

ICS 200 – Lesson 2: ICS Features and Principles

Lesson Overview

The **ICS Features and Principles** lesson describes the features and principles that constitute the Incident Command System. Collectively, these define the unique features of ICS as an incident or event management system.

This lesson should take approximately 40 minutes to complete. **Remember, you must complete the entire lesson to receive credit.**

Lesson 2 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, given a description of the incident situation you should be able to identify the actions that support the following ICS features and principles:

- Establishment and Transfer of Command
- Management by Objectives
- Unified Command
- ICS Management Functions
- Organizational Flexibility
- Unity and Chain of Command
- Span of Control
- Incident Action Plans
- Comprehensive Resources Management
- Common Terminology
- Integrated Communications
- Personnel Accountability

Roaring River Flood: Scenario Update

The Secretary of Agriculture has declared the State of New Liberty a disaster area. The USDA Franklin County Emergency Board Chairperson has been appointed as the Incident Commander.

The rain and flooding is continuing. State and local responders have been working to address needs. The flooding is impacting USDA operations in the area. Based on reports from the affected agricultural operations, the USDA State Emergency Board has requested the Secretary of Agriculture to declare the entire State of New Liberty a disaster area. The Secretary has issued the declaration and appointed the USDA Franklin County Emergency Board Chairperson as the Incident Commander.

The Incident Commander will use ICS principles and features to manage the incident. To ensure effective command and control, the Incident Commander:

- Establishes and transfers command, as needed.
- Manages by objectives.
- Determines if a unified command structure is needed.
- Assigns additional staff as needed.

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Roaring River Flood: Scenario Update (continued)

The standard ICS organizational structure helps the Incident Commander to:

- Establish management functions.
- Ensure unity of command
- Maintain a clear chain of command.
- Create a flexible organizational structure.
- Manage the span of control.

Planning is a critical ICS component for ensuring that there will be a comprehensive management strategy for the incident. Effective Incident Commanders manage by objectives. The objectives are set forth in the Incident Action Plans, and drive all decisions about operations and resource allocation. To facilitate the flow of information, the Incident Commander:

- Requires all incident personnel to use common terminology.
- Establishes integrated communication systems.

Clear chain of command, delegation of authority, and resource tracking ensures personnel accountability for assignments.

Establishment of Command

The first arriving authority at the scene, who has jurisdiction for the incident, establishes incident command and identifies the initial Incident Command Post (ICP). The initial Incident Commander will also:

- **Establish needed authorization and delegations of authority.** These agreements allow the Incident Commander to act on behalf of the Secretary, State Emergency Board and others who have responsibilities for the incident. They also allow the Incident Commander to make decisions and allocate funds.
- **Begin establishing incident facilities.** The next priority is to establish the incident facilities, beginning with the Incident Command Post.
- **Consider the need to transfer command.**

Responsibility for Incident Command

Frequently, command does not stay with the initial Incident Commander. A primary principle of ICS is the ability to assign the most experienced and skilled person as the Incident Commander, regardless of that employee's agency.

When the Agency Administrator(s) assigns the Incident Commander, the Administrator(s) delegates the appropriate agency authorities to that Incident Commander.

The process of moving the responsibility for incident command from one person to another is called transfer of command. All transfers of command must be approved by the agency.

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Transfer of Command

The initial Incident Commander will remain in charge until transfer of command is accomplished. Command may transfer to higher qualified or more experienced personnel from the same agency, or be transferred to the employee of another responsible agency.

Higher qualified persons arriving at an incident may:

- Assume command (according to agency guidelines).
- Maintain command as it is.
- Transfer command to a better qualified or more experienced Incident Commander.

Transfer of command begins with an initial briefing on the extent of damage and probable response needs.

Other Reasons To Transfer Command

Command may be transferred when:

- A more qualified person is available to assume command.
- A jurisdiction or agency is legally required to take command.
- Changing command makes good sense.
- The incident complexity changes.
- There is turnover of personnel on long or extended incidents.
- Personnel are called home for any reason.
- Agency Administrators direct a change in command.

