Incident Command System Review 2

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The first responder at the incident becomes the Incident Commander (IC). When a higher ranking person arrives (S)he may assume command, leave command as it is or reassign command to a third party. If command is transferred then all personnel with a need to know should be told the effective time and date of the transfer. One of the first incident documents produced is ICS Form 201. This form contains status information for briefing the incoming IC or team, or other resources.

As the incident grows, the Incident Command System (ICS) grows with it but, the ICS structure should include only the functions and positions needed to achieve the incident objectives. This means for example, if the Situation Unit Leader position is filled but there is no Planning Section Chief, the Situation Unit leader reports to the IC.

The IC may assign a deputy IC who is equally capable of assuming the IC role. (S)he may assign an operations section chief who is responsible for determining the appropriate tactics for the incident; this includes conducting tactical operations, developing the tactical objectives and organization, and directing all tactical resources.

As additional resources arrive, they are staged in an area close to the incident; resources in the staging area are awaiting operational assignment.

As the complexity of the incident increases it may exceed the existing authorities and a delegation of authority may be needed.

As more and more resources are committed to the Incident, it is important that each individual involved in incident operations be assigned to only one supervisor. This is called Unity of Command. Informal communication may travel up, down or laterally through the ICS. Reporting progress of assigned tasks is a formal communication and should only travel up the ICS. Another important consideration is Span of Control. This means that one person should only have between 3 to 7 people working for them with 5 being the optimal number. Span of control is accomplished by organizing resources into Teams, Divisions, Groups, Branches, or Sections. Divisions are established geographically, Groups by
functionality and Branches either geographically or functionally. Besides the IC, Branches and Sections may have Deputies.

Once it becomes clear that the incident will cover multiple operational periods, the planning section gets to work on the Incident Action Plan for the upcoming operational period which is presented to supervisory personnel at the Operational Period Briefing facilitated by the Planning Section chief.

As the incident continues to grow, most of the ICS positions are filled: The Liaison Officer is coordinating representatives from assisting or cooperating agencies and organizations. The medical unit is developing the medical plan, ordering medical aid and transportation for injured and ill incident personnel. The Finance/Administration Section is handling claims related to property damage, injuries or fatalities at the incident. The logistics section is ordering resources by kind and type within kind. Typing resources allows managers to make better resource ordering decisions by describing the size, capability, and staffing qualifications of a specific resource. And if there is an Information and intelligence function, it will either be within the Command Staff, As a Unit within the planning section, as a branch within the operations section or as a separate general staff section.

Finally, but most important, the top priority within the ICS common leadership responsibilities is ensuring safe work practices.