



National Incident Management System (NIMS) Guide

for County Officials



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- Phyllis A. Mann, CEM, Emergency Management Director, Kitsap County, Washington
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Letter from Larry Naake, Executive Director of NACo

Dear County Official,

On February 28, 2003, the President issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)–5, *Management of Domestic Incidents*, which directed the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and administer a National Incident Management System (NIMS). This system provides a consistent nationwide template to enable Federal, State, local, and tribal governments and private-sector and nongovernmental organizations to work together effectively and efficiently to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity, including acts of terrorism.

Many county agencies throughout the U.S. have been using a system of organizing emergency preparedness and response for years, as such systems were built initially on wildland fire response, and have grown to encompass all hazards, natural or human-caused. This integrated approach to incident management is now called “NIMS”.

Knowing how your county agencies – including Fire, Police/Sheriff, Emergency Management/Homeland Security, Public Health, Transportation, Public Works, Utilities, Schools, and so forth – need to work together when an emergency occurs, as well as how they may work with neighboring jurisdictions, state, and federal resources – is what NIMS is all about.

This Guide will help you, as a county official, understand what NIMS is and the role your county plays to enable a smooth and coordinated method to plan, prepare for, and respond to emergencies of any type and of any scale.

NACo hopes this Guide will help you determine the best ways your county can work with and support adoption and implementation of NIMS.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larry E. Naake". The ink is dark and the signature is written in a fluid, personal style.

Larry E. Naake
NACo Executive Director

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What is “NIMS”?

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a comprehensive national approach to incident management, applicable at all jurisdictional levels and across functional disciplines. NIMS provides a consistent nationwide approach for federal, state, tribal entities, local governments, and private and non-governmental organizations to work effectively and efficiently together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity.

NIMS is the outgrowth of systems developed and implemented by dedicated responders over many years, and its design and approach was developed by those who use these systems every day.

Why do I need to be concerned about NIMS?

- Responders from your county may be involved in providing or receiving mutual aid during response to large-scale emergencies. They use an Incident Command System (ICS) to organize response to emergencies. ICS is a part of NIMS. NIMS provides the method by which people, and the resources needed to effect a response, are coordinated. You need to learn about NIMS because this is the method that the responders in your county use to respond to emergencies and disasters.
- As of October 1, 2006, all federal preparedness assistance is contingent on your state’s compliance with NIMS. This assistance includes federal funding from the DHS Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG), Homeland Security Grant Program and Urban Area Security Initiative

More information

- On-line resources about NIMS are available by visiting: www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm
- Questions may be sent by email to the NIMS Integration Center at: NIMS-Integration-Center@dhs.gov



(UASI). That means that if your county wants to be eligible to receive federal funds for preparedness activities which includes nearly 50 different programs from more than 25 federal departments and agencies, your county must be able to certify that it has complied with the requirements of NIMS explained in this booklet. (A current list of federal preparedness funding from all programs and agencies can be found at www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm)

What will this Guide do for me?

The *NIMS Guide for County Officials* explains the key points of NIMS and how it applies to county governments in these core areas:

1. Local NIMS adoption
2. NIMS implementation
3. Training (what training is required for whom)
4. Disaster and emergency response planning (including mutual aid agreements)
5. Exercises to test capability to respond to disasters and emergencies
6. Resource management (including typing of resources)
7. Communications and information management for emergency response

What does NIMS Compliance mean?

As of October 1, 2006, the following are measurements for county “NIMS Compliance”:

- The county has adopted NIMS through executive order, proclamation, resolution or legislation as the county’s all-hazards, incident response system without “sunset” provisions. [See page 4]

See a sample county ordinance at www.naco.org/techassistance.

County response agencies must:

- Have appropriate personnel complete *NIMS: An Introduction* (ICS-700) training course. This is a minimum. Other training is strongly recommended. (See page 4)
- Keep records on training completed by county personnel.
- Establish a NIMS baseline. This is a self-assessment of where your county stands with regard to NIMS implementation. (See page 5)
- Establish a strategy for implementing NIMS
- Institutionalize the use of the Incident Command System (ICS)
 - o Revise and update plans and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to incorporate NIMS components, principles and policies, to include planning, training, response, exercises, equipment, evaluation, and corrective actions.

- o Incorporate NIMS/ICS into all training and exercises conducted by the county.
- o Participate in an all-hazard exercise program based on NIMS that involves responders from multiple disciplines and multiple jurisdictions.
- Develop strategies to implement the NIMS
 - o Participate in and promote intrastate and interagency mutual aid agreements, to include agreements with the private sector and non-governmental organizations. (See page 6)
 - o Inventory community response assets to conform to homeland security resource typing standards. (See page 7)
 - o To the extent permissible by law, ensure that relevant national standards and guidance to achieve equipment, communication, and data interoperability are incorporated into local acquisition.
 - o Apply standardized and consistent terminology, including the establishment of plain language communications standards across the public safety sector. (See page 7)

Adoption of NIMS

One of the key requirements of NIMS compliance is for local jurisdictions which provide emergency management, public health, public works, emergency medical services, police, and/or fire response to adopt NIMS through executive order, proclamation, resolution or legislation as the county's all-hazards, incident response system.

