

Beyond Initial Response

USING THE NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM'S INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

ICS

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— Second Edition —

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About the Authors

CHAPTER 3

INCIDENT COMMANDER

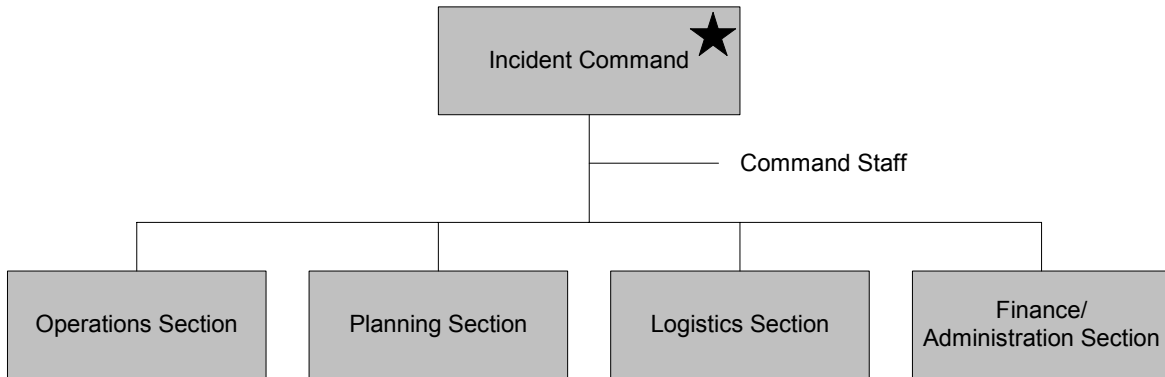


Figure 3.1 Incident Commander in relation to the Command and General Staff.

The one position in the Incident Command System that is on every response regardless of the size, type, complexity, or duration of the incident is the Incident Commander (IC), as in *Figure 3.1*. Although not always acknowledged, the first responder who arrives on-scene is acting in the capacity of an Incident Commander regardless of whether he or she usually carries that title. The minute you arrive at the scene of an incident, such as an auto accident, you'll be using all of your senses to assess the situation. This is almost an automatic reaction. Are there physical hazards that are preventing me from approaching the injured? Is there a need to secure the area to prevent further injuries? Is the fuel that I smell going to pose a fire or explosion hazard? Based on your assessment you'll be making some immediate decisions and will continue to do so until you successfully resolve the incident or are relieved by a higher official in your agency or by another agency with more jurisdictional authority. However, until relieved, you need to have that Incident Commander mindset that responds to immediate issues, ensures safety of responders and bystanders, orders help to assist, and asks "What if?" with respect to different contingencies that may impact the response.

Depending on the type of incident and its complexity, the number of issues that must be managed by the IC can range from few to many. The problem is that you never know whether that garden-variety incident response will resolve quickly or grow into something much larger and more complex. Even incidents such as a minor traffic accident can rapidly increase in complexity when a speeding vehicle inadvertently collides into the incident scattering debris and bodies in its wake. A house fire can quickly spiral out of control when chemicals in the basement explode injuring responders. As an Incident Commander, you must be ready to assume control over the unexpected until the incident is resolved or you are relieved by a more experienced IC.

The role of Incident Commander can be quite extensive and requires a variety of skills to perform. A job advertisement announcing the vacancy for an Incident Commander position would probably be written like the one below:

Incident Commander Position Available

Looking for a leader, decision maker, risk manager, multitasker, and communicator who is as equally adept at managing immediate challenges as well as predicting future events. Individual must thrive on adrenaline, and be prepared on occasions for sleepless nights, inadequate nourishment, and over-stimulus. Absolutely must be an exceptional team player. If interested apply within.

It's fair to say that the majority of incidents responded to every day do not require all of the skills and traits in the advertisement, but at some point you may come face-to-face with an incident that requires every bit of your experience, knowledge, and leadership to successfully manage.

