

ICS Outside the Norm

By Holly Tobin, Vice President, IAEM-Canada, Atlantic Region

“The Incident Command System (ICS) is a 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, 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.”

By definition, ICS should be able to be easily deployed in any situation by any group. Unfortunately this is not the reality when an organization does not deal in emergency response on a day-to-day basis. A common concern raised by emergency managers that work for public organizations such as government, municipalities, universities, etc. is that it is challenging to get their staff to truly understand the system and utilize it when an emergency arises. In addition to that the emergencies that these organizations face are not always life safety incidents with a clear command post, such as with a fire or hazardous material spill. For example, a major IT interruption or cyber-attack could be considered an emergency within a university setting.

The staff in these organizations tend to not have a command and control structure on a day-to-day basis, and their daily roles are not always as clearly defined as they are in the ICS structure. Bruised egos are common when an individual in a senior role day-to-day is placed amongst the ranks on the planning team during an emergency response. Old habits die hard, and people tend to gravitate towards their day-to-day hierarchy and consultative nature, as opposed to embracing the ICS model.

A group of emergency managers in Newfoundland have recognized this and are rising to the challenge to successfully implement ICS within their organizations. Individual efforts amongst the organizations have had varied success. A group of emergency managers have formed a group to share best practices and create a multi-organization workshop to address these complexities. Over the course of this fall several groups will be coming together to complete ICS training. Once individuals from each organization have completed sufficient training, they will partake in a tailor-made workshop focusing on assigning roles, utilizing forms and highlighting interagency cooperation. The ultimate goal is for the various organizations to be able to utilize ICS during any emergencies that arise whether they be internal or requiring the support of external agencies.

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