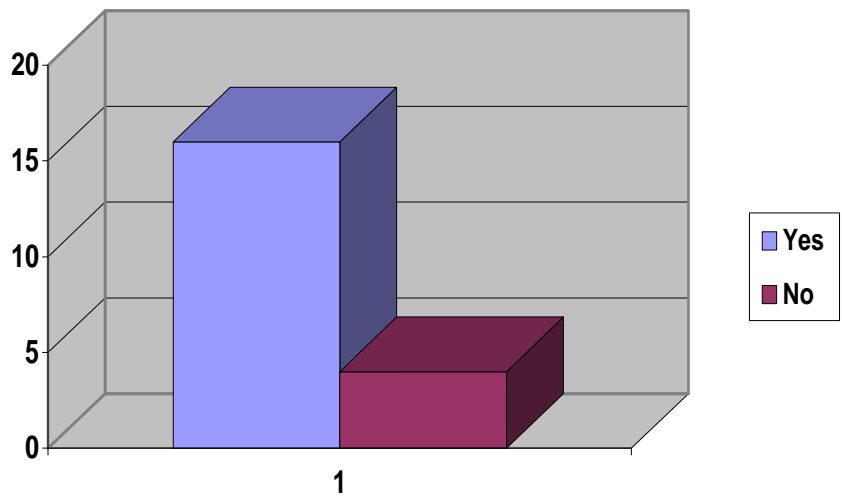
Use of plan language on police radio.

One of the requirements that is stated in the use of the National Incident Management System is that emergency responders are to use plain language on the radio when communicating to each other or other agencies. Out of the 20 agencies surveyed, 16 agencies are in compliance with this mandate and four agencies are out of compliance.

20

15

10

5

0

Policy

No Policy

1
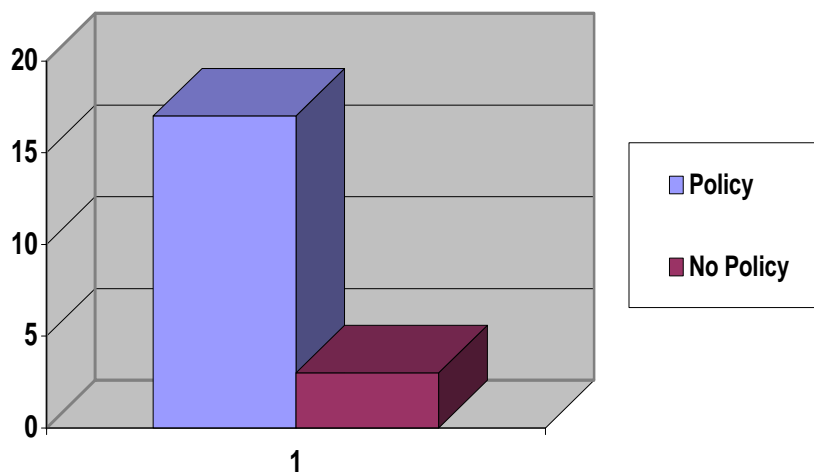
Policy or SOP on use of the Incident Command System

     Seventeen agencies out of the survey have some type of policy or Standard Operation Procedure for the use of the Incident Command System in place with the agency. As the survey and the graphs show, the researcher feels that there has been a great amount of improvement in the use of the Incident Command System since the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Since the development of the system in the 1970's law enforcement use was very limited or non existent.

     The research examined how the field of law enforcement has advanced in the use of the Incident Command System by training officers and administrators on the importance of the Incident Command System and how its use is beneficial to law enforcement. This research showed how law enforcement has been behind the times as compared to the fire departments in the use of the Incident Command System. The research showed not only that law enforcement was behind the times in the use of the Incident Command System, but that the use of the system also combines many other departments within city governments. Departments within city

governments have usually had no training in the use of the system, thus causing another problem within itself.

The findings of the research has shown how the field of law enforcement has advanced in the use of the Incident Command System since September 11, 2001, and that law enforcement was behind in the use of the Incident Command System prior to September 11, 2001. Another outcome or finding of the research shows how far law enforcement has developed a better understanding and use of the National Incident Management System. One other finding was since September 11, 2001, the President of the United States signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 mandating the development of the National Incident Management System. This system mandates that States, territorial, tribal, and local entities follow the directive if they wish to receive any Federal grant monies. This researcher believes that the research has shown that law enforcement has advanced in greatly in the use of the Incident Command System since September 11, 2001.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue that was examined considered whether or not law enforcement's use of the Incident Command System has evolved since the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Prior to September 11, 2001, many law enforcement agencies throughout the country did not formally use the Incident Command System on medium to large scale incidents. The Fire Services however, have used and trained on the use of the Incident Command Systems for many years, where law enforcement has only began training on the formal use of the Incident Command System within the past few years.

The purpose of this research was to examine how the field of law enforcement has advanced in the use of the Incident Command System by training officers and administrators on

the importance of the Incident Command System and how its use is beneficial to law enforcement.   This research showed how law enforcement has been behind the times as compared to the fire departments in the use of the Incident Command System. Not only was law enforcement behind the times, the Incident Command System also combines many other departments within city governments. These other departments within city governments have usually had no training in the use of the system, thus causing another problem within itself.

The research question that was examined focused on whether or not law enforcement's use of the Incident Command System has evolved more since the tragedy of September 11, 2001.

The researcher hypothesized that law enforcement has advanced in the use of the Incident Command System since September 11, 2001 than prior to that date.

The researcher concluded from the findings that the law enforcement community has advanced in the use of the Incident Command System vastly since the events of September 11, 2001.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reasons why the findings did support the hypothesis are probably due to the fact that law enforcement began to see the importance of the Incident Command System and that the Federal Government mandated that emergency services must become knowledgeable of NIMS in order to receive any federal grant monies.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because of the lack of current information on this topic that could be located by the researcher for the study.

The study of Law Enforcements Advancement in the Use of the Incident Command System since September 11, 2001 is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of the effectiveness of the system to help emergency responders to properly handle critical incidents

and to be able to receive Federal Government grant money in the event of a critical incident. Law Enforcement and the citizens of this country stand to be benefited by the results of this research because of the training that is implemented on the use of the system. They will also benefit by helping these agencies to bring the incidents to a faster conclusion with the possibility of less loss of life or property.

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APPENDIX/APPENDICES

WILLIAM C. PIERCE
FLOWER MOUND POLICE DEPARTMENT
LEMIT/LCC
LAW ENFORCEMENT USE
INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

Agency (Optional):_____

Number of Sworn Officers:_____

Circle Y N

1. Does your agency use the Incident Command System on large scale incidents?
   Y N

2. Does your agency actively seek schools on the use of the Incident Command System for training?   Y N

3. Has your agency sent any supervisors/officers to a school for training in the Incident Command System within the past year?   Y N

4. Does your agency use plan or common language on the police radio as mandated by the NIMS?   Y N

5. Prior to September 11, 2001, did your department use the Incident Command System on medium or large scale incidents?   Y   N

6. Does your agency have a General Order/SOP on the use of the Incident Command System?   Y   N