Roaring River Flood: Establishment and Transfer of Command

Let's return to the Roaring River Incident.

Initially, the USDA Franklin County Emergency Board Chairperson was appointed as the Incident Commander. As the incident expanded, command was transferred to an experienced member of the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Federal Incident Management Team.

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Management by Objectives

Within ICS, management by objectives covers six essential steps. These steps take place on every incident regardless of size or complexity.

	Understand agency policy and direction.
	Assess incident situation.
	Establish incident objectives.
	Select appropriate strategy or strategies to achieve objectives.
	Perform tactical direction (applying tactics appropriate to the strategy, assigning the right resources, and monitoring their performance).
	Provide necessary follow-up (changing strategy or tactics, adding or subtracting resources, etc.).

Roaring River Flood: Initial Incident Objectives

There's so much that needs to be accomplished and it is easy to lose track of what has priority. The Incident Commander must establish incident objectives from the onset. Identifying objectives allows Command and General Staff members to determine strategy, tactics, and resource needs.

Incident Commander

"There's so much that needs to be accomplished, we need to focus quickly. Based on our most urgent priorities, we have established two initial objectives for the incident.

The first objective is to verify the initial assessments.

The second objective is to develop plans and acquire the needed resources to accomplish the following:

- Ensure the safety and welfare of the personnel who will be assigned to this incident.
- Protect the food supply. One of our greatest concerns is to make sure no contaminated food makes it onto grocery shelves.
- Euthanize those animals that are suffering.
- Collect and dispose of animal carcasses.
- Destroy the escaped fruit flies and prevent further reproduction.

Identifying these initial objectives will allow our Command and General Staff members to determine our strategy, tactics, and resource needs."

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Unified Command

In ICS, Unified Command is a unified team effort which allows all agencies with responsibility for the incident, either geographical or functional, to assign an Incident Commander to the Unified Command. The Incident Commanders in the Unified Command establish a common set of incident objectives and strategies.

This type of command structure is accomplished without losing or giving up agency authority, responsibility, or accountability.

Roaring River Flood: Unified Command

Because of the involvement of local, State, and Federal agencies, the Roaring River Incident Commander considers using a unified command. After careful consideration, the Incident Commander decides not to establish a unified command for the following reasons:

- The Department of Agriculture’s responsibilities are clearly separate from and easily conducted independently of ongoing State and local flood response activities.
- There are few resources currently assigned to the incident, and other agencies such as FEMA have not yet been deployed.

Unified command could be used later in the incident response, if warranted.

ICS Management Functions

Five major management functions are the foundation upon which the ICS organization develops.



The five major ICS functions are as follows:

Command: Sets incident objectives and priorities and has overall responsibility at the incident or event.

Operations: Conducts tactical operations to carry out the plan. Develops the tactical assignments and organization, and directs all tactical resources.

Planning: Prepares and documents the Incident Action Plan to accomplish the incident objectives, collects and evaluates information, maintains resource status, and maintains documentation for incident records.

Logistics: Provides support, resources, and all other services needed to meet the incident objectives.

Finance/Administration: Monitors costs related to the incident. Provides accounting, procurement, time recording, and cost analyses.

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Roaring River Flood: Management Functions Activity

Situation: At this point in the incident, the Incident Commander has a limited number of staff members who can be assigned to management functions.

What is the Incident Commander's best course of action?

The Incident Commander's best course of action is to **assume responsibility for all functions that cannot be staffed and delegated.**

Every incident or event requires that certain management functions be performed. Even if an incident is very small, and only one or two people are involved, these activities will still always apply to some degree. Remember:

- Command should never be delegated. In addition, command should always be exercised from the Incident Command Post.
- Delaying planning is not a good option. Without an effective planning function, incident management will become increasingly chaotic and ineffective, and will most likely fail.
- Rotating assignments is not viable because it would result in an unclear chain of command and a lack of management continuity.

