

Frequently Asked Questions about NIMS: The National Incident Management System

What is the National Incident Management System (NIMS)?

NIMS is a comprehensive, national approach to incident management that is applicable at all jurisdictional levels and across functional disciplines. It is intended to:

- Be applicable across a full spectrum of potential incidents, hazards, and impacts, regardless of size, location or complexity.
- Improve coordination and cooperation between public and private entities in a variety of incident management activities.
- Provide a common standard for overall incident management.

The full NIMS Document can be accessed at http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMS_core.pdf.

What are the Components of NIMS?

NIMS Components link together and work in unison to form a comprehensive incident management system. NIMS Components include:

- Preparedness
- Communications and Information Management
- Resource Management
- Command and Management
- Ongoing Management and Maintenance

Additional information relating to each NIMS component can be found at <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm>.

Why do we need NIMS?

NIMS provides a consistent nationwide framework and approach to enable government at all levels (Federal, State, tribal, and local), the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to work together to prepare for, prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents regardless of the incident's cause, size, location, or complexity. Consistent application of NIMS lays the groundwork for efficient and effective responses, from a single agency fire response to a multiagency, multijurisdictional natural disaster or terrorism response. Entities that have integrated NIMS into their planning and incident management structure can arrive at an incident with little notice and still understand the procedures and protocols governing the response, as well as the expectations for equipment and personnel. NIMS provides commonality in preparedness and response efforts that allow diverse entities to readily integrate and, if necessary, establish unified command during an incident.

To whom does NIMS apply?

NIMS is applicable to State, tribal and local governments, private sector organizations, critical infrastructure owners and operators, nongovernmental organizations and other organizations with an active role in emergency management and incident response. Elected and appointed officials, who are responsible for jurisdictional policy decisions, must also have a clear understanding of their emergency management roles and responsibilities to better serve their constituency.

How does NIMS relate to local incident command?

A basic premise of NIMS is that all incidents begin and end locally. NIMS does not take command away from State and local authorities. NIMS simply provides the framework to enhance the ability of responders, including the private sector and NGOs, to work together more effectively. The Federal Government supports State and local authorities when their resources are overwhelmed or anticipated to be overwhelmed. Federal departments and agencies respect the sovereignty and responsibilities of local, tribal, and State governments while rendering assistance. The intention of the Federal Government in these situations is not to command the response, but rather to support the affected local, tribal, and/or State governments.

What is the role of Elected and Appointed Officials during an incident?

Elected and appointed officials are responsible for ensuring the public safety and welfare of the people of that jurisdiction. Specifically, these officials provide strategic guidance and resources during preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Elected or appointed officials must have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities for successful emergency management and response. At times, these roles may require providing direction and guidance to constituents during an incident, but their day-to-day activities do not focus on emergency management and response. Their awareness of NIMS is critical to ensuring cooperative response efforts and minimizing the incident impacts.

What is NIMS compliance and how does it affect my department or jurisdiction?

NIMS compliance is a term used to describe progress being made by an agency or a jurisdiction to address the NIMS implementation objectives for a given year. Each federal fiscal year since 2005, the National Integration Center, a department within FEMA, has published implementation requirements and guidelines for federal, state, local and tribal entities and jurisdictions. There are implementation activities relating to each of the NIMS components.

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5) requires that federal agencies tie federal preparedness funding eligibility directly to progress on NIMS implementation. Inability to demonstrate compliance with required NIMS implementation activities will affect federal preparedness funding eligibility at all levels of government – state agency, county, local jurisdiction or department. Those receiving, or planning to receive, federal preparedness funding from any federal sources should examine the applicable grant guidance to determine eligibility requirements.

The full Ohio NIMS Implementation Guidance for this and past federal fiscal years can be accessed at: <http://ema.ohio.gov/NimsGuidance.aspx>.

Federal Guidance and resources relating to NIMS can be accessed at: <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/>.

