

CHANGES IN THE USE OF INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM IN THE U.S. COAST GUARD¹

CDR Kristy Plourde
National Strike Force Coordination Ctr
1461 N. Road St
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
Email: Kplourde@nsfcc.uscg.mil

LCDR Tim Deal
Commandant (G-MOR-3)
2100 Second St SW
Washington DC 20593-0001
Email: tdeal@comdt.uscg.mil

LT Doug Lincoln
USCG MSO Wilmington
1502 N 23rd St
Wilmington, NC 28405
Email: dlincoln@MSOWilimington.uscg.mil

ABSTRACT: *Incident Command System (ICS) is a proven multi-contingency response management system that is flexible and provides improved interoperability with other organizations. The U.S. Coast Guard adopted the use of ICS in oil spill responses well before 2001, but the U.S. Coast Guard announced and published its implementation plan for use of ICS Coast Guard-wide in February 2001. This paper will discuss how the U.S. Coast Guard has been moving forward with a phased ICS implementation program and will discuss some of the new tools that have been established. In the Atlantic and Pacific regions, the U.S. Coast Guard has established Incident Management Assist Teams (IMATs), which are a group of trained and experienced personnel who exercise and deploy as a team. These IMATs have been developed to support local U.S. Coast Guard Incident Commanders in their response organization on large incidents. The U.S. Coast Guard has begun work on an ICS qualification system with Position Task Books (PTBs), qualification tracking, and instructor qualifications and continues to move forward with ICS training programs. The U.S. Coast Guard published the Incident Management Handbook (IMH) in April 2001. This handbook incorporated the oil spill Field Operations Guide (FOG) and included information for other types of incidents including Hazardous Materials, Terrorism, and Search and Rescue. The U.S. Coast Guard has also published job aids to help personnel in specific ICS positions. While the U.S. Coast Guard recognizes that implementation of ICS in its organization will take some time, it continues to move forward. This will only improve the way the U.S. Coast Guard responds to incidents.*

History of ICS/background

The National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS) version of the Incident Command System (ICS), developed to integrate multiple fire fighting units in a wildland fire response situation, has become the adopted model for oil spill response and other emergencies in the United States. ICS was developed in the 1970s for fire response in order to integrate

multiple response organizations and reduce confusion during an emergency situation. By standardizing response roles, ICS provides for consistency and good organization. A new training curriculum was completed in 1994 to better reflect the “all hazard – all risk” capability of NIIMS (floods, earthquakes, oil spills, fires, planned events, etc.). It is organizationally flexible and capable of expanding and contracting to accommodate responses or events of varying size or complexity. As recently as 1994, however, ICS was being used only sporadically for emergency applications other than firefighting, including hazardous materials and oil spill response.

The first draft of the oil spill Field Operations Guide (FOG) was used in the Preparedness for Response Exercise Program (PREP) exercise in Los Angeles in the fall of 1994. It became very popular, and demand for its use generated requirements for training programs and forms. The group known as the Standard Oil Response Management System (STORMS) was organized to guide this effort. The STORMS Task Force produced the first official oil spill response-focused ICS FOG in 1996, which was published by California Department of Fish and Game’s Office of Spill Prevention and Response (DFG OSPR) and the U.S. Coast Guard. Many federal and state emergency response agencies are now required to use ICS. In addition, the response systems specified in vessel and facility oil spill contingency plans are required by many regulatory agencies to be compatible with NIIMS ICS.

The work of the STORMS Task Force was so successful that the oil spill FOG has only required “updating” to reflect ongoing field experience as well as emerging response paradigms. Following the 1998 Spill of National Significance (SONS) drill in Valdez, Alaska, it was agreed that the States/BC Oil Spill Task Force should facilitate a national workgroup focused on updating the 1996 Oil Spill FOG. Similar “update” efforts had already begun. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation began an Alaska FOG update process in cooperation with Alaska industry and response organizations in 1998. As the result of two years of coordinated work, the updated Oil Spill FOG was published in 2000.

The United States Coast Guard initially adopted NIIMS based ICS for response to oil and hazardous substance releases in February 1996. In August, 1998, the U.S. Coast Guard adopted the use of ICS Coast Guard wide in order to provide a standardized response management system for all U.S. Coast Guard response operations and established a Response Management Coordination Council (RMCC) to coordinate uniform implementation. In February 2001, the U.S. Coast Guard published the Incident Command System Implementation Plan that outlines a five-year plan for implementation of ICS throughout the U.S. Coast Guard. As a companion to the ICS Implementation Plan, the U.S. Coast Guard Incident Management Handbook (IMH), was developed as a guide in the initiation of an ICS response for all major U.S. Coast Guard mission areas and for multiple contingencies, natural disasters, terrorism, and hazardous material and oil spill incidents. Around the same time, ICS position specific Job Aids were developed as guides and performance supports to help ICS staff members perform tasks they do infrequently, are too complex to memorize, or that are comprised of critical steps.