Organizational Flexibility

The ICS organization reflects the principle of management by objectives. Every incident has different requirements. The organizational structure should reflect only what is required to meet and support planned incident objectives.

The size and structure of the current organization is determined by the incident objectives. Each activated element must have a person in charge of it. As objectives are achieved, elements that are no longer needed should be reassigned, or demobilized.

Roaring River Flood: Implementing Organizational Flexibility

This incident is going to need a lot of planning and logistical support. To support our initial incident objectives we need to assign staff to verify the initial assessments.

Incident Commander

"This incident is going to need a lot of planning and logistical support. To support our initial incident objectives, we need to assign staff to verify the initial assessments.

Considering the large flood impact area, there's likely to be a lot of competition for resources. And after we secure needed resources, it will take some time for them to mobilize. And of course, the organization will expand to reflect the tactics related to implementing the objectives. What's important is that we expand the structure based on operational needs and without chaos.

I plan to activate the Section Chiefs first. Each Chief in turn will manage the assigned function and determine appropriate staffing."

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Unity and Chain of Command

In the Incident Command System:

- **Unity of command** means that every individual has only one designated supervisor.
- **Chain of command** means that there is an orderly line of authority within the ranks of the organization, with lower levels subordinate to, and connected to, higher levels.

The above ICS principles are used to communicate direction and maintain management control. These principles do not apply to the exchange of information. Although orders must flow through the chain of command, members of the organization may directly communicate with each other to ask for or share information.

ICS team members work within the ICS position descriptions and follow the designated chain of command, regardless of their nonemergency positions or everyday administrative chain of command.

Unity and Chain of Command

In almost 95 percent of all incidents, the organizational structure for incident management will consist of command and single resources. A single resource is an individual, a piece of equipment and its personnel complement, or a crew or team of individuals with an identified work supervisor that can be used at an incident.

However, as incidents expand, the chain of command is established through an organizational structure that can consist of several layers, as needed, such as:

- **Command:** The Command Staff consists of the Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer. They report directly to the Incident Commander. They may have one or more assistants, as needed.
- **Sections:** A Section is the organizational level with responsibility for a major functional area of the incident (e.g., Operations, Planning, Logistics, Finance/Administration). Section Chiefs manage sections.
- **Branches:** A Branch is the organizational level having functional or geographic responsibility for major parts of incident operations. Branch Chiefs are in charge of Branches.
- **Divisions/Groups:** Divisions are used to divide an incident geographically. Groups are used to describe functional areas of operations. Divisions and Groups are managed by Division/Group Supervisors.
- **Units:** A Unit is the organizational element having functional responsibility for a specific incident planning, logistics, or finance/administration activity. Units are managed by Unit Leaders.
- **Task Forces/Strike Teams:** Task Forces are composed of **unlike** resources. Strike Teams are composed of **like** resources. Both Task Forces and Strike Teams must be organized within span of control guidelines, and have common communications and a Leader.
- **Resources:** Resources are personnel and equipment available, or potentially available, for assignment to incidents. Resources are described by kind and type (e.g., ground, water, air, etc.) and may be used in tactical support or overhead capacities at an incident.

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Span of Control

Span of control pertains to the number of individuals one supervisor can effectively manage. It is especially important to maintain an effective span of control at incidents where safety and accountability have top priority.

Management studies have shown that the span of control for a supervisor falls within a range of three to seven, depending upon the skills of the supervisor and the complexity of the task being overseen. If a supervisor has fewer than three or more than seven people reporting, some adjustment to the organization should be considered.

The general rule for span of control in ICS is one supervisor to five subordinates.

Incident Action Plan

An Incident Action Plan is developed for each operational period (for example, every 12 hours).