Federal Fiscal Year 2009 NIMS Activities

The NIMS Integration Center has not added or modified any existing FFY 2008 required activities for this federal fiscal year. FFY 2009 will be a ‘maintenance’ year for NIMS implementation, i.e. – NIMS stakeholders are expected to address outstanding FFY 2008 corrective action plans reflected in the NIMSCAST and to continue any ongoing implementation activities, such as training, resource typing, etc. Advanced Incident Command System training (ICS-400) for appropriate General and Command Staff should be completed by the end of FFY 2009 (September 30, 2009) as stated in the FFY 2008 requirements.

What is NIMSCAST?

Ohio recognizes NIMSCAST (NIMS Compliance Assistance Support Tool) as the mechanism for tracking and reporting NIMS implementation progress. The system is internet-based. Every jurisdiction in Ohio over 5,000 population has already been provided an account in the NIMSCAST and permissions have been set up for a NIMSCAST administrator or multiple administrators for each account. In addition, the six major cities in Ohio have established subaccounts specifically for the disciplines of Law Enforcement, Fire, and Public Health.

The purpose of NIMSCAST is to report the progress of NIMS implementation by the jurisdiction (or agency in the case of state agencies). A jurisdiction should consider all applicable departments and disciplines (i.e. – having a role in emergency and/or disaster response and recovery) in answering the NIMS metrics questions. Commentary relating to specific metrics has been included in this guidance to assist local and state agency NIMSCAST administrators answer the metrics questions accurately.

Since FFY 2009 objectives remain the same as those in FFY 2008, all responses entered into the FFY 2008 NIMSCAST have been carried over into the FFY 2009 NIMSCAST. **It is still necessary, however, to access the system, verify and/or update the responses that have been carried over, and to “Submit for Rollup” for this federal fiscal year.** The deadline for submitting FFY 2009 responses and updating existing NIMSCAST corrective action plans is **August 29, 2009**.

NIMS Training Requirements

All NIMS training requirements are ongoing and apply to new hires, promotions, and reassignments. Policies which ensure that appropriate levels of NIMS training are maintained should be established at the jurisdictional and/or departmental level.

Elected and appointed officials and policy makers (e.g. – trustees, mayors, commissioners, city managers, judges, council members, township administrators, finance directors, etc.) are required to take FEMA IS-700 NIMS: An Introduction. IS-100 Introduction to the Incident Command System (ICS) is recommended but not required.

Sheriffs, although elected, are first considered part of the ICS Command and General Staff category for the purposes of determining the appropriate level of training.

Training requirements summary by potential roles in an emergency:

- *Entry level first responders and disaster workers:* IS-700 and IS-100
- *First line supervisors in the ICS structure (i.e. – single resource leaders):* IS-700, IS-100 and IS-200 (Basic ICS)
- *Middle managers in the ICS structure (i.e. – strike team leaders):*
IS-700, IS-800 (National Response Framework), IS-100, IS-200, and ICS-300 (Intermediate ICS)
- *Command and General Staff in the ICS structure (i.e. – section chiefs, area commanders, select department heads with multi-agency coordination responsibilities, etc.):*
IS-700, IS-800, IS-100, IS-200, ICS-300, ICS-400 (Advanced ICS)

FEMA Independent Study courses can be accessed at: <http://training.fema.gov/IS/NIMS.asp>.

What role does Preparedness have in NIMS?

Preparedness is essential for effective incident and emergency management and involves engaging in a continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective action to achieve and maintain readiness to respond to emergencies. As such, the NIMS Preparedness Component serves as a baseline concept that links all the NIMS Components. Preparedness spans jurisdictions, governments, agencies and organizations. Though individuals certainly play a critical role in preparedness and are expected to prepare themselves and their families for all types of potential incidents, they are not directly included in NIMS preparedness. NIMS primarily discusses the preparedness role for governments, organizations geared specifically toward preparedness, elected and appointed officials, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

What is a Common Operating Picture?

A common operating picture (COP) offers a standard overview of an incident, thereby providing incident information that enables the Incident Commander/Unified Command and any supporting agencies and organizations to make effective, consistent, and timely decisions. Compiling data from multiple sources and disseminating the collaborative information COP ensures that all responding entities have the same understanding and awareness of incident status and information when conducting operations.