The IMH and Job Aids are available on the U.S. Coast Guard's ICS website² or for purchase through the Government Printing Office. Comments and recommendations for additional changes to the IMH and Job Aids should be sent to the U.S. Coast Guard's Office of Response³.

The adoption of NIIMS ICS has provided the U.S. Coast Guard with many advantages:

1. A flexible standard response management system that will allow for the cultivation of response management expertise at all echelons of the U.S. Coast Guard.
2. Provides for increased support of trained personnel during major incidents.
3. NIIMS is a "public domain" system that allows unrestricted distribution by U.S. Coast Guard personnel to improve the capabilities of and unify the local response community into a more effective organization.
4. Applies to any response situation.
5. Provides for logical and smooth organizational expansion and contraction.
6. Maintains autonomy for each agency participating in the response.

USCG ICS implementation plan – goals and objectives

Adopted in February 2001, the U.S. Coast Guard's ICS Implementation Plan provides the structure for implementing NIIMS ICS throughout the entire Coast Guard for use during all response operations and the management of major events. The intent is to provide U.S. Coast Guard responders with a response management tool that is flexible, provides interoperability with other response organizations, and provides surge capability that does [not?]currently exist. The Implementation Plan remarks that ICS will aid in the improvement of U.S. Coast Guard responders' skills and standardize the U.S. Coast Guard's ability to respond, either as the only agency or as part of a multi-agency response effort, effectively improving the U.S. Coast Guard's readiness. The Implementation Plan notes that full implementation of ICS and daily use of ICS principles is expected of everyone by the end of year 2005. The Implementation Plan has three cornerstones: USCG ICS Training Plan, Regional/National Incident Command (RIC/NIC) Protocol, and Incident Management Assist Team (IMAT) Guidance. The Regional/

National Incident Command (RIC/NIC) Protocol provides a senior level management organization in the event of a regionally or nationally significant incident and will not be addressed in this paper.

Incident management assist team (IMAT)

The Incident Management Assist Team (IMAT) Guidance in the Implementation Plan required the establishment of two highly trained teams to assist Incident Commanders during large and complex response operations. U.S. Coast Guard units routinely respond to a wide range of incidents. The vast majority of these incidents never reach the level of complexity or intensity that would require a trained incident management assist team from outside a U.S. Coast Guard unit's local area. However, there are instances where more command and control experience and capability using ICS is required to ensure the best possible response. Recognizing that it is neither realistic nor cost-effective to maintain the highest level of expertise for every individual within a response program, NIIMS ICS guidance provides for Type Teams that can assist local units. U.S. Coast Guard has decided to support Incident Commanders responding to complex, resource-intensive response operations, by making available highly trained, multi-contingency IMATs. To ensure that the IMATs are multi-contingency capable, and to capitalize on the knowledge and experience that already exists in the U.S. Coast Guard, personnel for these teams came from a wide range of U.S. Coast Guard programs. One team is located in the Atlantic Area and one in the Pacific Area. This geographic breakdown delineates each team's area of responsibility for response.

IMATs represent the highest level of ICS expertise in the U.S. Coast Guard. They provide management support for any contingency to which the U.S. Coast Guard responds and their value is in their ability to augment the requesting unit's incident management organization to fill needed positions or enable the organization to operate around the clock.

U.S. Coast Guard Incident Commanders requesting the support of an IMAT benefit from the team's area of expertise: implementing the ICS to manage an incident. Therefore, an IMAT should be called into action when the response requires more incident management expertise than is available to the local area response team. IMATs can be used in many ways and these may include:

1. Members filling their assigned position.
2. Serving as a deputy.
3. Serving as a relief during 24 hour operations.
4. Acting as a coach or mentor for the local personnel assigned to fill a position.
5. Being reassigned to another position as determined by the Incident Commander's (IC's) organization depending upon the member's qualification and experience.

IMAT members may be demobilized whenever the IC determines they are no longer needed to support the incident.

IMATs are made up of the following 16 ICS positions:

- Deputy Incident Commander
- Safety Officer
- Information Officer
- Operations Section Chief
- Air Operations Branch Director
- Planning Section Chief
- Resources Unit Leader
- Situation Unit Leader

Documentation Unit Leader
 Logistics Section Chief
 Communications Unit Leader
 Supply Unit Leader
 Finance/Administration Section Chief
 Time/Cost Unit Leader
 Compensation/Claims Unit Leader
 Procurement Unit Leader

The U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area IMAT was utilized for the Detroit area Rouge River Spill in April 2002. This deployment was highly successful and the team supported the U.S. Coast Guard Federal On-Scene Coordinator as it was envisioned. The IMAT concept in the U.S. Coast Guard will continue to be refined over time.