The purpose of the Incident Action Plan is to provide all incident supervisory personnel with appropriate direction for that operational period. The plan may be verbal or written.

Written Incident Action Plan

All levels of a growing organization must have a clear understanding of the tactical actions for the next operational period. It is recommended that written plans be used whenever:

- Verbal plans could result in the miscommunication of critical information.
- Two or more jurisdictions or disciplines are involved.
- Large changes of personnel occur by operational periods.
- Personnel are working across more than one operational period.
- There is a full activation of the ICS organization.
- The incident has important legal, political, or public ramifications.
- Complex communication issues arise.

In addition, the Incident Commander may direct the organization to develop a written Incident Action Plan at any time.

Documenting the Plan

In ICS, an Incident Briefing Form is used on smaller incidents to record initial actions and list assigned and available resources. As incidents grow in complexity and/or size, ICS provides a format and process for the development of a written Incident Action Plan.

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Comprehensive Resources Management

All ICS resources are ordered, received, assigned, and tracked systematically. Resources include personnel, tools, equipment and their operators, and expendable items (e.g., drugs and syringes that veterinary services will use to euthanize animals, pesticides, etc.).

The Incident Commander uses the Resource Summary on page 4 of ICS Form 201 to document the resource status. Lesson 4 of this course covers resource management in more depth.

Initial Incident Objectives: Review

The first objective is to verify the initial assessments.

The second objective is to develop plans and acquire the needed resources to accomplish the following:

- Ensure the safety and welfare of the personnel who will be assigned to this incident.
- Protect the food supply. One of our greatest concerns is to make sure no contaminated food makes it onto grocery shelves.
- Euthanize those animals that are suffering.
- Collect and dispose of animal carcasses.
- Destroy the escaped fruit flies and prevent further reproduction.

Roaring River Flood: Incident Objectives Activity

Situation: The ICS organization is now fully activated. Tactical assignments are being established for each 12-hour operational period. Staff members have begun working in 12-hour shifts. It is critical that all personnel have a clear understanding of the tactical actions to be accomplished in the next operational period.

What is the Incident Commander's best course of action?

The Incident Commander's best course of action is to **direct the organization to develop a written Incident Action Plan.**

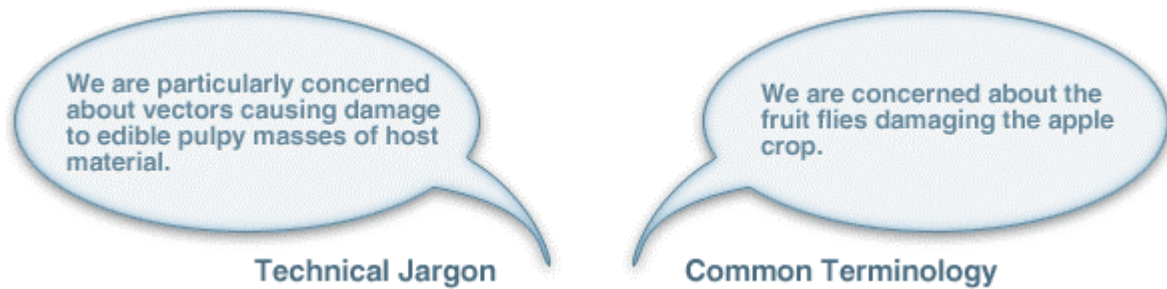
As incidents grow in complexity and/or size, ICS provides a format and process for the development of a written Incident Action Plan. It is recommended that written plans be used whenever:

- Verbal plans could result in the miscommunication of critical information.
- Two or more jurisdictions or disciplines are involved.
- Large changes of personnel occur by shifts.
- Personnel are working across more than one operational period.
- There is a full activation of the ICS organization.
- The incident has important legal, political, or public ramifications.

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Common Terminology

The ability to communicate within the ICS is absolutely critical. An essential method for ensuring the ability to communicate is by using standard or common terminology.