What is Interoperability?

Interoperability allows emergency management/response personnel and their affiliated organizations to communicate within and across agencies and jurisdictions via voice, data, or video-on-demand, in real-time, when needed, and when authorized – this includes equipment and the ability to communicate. If entities have physical communications systems that are able to directly communicate, those systems are considered to be interoperable. This can be a function of the actual system or the frequency on which the system operates.

What is Resource Management?

Resource management involves the coordination, oversight, and processes necessary to provide timely and appropriate resources during an incident. Utilization of the standardized resource management concepts such as the typing, inventorying, ordering, and tracking of resources will facilitate their dispatch, deployment, and recovery before, during, and after an incident.

Additional information on this topic is available through the FEMA independent study course IS-703 NIMS Resource Management at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is703.asp>.

What is Command and Management?

The Command and Management component within NIMS is designed to enable effective and efficient incident management and coordination by providing a flexible, standardized incident management structure. To institutionalize these activities within a formal structure, command and management includes three fundamental elements: the Incident Command System (ICS), Multiagency Coordination Systems (MACS), and Public Information. These fundamental elements provide standardization through consistent terminology and established organizational structures.

Why is ICS needed?

When an incident requires response from multiple local emergency management and response agencies, effective cross-jurisdictional coordination using common processes and systems is critical. The Incident Command System (ICS) provides a flexible, yet standardized core mechanism for coordinated and collaborative incident management, whether for incidents where additional resources are required or are provided from different organizations within a single jurisdiction or outside the jurisdiction, or for complex incidents with national implications.

What is ICS Designed To Do?

The ICS is a widely applicable management system designed to enable effective, efficient incident management by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure. ICS is a fundamental form of management established in a standard format, with the purpose of enabling incident managers to identify the key concerns associated with the incident—often under urgent conditions—without sacrificing attention to any component of the command system.

It represents organizational "best practices" and, as an element of the Command and Management Component of NIMS, has become the standard for emergency management across the country. Designers of the system recognized early that ICS must be interdisciplinary and organizationally flexible to meet the following management challenges:

- Meet the needs of incidents of any kind or size.
- Allow personnel from a variety of agencies to meld rapidly into a common management structure.
- Provide logistical and administrative support to operational staff.
- Be cost effective by avoiding duplication of efforts.

ICS consists of procedures for controlling personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications. It is a system designed to be used or applied from the time an incident occurs until the requirement for management and operations no longer exists.

The ICS Resource Center is available at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/ICSResource/index.htm>.

What is a Multiagency Coordination System (MACS)?

MACS is designed to facilitate the process of multiagency coordination, which allows all levels of government and all disciplines to work together more efficiently and effectively. Multiagency coordination can and does occur on a regular basis whenever personnel from different agencies interact in such activities as preparedness, prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation. More specifically, the primary function of MACS is to coordinate activities above the field level and to prioritize the incident demands for critical or competing resources, thereby assisting the coordination of the operations in the field. MACS consists of a combination of elements: personnel, procedures, protocols, business practices, and communications integrated into a common system.

Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) are one of several system elements included within the Multiagency Coordination System (MACS). EOCs are intended to facilitate MACS functions, and may provide support to Area Command, Incident Command, or Unified Command when resource needs exceed local capabilities.

Additional information on this topic is available through the FEMA independent study course IS-701 NIMS Multiagency Coordination Systems at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is701.asp>.

What does Public Information, within NIMS, include?

Public Information consists of the processes, procedures, and systems to communicate timely, accurate, and accessible information on the incident's cause, size, and current situation to the public, responders, and additional stakeholders (both directly and indirectly affected). Public information must be coordinated and integrated across jurisdictions and organizations involved in the incident to include, Federal, State, tribal, and local governments, private sector entities and NGOs. In order to facilitate that process, Public Information includes three major systems/components - Public Information Officers (PIOs), the Joint Information System (JIS), and the Joint Information Center (JIC).

Additional information on this topic is available through the FEMA independent study course IS-702 NIMS Public Information Systems at <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is702.asp>.