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ICS / EOC INTERFACE

By: Margaret Dimmick- Exercise Specialist

The Mission and the Environment

One of the most positive developments in emergency response in recent years has been the national use of NIMS ICS. ICS has gained acceptance in public safety, private sector, and non-emergency event planning and has been applied to incidents and events ranging from Hurricane Katrina to the Olympic Games, to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Few argue the benefits of adopting a standardized, well-practiced all-risk incident management structure. But as policy and practice strengthen the role of the Incident Command System, questions arise about how best to support the Incident Management Team (IMT) implementing ICS "in the field" with the coordination, support, and policy decisions traditionally the venue of the jurisdiction or company Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

While there are many topics of discussion and comparison between the ICS and the EOC, the most urgent questions arise over mission or functional overlap between the two structures. Both ICS and EOC structures recognize the importance of multi-agency coordination and public information. ICS Command and General Staff position descriptions include public information, liaison, logistical, and fiscal responsibilities that also appear in most EOC staffing patterns. The Agency/ Company Administrator plays a key role in directing both the IMT in charge of the incident, and the jurisdiction or company EOC supporting it. These broad examples illustrate potential overlap that can result in duplication of effort and friction between the two organizational structures.

Of course, there are text-book solutions to overlap: command and control is the province

of the ICS; coordination and support is the province of the EOC. Unfortunately, like many text-book solutions, what looks cleanly separated into distinct black and white in the text book, is gray in the real world. In the real world of jurisdiction and company emergency managers, solutions are rarely either/or; always/never; black/white. A more constructive strategy for problem solving lies in "situational awareness" of areas of potential overlap, and a tool box of techniques to prevent friction, leverage strengths, and lessen the impact of possible shortcomings on both sides of the response effort.

Situational Awareness: Overlap-Your Turf or Mine?

Who is in Command of What?

While it is simple to say the Incident Commander is in charge of all aspects of the incident scene, many incident "scenes" are either geographically diffuse (think winter storms), combinations of public and private sector responsibilities (schools, hospitals, oil spills), or require actions that are a blend of "support" and "tactical" activities that need careful on-scene coordination to be successful (such as providing transportation for large scale evacuations). How will "command" issues be resolved?

Public Information

Public information is a fluid and dynamic process. A general philosophy frequently applied to public information is that the Incident PIO will speak to actions taken on the incident, while the EOC PIO addresses the impact on the overall jurisdiction, and interagency efforts to support the IMT.

(Continued on page 3)



Upcoming Events

May 2-6 ICS-346/7/8

USCG, Miami, FL

May 10-12 ICS-320

USCG, Sunny Point, NC

May 10-12 PREP Exercise

Chevron, Oceanside, CA

May 11 ICS-408

USCG, Alameda, CA

May 17-19 ICS-320

USCG Detroit, MI

May 19 ICS-408

USCG, Philadelphia, PA

May 23-26 International Oil Spill Conference

Portland, OR

June 1-2 IAP Planning Process

FEMA, Herndon, VA

June 13-16 ICS-310

CA OSPR, San Ramon, CA

June 13-17 ICS-300/400

DOE, Albuquerque, NM

June 14-16 ICS Exercise

Shell, Seattle, WA

June 20-22 ICS-300

Shell Pipeline, Robert, LA

June 22-24 ICS-320

Maine DEP, Portland, ME

View 2011
Events Calendar

Development

Environmental Unit Leader

Course and Job Aid

Division/Group Supervisor

Job Aid

Emergency Operation Center

Course

Public Information Officer

Job Aid

Staging Area Manager

Job Aid

Finance Section Chief

Job Aid

Stay tuned...

It's up to you!

Tell us which ICS
courses you would like
to see on our
calendar

Send us an e-mail at
Info@emsi-ics-services.com
listing your choice of:

ICS course

Ideal time-frame

Preferred location

Once we've heard from
you, we will schedule a few
courses, based on popular
response.

Public Information (continued from page 1)

However, this is frequently less straightforward than it appears at first glance. What is the message? Is the message best delivered by uniformed public safety, company, or elected officials? Is the IMT local? Is the public expected to take specific protective actions? Who can activate the Emergency Alert System? Is there a JIC activated? The answers to these questions may affect how responsibilities for public information are divided between the IMT and the EOC.