A critical part of an effective multiagency incident management system is for all communications to be in plain English. That is, **use clear text. Do not use radio codes, agency-specific codes, or jargon.**

Applying Common Terminology

In ICS, common terminology and designations are applied to:

Organizational Elements	Each ICS organizational element (e.g., Sections, Divisions and/or Groups, Branches) has a specified title.
Resources	Some resources have common designations based on their type or kind. Many resources are also classified by type to indicate their capabilities (e.g., types of helicopters, trucks, heavy equipment, etc.).
Facilities	Standard ICS facilities have specific names. Consistent names clarify the activities that take place at a specific facility, and what members of the organization can be found there.
Position Titles	ICS management or supervisory positions are referred to by titles such as Officer, Chief, Director, Supervisor, etc.

Position Titles

The use of specific position titles in ICS serves three important purposes:

- Titles provide a common organizational language for multiagency use at an incident. For example, confusion can arise if one agency uses the title Branch Chief, another Branch Manager, another Branch Officer, etc.
- The use of distinct titles for ICS positions allows a distinction to be made between the administrative position and rank of the individual and the ICS position. This allows for filling ICS positions with the most qualified individuals rather than by rank.
- The lack of standardization of position titles can also confuse the ordering process when requesting qualified personnel. For example, when ordering personnel to fill unit positions, common titles and associated qualifications ensure that qualified personnel will be acquired.

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Integrated Communications: Elements

Effective ICS communications includes three elements:

- The “hardware” systems used to transfer information.
- Planning for the use of all available communications frequencies and resources.
- Procedures and processes for transferring information internally and externally.

Integrated Communications: Planning

Every incident needs a Communications Plan. The plan can be simple and stated verbally, or it can be complex and written. A Communications Plan (ICS Form 205) is a component of the written Incident Action Plan.

An awareness of available communications resources, combined with an understanding of incident requirements, will enable the Communications Unit Leader to develop an effective Communications Plan.

Integrated Communications: Modes

It is not unusual for the communications needs on large incidents to outstrip available radio frequency resources.

Some incidents are conducted entirely without radio support. In such situations, other communications resources—cell phones, alpha pagers, e-mail, secure phone lines, etc.—may be used as the only communication methods for the incident.

Currently, the Incident Commander of the Roaring River incident has decided to use cell phones as the primary communication mode.

Integrated Communications: Networks

At a minimum, any communication network must accomplish the following:

- Link supervisory personnel within the Operations Section to each other and to the Incident Commander.
- Provide common communication among resources assigned to tactical elements such as Branches, Divisions/Groups, and ground-to-air and air-to-air assets.
- Provide a link to the rest of the organization for resource status changes, logistical support, etc.

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Personnel Accountability: Procedures

Accountability is a key ICS element. Accountability ensures cost-effective use of resources and improved personnel safety. Several procedures within ICS ensure personnel accountability, including:

Check-In	All personnel must check in upon arrival at an incident. Check in only once!
Unity of Command	Everybody has only one supervisor.
Resource Status	The Resources Unit maintains status of all incident resources.
Assignment Lists	Division/Group Assignment Lists identify resources with active assignments in the Operations Section.
Unit Logs	Unit Logs record personnel assigned and major events in all ICS organizational elements.

Personnel Accountability

A large percentage of responder injuries and deaths can be directly attributed to a failure in personnel accountability.

While the Resources Unit in Planning tracks resources assigned to the incident, resource tracking is also taking place in Operations. The Resources Unit, unless operating on the scene of a small incident, is unlikely to be able to track the movement of resources into and out of a rapidly changing “hot zone.” Resource tracking at this level is the responsibility of the Division/Group Supervisors, Branch Directors, or whoever has first-level supervisory responsibility for the resource.

Lesson Summary

You have completed the **ICS Features and Principles** lesson. The principles and features described in this unit define the unique ICS features.

The next lesson presents information on ICS organizational structure.