Training of ICS in the USCG

The Training Plan within the U.S. Coast Guard's ICS Implementation Plan provides an overview of the ICS features and outlines the training requirements for everyone in the U.S. Coast Guard. It is understood that it takes time to become trained and proficient in the use of ICS and the training plan provides a phased approach to achieve full implementation of ICS in the U.S. Coast Guard. The first phase or initiative is to meet the initial training needs with aggressive, proactive training program for U.S. Coast Guard personnel to develop a sound baseline of ICS knowledge and proficiency. The second initiative is the development of a productive, systematic and institutionalized program for ICS qualification.

Training Courses

The ICS Implementation Training Plan outlines ICS training and training sources and requirements for who attends training. Two new training courses have been recently developed by the U.S. Coast Guard; an Incident Response Planning Workshop and a Division/Group Supervisor Course. In addition revisions and improvements to NIIMS ICS I-100, I-200, I-300 and I-400 courses have been on-going. U.S. Coast Guard personnel also attend position specific courses provided primarily through the National Wild Fire Coordinating Group (NWCG) and the federal and state agencies who participate in the NWCG. U.S. Coast Guard ICS Instructors currently are being trained and certified by the U.S. Coast Guard's National Strike Force Coordination Center.

Qualifications

The second initiative of the Implementation Plan is to set up an ICS qualification system. The NIIMS ICS qualification system is a "performance based" system. In this type of system, the primary criterion for qualification is individual performance as observed by an evaluator, using approved standards. The components of the qualification system will be: Position Task Books (PTBs), Qualification Tracking, Interim Qualifications, and Instructor Qualifications.

Following NIIMS ICS principles and modular development, the U.S. Coast Guard has recognized that incidents should be classified into types (Type 1, 2, 3, or 4) with Type 1 being the largest and most complex. In addition, qualifications should also be typed so that personnel may gain experience and advance in

their skill levels over time. The U.S. Coast Guard has developed Position Task Books (PTBs) with "type" levels of qualification for several of the critical ICS positions (IC, IO, SO, OPS, PSC, LSC and Div/Group Supervisor)⁴ [SPELL OUT ACRONYMS OR INCLUDE IN LIST OF IMAT POSITIONS] and these will be prototyped by the IMATs and Strike Teams to determine whether PTBs should be used on a broader scale throughout the U.S. Coast Guard. These PTBs are very similar to the ones used by wildfire agency personnel for their ICS qualifications and contain all critical tasks required to perform a specific job. Performance tasks may be "signed off" by appropriately qualified ICS staff members, after the trainee demonstrates satisfactory performance during real incidents, training, simulated incidents (drills and exercises) or planned events.

Once personnel have completed the required training, they will be issued a qualification letter. The person will be assigned a qualification code, which will be entered into a database and tracked. Until the U.S. Coast Guard's formal training management system is online, training providers are tracking the personnel that are trained in ICS topics.

Next steps – future outlook

There are many on-going U.S. Coast Guard ICS related projects including funding for a full time U.S. Coast Guard ICS Coordinator position, certification/qualification of ICS instructors, qualification tracking, developing more position specific ICS courses, developing new ICS forms and computer-based ICS forms, refinements of the IMAT concept and enhancement in the use of ICS as the U.S. Coast Guard learns more about this flexible incident management system.

NIIMS ICS is an on-site management system whose principles can be applied to all types of incidents such as floods, hurricanes, search and rescue (SAR), law enforcement, oil spills, hazardous substance releases, and to planned events such as marine parades. Numerous studies of actual responses and exercises have identified on-site command and control as an area in which the nation's ability to respond is significantly enhanced through the use of a standardized response management system. ICS provides a uniform process, organization, and language for emergency response management, ensuring that all emergency responders, regardless of agency or organization, respond as a coordinated team with common objectives. The move towards ICS continues to gain popularity among federal agencies as multi-agency response operations become the norm. It is imperative for the successful implementation of ICS into the U.S. Coast Guard culture that ICS principles be applied to day-to-day response missions. While the U.S. Coast Guard recognizes that implementation of ICS in its organization will take some time, it continues to move forward. This will only improve the way the U.S. Coast Guard responds to any incident.

Biography

Commander Kristy Plourde is presently serving as the Deputy Commander of the National Strike Force. She has managed numerous responses and has served as Federal On-Scene Coordinators Representative/Incident Commander, Operations and Planning Section Chiefs, and other ICS roles during spill responses. She has 20 years U.S. Coast Guard experience and has an MS in Chemistry from the University of Connecticut and BS in Physical Sciences from the U. S. Coast Guard Academy.

¹ The opinions or assertions expressed in this paper are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the U. S. Coast Guard.

² For U.S. Coast Guard ICS information including the IMH, forms, and job aids: www.uscg.mil/hq/ics

³ Commandant (G-MOR-3), 2100 Second St SW, Washington DC 20593-0001

⁴ Available on the CG's ICS website: <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/ics/>