Interagency Liaison

The IMT Liaison Officer is responsible for providing an interface between the IMT and cooperating and assisting Agency Representatives. Multi-agency Coordination is a primary mission of all EOCs. Inevitably, both organizations will interface with the same agencies, and will ask the same questions of the same people. How can IMT and EOC Liaison Officers manage these contacts efficiently and effectively?

Operations

Of all the ICS functions, the difference between EOC and IMT Operations would seem to be the most clear-cut. The IMT does tactics; the EOC does support. But overlap can occur in Operations. Who directs damage assessment? What about major evacuations and community-wide traffic control? Are DMAT and DMORT support missions or tactical assignments? How will "support" missions that require access to the incident scene be coordinated and supervised? If there is a Department Operations Center (DOC) activated, how does that organization interact with the IMT? With the EOC?

Planning

Who does contingency planning? Who gathers and interprets disaster-related information? Who tracks what resources? Are the planning processes linked or completely independent of each other?

Logistics

Who can order what, from whom? When the EOC is activated, are normal mutual aid response procedures superseded? Can the incident order tactical resources directly from dispatch? Who provides food and shelter for evacuees? Responders? Who assigns communications assets?

Finance/Administration

What is the purchasing authority of the IMT's Finance/Administration function? What is its authority to negotiate contracts on behalf of the jurisdiction or company? What about claims against the jurisdiction or response organization? Is the IMT expected to establish and maintain the fiscal record-keeping required for FEMA Public Assistance? Which organization is better

positioned to negotiate cost-share agreements for a multi-agency/multi-jurisdiction response?

While many of the questions listed above have either EOC or IMT textbook answers, the "real world" solution to most is "it depends." It depends on the level and form of government. It depends on the company. It depends on the kind of disaster, the time of day and day of the week it occurs, and whether there was warning. It depends on the capability of the IMT and whether it is local. It depends on the response needs of the incident and the support needs of the victims. It depends on whether or not the jurisdiction or company has a working, well-equipped EOC with dedicated staff, or a conference room with a single phone line and a confused secretary. In short-there is no such thing as a one-size fits all solution to the ICS/EOC interface. Fortunately, there are some strategies that can assist ICS practitioners and EOC managers.

Toward a More Interactive Model

The following three practices can assist in clarifying the roles and relationships between the IMT and the EOC. Used alone or (preferably) in combination they ensure that the organizations recognize the unique requirements of the specific disaster, and identify "real-time" adjustments between the IMT and the EOC. Using them in a proactive mode rather than waiting for issues to evolve over the course of the response, will make both the IMT and the EOC more responsive and effective.

Delegations of Authority

While ICS curricula stress the use of Delegations of Authority to provide direction to the Incident Commander, they are relatively rare outside of the wildland fire arena. Local emergency response authority is clearly defined in statute and Emergency Operations Plans or in company procedures and most local authorities do not see a need to develop a Delegation of Authority for a specific incident, especially when assigning their own IMTs and EOCs. However, a Delegation of Authority can be a very useful tool for identifying roles and responsibilities and limitations of the IMT and the EOC related to a specific activation. It provides the Agency/Company Administrator with a formal, written opportunity to provide consistent and simultaneous direction to both the IMT and the EOC-especially if the needs of the specific event require a deviation from standard operating procedures. And of course, it provides valuable documentation in the event there are legal issues arising from the incident.

IMT/EOC Meeting

A face-to-face meeting between IMT Command and General Staff and their EOC equivalents should be conducted as part of the IMT transfer of command/201 briefing process. (Continued on page 4)

IMT/EOC Meeting (continued from page 3)

This face-to-face meeting gives both organizations the opportunity to develop or confirm processes, define roles and responsibilities, and establish critical information reporting procedures. Most important, it establishes a personal relationship between the principle players and defuses the possibility of an “us against them” dynamic.

Synchronizing Planning Cycles

To a large degree, the EOC Planning Cycle is dependent upon the products and decisions imbedded in the IMT Planning Cycle. However, input to the EOC can't begin and end with the approved IAP. It is likely that the IAP for the next operational period will be formally approved fewer than six hours before the Operational Period Briefing. If the EOC is briefed on the IMT's plans for the next operational period only after the IAP is approved, the EOC may not be able to procure resources in time. This disconnect is especially likely when planning for the next day operational period is occurring during the previous night-when offices are closed and resources difficult to contact and organize. The EOC should be briefed on Command objectives after the Command and General Staff Meeting, and given a “heads up” for required resources after the IMT Tactics Meeting. It is helpful if someone from the EOC can observe the Planning Meeting. At the very least, EOC Staff should be appraised of any major changes that are identified during the IMT Planning Meeting.

