Handout 4-5: Consolidating the Management of Multiple Incidents
Reference NIMS October 2017, ICS Tab 7 (pages 102-104)

Large disasters or multiple different disasters occurring quickly in the same area may result in the establishment of multiple incident command organizations operating more or less independently. ICS provides several options for consolidating the management of separate incidents. These options, which are described below, can enhance coordination and improve the efficient use of resources.

Incident Complex: Multiple Incidents Managed within a Single ICS Organization

An incident complex is an organizational structure that exists when two or more individual incidents located in the same general area are assigned to a single Incident Commander or Unified Command. When an incident complex is established over several individual incidents, the previously identified incidents become branches or divisions within the Operations Section of the incident complex. Each branch thus has the flexibility to establish divisions or groups. In addition, when divisions and groups have already been established at each of the incidents, the same basic structure can be propagated. If any of the incidents within an incident complex have the potential to become a large-scale incident, it is best to establish it as a separate incident with its own ICS organization.

The following are examples of when an incident complex may be appropriate:

- Disasters such as wildfires, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, or other situations where many separate incidents occur in proximity

- Several similar incidents occurring in proximity to one another

- One incident underway with an Incident Management Team (IMT) assigned, with other smaller incidents occurring in the same area

The following are additional considerations for using an incident complex:

- A single Command and General Staff can adequately provide operations, planning, logistics, and finance/administration activities to the incidents that comprise the incident complex

- A combined management approach could achieve staff or logistical support economies

Area Command

An Area Command is established to oversee the management and support of multiple incidents or to oversee the management of a large or evolving incident with multiple ICS organizations.

Area Command Responsibilities

An Area Command does not have operational responsibilities but prioritizes the use of scarce resources among the incidents. Additionally, the Area Command:

- Develops broad objectives for the impacted area(s)

- Coordinates the development of individual incident objectives and strategies

- Allocates resources as the priorities change

- Ensures that incidents are properly managed

- Ensures effective communications

- Ensures that incident management objectives are met and do not conflict with each other or with agency policies

- Identifies critical resource needs and reports them to EOCs and/or MAC Groups

- For incidents that have a recovery dimension, ensures that short-term recovery is coordinated to assist in the transition to full-recovery operations

Area Command Organization

The Area Command organization operates under the same basic principles as ICS. Typically, an Area Command comprises the following key personnel:

- Area Commander (Unified Area Command): Responsible for the overall direction of assigned incidents. This responsibility includes ensuring that conflicts are resolved, incident objectives are established, and strategies are selected for the use of scarce resources. The Area Commander coordinates with local, state, tribal, territorial, and Federal departments and agencies, as well as NGOs and other private sector elements.

- Assistant Area Commander–Logistics: Provides facilities, services, and materials at the Area Command level (by ordering resources needed to support the Area Command) and ensures the effective allocation of scarce resources and supplies among the incidents.

- Assistant Area Commander–Planning: Collects information from various incidents to assess and evaluate potential conflicts in establishing incident objectives, strategies, and priorities for allocating scarce resources.

- Area Command Aviation Coordinator: Assigned when aviation resources at multiple incidents compete for common airspace and scarce resources. This role works in coordination with incident aviation organizations to evaluate potential conflicts, develop common airspace management procedures, ensure aviation safety, and allocate scarce resources in accordance with Area Command priorities.

- Area Command Support Positions: Activated as necessary:

  - Resources Unit Leader- Tracks and maintains the status and availability of scarce resources assigned to each incident under the Assistant Area Commander–Planning.

  - Situation Unit Leader- Monitors the status of objectives for each incident assigned to the Area Command.

  - PIO- Provides coordination between incident locations and serves as the point of contact for media requests to the Area Command.

  - Liaison Officer- Helps maintain off-incident interagency contacts and coordination.

<u>Area Command Location</u>

The following are guidelines for locating an Area Command:

- Established as close to the incidents as needed to facilitate operations, to make it easier for the Area Commander and Incident Commanders or Unified Commands to meet and otherwise interact

- Should not be co-located with any individual ICP, to avoid confusion with the ICP activities

- Should allow for effective, efficient communications and coordination with subordinate incidents, as well as with EOCs and MAC Groups

- Housed in a facility large enough to accommodate a full Area Command staff. It should also be able to accommodate meetings among the Area Command staff, the Incident Commanders or Unified Commands, and agency administrators/executives as well as news media representatives

Area Command Reporting Relationships

When an Area Command is involved in coordinating multiple incident management activities, the following reporting relationships apply:

- The Incident Commanders for the incidents under the Area Command report to the Area Commander

- The Area Commander is accountable to the agency or agencies or the jurisdictional executive(s) or administrator(s)

- If one or more incidents within the Area Command are multijurisdictional, a Unified Area Command is established