If you answered yes to the advertisement or otherwise find yourself in the role of Incident Commander, this chapter will be a big help to you whether you're responding to those day-to-day incidents that take only an hour or two to resolve or when facing a more complex and dynamic situation.

If you'll be filling the role of IC during an incident, we highly encourage you to read all of the Command and General Staff positions that are included in this book. The reason is twofold. First, you should always keep in mind that as the IC, all responsibility for the incident management lies with you unless you assign someone else to take care of a particular aspect; for example, safety. If you do not assign a Safety Officer, then you retain that responsibility and are accountable for developing a Site Safety Plan and monitoring all activities for potential safety issues, along with the myriad responsibilities that a Safety Officer must perform. This is similar for any Command and General Staff position. The second reason to read up on those positions is that if you do assign someone to perform one or more of those jobs, you need to understand what work they will be managing.

There's a lot to cover in this chapter so we decided to break it into four sections. Section One is focused on your role as Incident Commander during the initial response to an incident. Section Two discusses documenting your initial response actions. Section Three is about transferring the role of IC (either you're transferring IC to a more qualified person or you are the incoming IC). Section Four covers the IC's responsibilities when management of the incident requires the use of the ICS Planning Process. So let's get started!

Section One: Initial Response

There are many things you have to do when responding to an incident as the Incident Commander. In addition to the technical skills and experience that you bring to the incident, you must also be proficient at managing all aspects of the incident. The Incident Command System was designed to help you succeed. The information we discuss in this section is focused on helping you accomplish your management responsibilities by leveraging the strengths of the ICS in the early minutes and hours of the response.

As the initial IC you have many responsibilities, some of the major ones include:

- Determining incident priorities
- Establishing incident objectives
- Managing tactical operations
- Assuring the safety of responders and the public
- Determining the need to expand your organization
- Ensuring that appropriate facilities are established to support the response
- Identifying and ordering the necessary tactical resources to accomplish response objectives
- Keeping your agency or organization management briefed
- Identifying staging areas
- Ensuring scene integrity and evidence preservation
- Communicating with stakeholders
- Evaluating “What if?” contingencies
- Assembling and disassembling strike teams and task forces
- Maintaining an ICS-201 Incident Briefing Form

To help you remember the critical management actions that you should take after arriving on-scene we have included a checklist (see *Figure 3.2*). Most likely, when you get a chance to review the checklist you'll find that you've already addressed many of the items; however, like pilots on an aircraft, use the checklist to make sure that nothing is inadvertently forgotten.

<u>Initial IC Actions Checklist</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assess the incident situation; ensure safety of public and responders <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Use all of your senses (sight, smell, hearing, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Verify situation against initial report of the incident and communicate findings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish command as initial Incident Commander
<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine who is on-scene <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Other responders○ Spontaneous volunteers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Redirect resources based on initial observations
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify limitations and constraints
<input type="checkbox"/>	Begin to conduct a detailed assessment and react as appropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Identify life-safety and security issues○ Evaluate potential threat to population○ Identify immediate environmental issues○ Identify potential threats to property
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that incident evidence is protected
<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine need to subdivide incident into workable management units <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Divisions, Groups, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Document decisions and actions

Figure 3.2 Checklist of actions that the Initial Incident Commander should consider taking.

Establishing Incident Objectives

One of the core principles of the Incident Command System is management by *objectives*. Simply put, this is determining what it is you want to accomplish, and working toward that goal.

During your initial response to an incident, you're often using your agency's internal guidance and training to determine your initial actions, but no two incidents are alike and an incident that at first appears under control can get ugly real quick so be ready to adapt.

Objectives are not always easy to develop, but there's a speedy way to evaluate whether the ones you created are on the right track. To evaluate your objectives ask yourself the following questions:

- Is your objective **achievable**? (Do you understand the situation clearly enough that the objective isn't impossible to accomplish given the constraints of resources, weather, geography, etc.)
- Is your objective **measurable**? (Can you measure progress toward completion of the objective)
- Is your objective **flexible**? (Rigid objectives do not allow for adaptability to the incident situation as it changes)

Here are a couple of examples to help make the point:

Objective: *Lower the water in Vallecito Reservoir by 24 inches by 0800, 16 October.* This is focused on an operations task and is an appropriate objective that meets the criteria above.