In practice, waiting for IMT products at these key points in the IMT Planning Process means that the EOC Planning Process will lag the IMT Planning Process slightly. If the EOC staff knows the IMT timeline, and the specific products to expect at each point, it is more likely to be able to provide the necessary support to allow the IAP to be implemented.

EMSI Initiatives

Course Development

EMSI is developing a curriculum to address the relationship between the IMT and its supporting EOC. The curriculum will include lecture and hands-on activities that provide participants with the tools to implement an efficient and productive EOC Planning Process and ensure an effective IMT/EOC interface. EMSI would welcome any suggestions you may have to inform this discussion. You may send an email to EMSI Course Coordinator Margaret Dimmick at: dimmicks@earthlink.net.

Instructor Profile



Margaret Dimmick

Margaret is an EMSI exercise designer, simulation cell manager, course contributor, and instructor. She also instructs ICS Planning and Logistics for FEMA's All-Hazard IMT Program. Margaret has over 30 years of ICS experience in wildland and structural fire, law enforcement, search and rescue, and event planning. In addition, she spent 12 years as an Emergency Manager serving in local EOCs, and designing and delivering ICS and emergency management training and exercises for local government agencies. Margaret is the President of Incident Concepts, an emergency management consulting firm. She lives in Boise, Idaho.

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Welcome!

We are pleased to introduce you to the newest member of our team, Mr. Shawn Essert. Shawn will serve as a Program Director for EMSI, working closely with both our government and industry partners.

Shawn enlisted in the Coast Guard during the Exxon Valdez response and spent his first two tours of duty in south Louisiana, where he gained tremendous experience in oil and hazmat response. Most notably, he served as the Federal On-Scene Coordinator's Representative (FOSCR) on a multi-million dollar oil well blow-out response in Timbalier Bay. With over eight years in the enlisted ranks, Shawn graduated Officer's Candidate School and received his commission in June of 1998. His background made him a lead candidate for his assignment as Operations Officer for the Pacific Strike Team in Novato, CA. As part of the National Strike Force capability, Shawn was recognized for his admirable efforts as Operations Section Chief for the EPA response at Ground Zero 911 (NYC); Operations Section Chief for the Anthrax response on Capitol Hill (Wash. DC); Planning Section Chief for Oil and Hazmat response during Hurricane Katrina (LA); Technical Specialist for Typhoon Pongsona Response (Guam) and the Space Shuttle Disaster (TX). Shawn continued to distinguish himself in the emergency management field teaching the National Incident Management System (NIMS) throughout the United States and abroad, including Mexico, Russia, the Republic of Palau, and Canada. Shawn has extensive policy, planning, training, exercise and evaluation experience. He was the main contributor in development of the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) security



exercise programs (PortSTEP and I-Step); launched the first TSA regional intermodal exercise in Atlanta, GA (2007); developed and implemented the USCG's Area Maritime

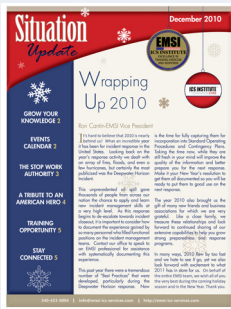
Security Exercise Program (AMSTEP). Shawn created the foundation for USCG Exercise Support Team (EST) concept and designed and delivered exercises throughout the United States at all levels, including National Level Exercises, as well as foreign security exercises for the State Department, including Argentina, Panama, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

Shawn is a single father of three beautiful daughters Makenli, Riley, and Sedona. He loves to follow college sports, enjoys sun, sand and surf when he gets the chance, and simply spending time with his girls. This past summer, Shawn and his oldest daughter Makenli vacationed in Korea and had a wonderful time exploring the culture together.

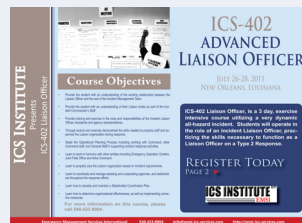
- Certified Type I Planning Section Chief
- Certified Type I Operations Section Chief
- Certified Type II Incident Commander
- HAZMAT Specialist and Incident Commander
- Master Exercise Practitioner (MEP) – FEMA
- Certified Incident Command System Instructor
- Certified Hazardous Waste Operations Instructor
- Homeland Security Exercise & Evaluation Program (HSEEP) Trainer

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