Objective: *Provide portable sanitary facilities for the work crews in Division A by 0800, 16 October.* Although this objective meets the criteria, it is not an operational objective. Remember that the objectives you have developed are driving the direction of your operations. If you brought in a Logistics Section Chief (LSC), the LSC will identify support issues such as portable sanitary facilities and will ensure that they're addressed. You have more pressing concerns.

Objective: *Lift the sunken railway tank car from the Buffalo Bayou trestle bridge by using a floating 200-ton heavy lift crane so that the navigation channel can be opened by 1000 on October 17.* This objective may meet the criteria, but it's too specific. The real intent is to clear the navigation channel. By specifying a heavy lift crane as the tactic, the IC has limited the options available to the Operations Section Chief. Perhaps the tank car can be floated by using divers and compressed salvage airlift bags. Or, perhaps it can be pulled out of the channel by using tracked bulldozers on the beach. The point is, don't make the objective extremely specific unless that is exactly what you want your responder to do.

Objective: *Be safe.* This does not meet the criteria for an objective, but we often see it anyway because the IC wants to emphasize safety. There may be better wording; perhaps the objective could be *Conduct a hazard risk analysis and develop safeguards to protect responders and the public.* Optimally, safety is stated in the messages from the IC, and safety is integrated into all response tactics through operational briefings, including those done on-scene by the responders (known as tailgate briefings). Another way to ensure safety is by assigning an Assistant Safety Officer at the site of high-risk activities, and through prepared Health and Safety Plans and Job Safety Analyses. When safety is a proper part of a response organization, it shows up in both the incident priorities and objectives, as well as in all of the incident work products.

Remember that the objectives you set for the response will be used to guide the actions of every responder that comes to assist in the response. Objectives are critical to the response effort. If objectives are unclear, your team will have to guess at what it is you want and may not accomplish what you want. If objectives are too narrow, your team will not have the flexibility necessary to adapt to a changing situation.

Now that we've discussed your initial responsibilities and reviewed objectives with you, let's move onto documenting your initial response.

Section Two: Documenting Your Initial Response

The ICS-201 Incident Briefing Form is an excellent tool for the initial Incident Commander to help organize and manage the initial response phase of an incident. It's a simple four-page document that has a place to draw a quick sketch of the incident, record the initial objectives and actions taken, jot down a rough sketch of the organization and list resources that have responded to the incident. Your agency may have another form that captures similar information, but we advocate that you use the ICS-201 because it's a part of the ICS and should be a part of your response kit.

Page 1 of the ICS-201 (Sketch Map)

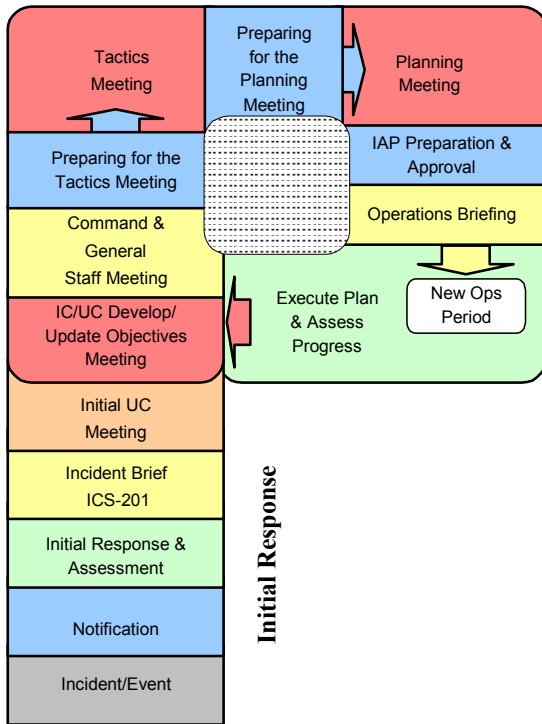
You are not required to have artistic talent to draw a simple layout of the incident, such as that in *Figure 3.3*, and the benefits of a picture will enable others to quickly grasp the scope of the incident and important details. The map should show the current situation, any incident facilities that have been established such staging areas; the wind direction, and other critical aspects of the incident. In addition, at the bottom of Page 1, take a few minutes to summarize what you and the other responders are facing.

INCIDENT BRIEFING	1. INCIDENT NAME DEER PARK	2. DATE PREPARED 21 NOV 2005	3. TIME PREPARED 4:45 PM
<p>4. SKETCH MAP</p> <p> X Incident location Houses ---- Leading edge of fire Incident Command Post Helispot NW 10kts → Wind 4:30 11/21 wooded area </p>			
<p>A private plane crashed into a residential neighborhood setting two homes on fire and igniting a grass</p>			
<p>fire that is quickly spreading. There are seven injured and four confirmed killed. Four homes are</p>			
<p>threatened by the grass fire and access to the homes is blocked. Power is out in the neighborhood.</p>			
<p>5. PREPARED BY (NAME AND POSITION) B. Nelson (IC)</p>			

Figure 3.3 A sketch map of the incident is an excellent way to convey the scope of the problem.

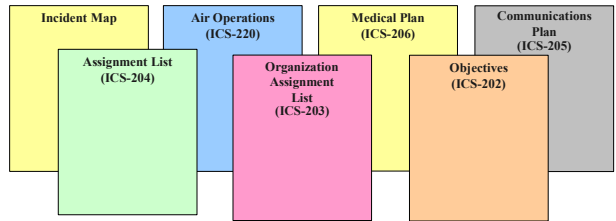
Page 2 of ICS-201 (Summary)

Operational Planning "P"



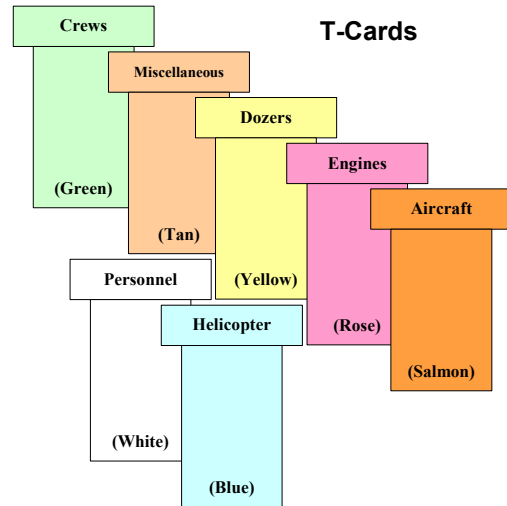
The Incident Command System Planning Process enables an incident management team to methodically work toward the development of an Incident Action Plan. The various 'steps' in the Planning Process are illustrated in the Operational Planning "P."

Incident Action Plan



The Incident Action Plan (IAP) is used to direct response operations ensuring that everyone on the incident is working toward the same priorities and objectives.

T-Cards



Seven different color T-cards are used to track incident resources.

RESOURCES STATUS DISPLAY

Command		
AGENCY	NAME	INCIDENT ASSIGNMENT
BFD	B. NELSON	IC

Search Group				
AGENCY	NAME	INCIDENT ASSIGNMENT		
BFD	P. ROBERT	DIVS		
FRA	C	MESA 3		
PHL	E	Ambulance 1		
USCG	VL	44120		

Division A				
AGENCY	NAME	INCIDENT ASSIGNMENT		
BMP	F. HENRY	DIVS		
PWC	C	ARCH 2		
FRA	C	MESA 5		

T-Card Legend	
■	Rose T-card (vessels)
■	Green T-card (crews)
■	Yellow T-Card (wheeled vehicles)
■	White T-Card (personnel)

Color-coded T-cards provide a rapid assessment of resources on an incident and their location. The green-color cards represent crews working the incident. Here you can immediately identify there are three crews involved.