Local adoption of NIMS was a compliance requirement for federal FY05, and many counties adopted NIMS formally at that time.

If NIMS is adopted by local legislation, the legislation should not have "sunset" provisions, or if it does, the legislation must be renewed as often as necessary to maintain NIMS as the incident response system used locally.

Model language for county adoption of NIMS may be found at www.naco.org/techassistance.

Training

Free training about NIMS, ICS, the National Response Plan (NRP), and related topics is available from FEMA's Emergency Management Institute Virtual Campus.

A complete list of all training that is available to take on-line is at www.training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/crslist.asp.

Training requirements for basic NIMS compliance is the on-line course ICS-700: *NIMS, An Introduction*. This course is accessible from the link above.

Further, training courses are strongly recommended for the categories of personnel listed below.

Courses offered on-line will have course numbers that begin with "IS". Courses offered in a classroom will have course numbers that begin with "ICS". Courses at the 300 level and above are classroom-based only.

Entry Level – personnel who have a direct role in emergency preparedness, incident management, or response:

- ICS-700: *NIMS, An Introduction*
- IS-100: *Introduction to Incident Command System*

Note, there are different versions of IS-100 available. Personnel with these specialties may find it more suitable to take the version created for their line of work:

- o Law Enforcement (IS-100LE)
- o Public Works (IS-100PW)
- o Operational first responders (IS-100, cross listed with the National Fire Academy course Q-462.)

First Line, Single Resource, Field Supervisors – personnel who have an operational role in emergency response

- IS-700: *NIMS, An Introduction*
- IS-100: *Introduction to Incident Command System*
- IS-200: *Basic Incident Command System*

Middle Management: Strike Team Leaders, Division Supervisors, EOC Staff, etc.

- IS-700: *NIMS, An Introduction*
- IS-100: *Introduction to Incident Command System*
- IS-200: *Basic Incident Command System*
- ICS-300: *Intermediate Incident Command System* (Note: this is a classroom course offered at the state level and is an FY07 requirement)
- IS-800a: *National Response Plan (NRP)*

Command and General Staff; Area, Emergency and EOC Managers

- IS-700: *NIMS, An Introduction*
- IS-800: *National Response Plan (NRP), An Introduction*
- IS-200: *Basic Incident Command System*
- ICS-300: *Intermediate Incident Command System (see above note)*
- ICS-400: *Advanced Incident Management System (see above note)*

Anyone may participate in any of these training courses provided prerequisites are met. They courses are free, and take from 30 minutes to an hour per lesson for the basic courses. Advanced courses are three days in length depending on

Table 1: Training Documentation Example

Name	Position	Dept.	Course #	Course title	Date passed
Joe Example	EM Tech II	HS	IS-100	Intro to ICS	08/16/2006
Mary Sample	Officer IV	POL	IS-100LE	Intro to ICS for Law Enf.	05/12/2005
Fred Fireguy	Firefighter I	FIRE	IS-200	Basic ICS	03/05/2005

complexity and student experience, and have prerequisites. Upon successful completion of the course, participants receive a confirmation by email, and a certificate in the mail which may be used to document required training.

Training documentation

While there is no set standard of documenting training that people complete, it is suggested that the simple format in Table 1 above be used.

What about training for elected officials?

The NIMS Integration Center strongly recommends that all elected officials who will be interacting with multiple jurisdictions and agencies during an emergency incident at the minimum, complete *ICS-700: NIMS, An Introduction* and *IS-100: Introduction to ICS*. These courses provide a basic understanding of the National Incident Management System and the Incident Command System. Everyone directly involved in managing an emergency should understand the command reporting structures, common terminology and roles and responsibilities inherent in a response operation.

Establish a NIMS Baseline

There are many concepts, ideas, and practices described in NIMS that many response agencies have used for years. This includes using an Incident Command System (ICS), mutual aid agreements, providing training for responders, planning and preparedness activities, and conducting drills & exercises.

While none of these activities are new, some adjustments to how these activities are done, described, or conducted may need to happen to reflect incorporation of NIMS in these practices.

The best way to determine where your county measures up with regard to NIMS implementation is to do a self-assessment. This assessment can be done using an on-line product developed by the Department of Homeland Security called NIMCAST.

NIMCAST stands for National Incident Management System Capability Assessment Support Tool. The NIMCAST is a web-based self-assessment tool designed to help state and local jurisdictions determine their capabilities and compliance against the requirements established in the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

The NIMCAST allows users to assess the current status/level of their jurisdiction's incident preparedness against the requirements outlined in the NIMS. Using the NIMCAST as a method of identifying weaknesses in incident preparedness will assist counties to become compliant with NIMS. As a self-assessment support tool, the NIMCAST not only aids counties to become compliant with the NIMS, but also helps to identify resources that are needed to enhance incident preparedness. Check with your State NIMS coordinator to get setup for NIMCAST if not already done.

To learn more about NIMCAST and use the tool, visit www.fema.gov/nimcast/index.jsp.

Implement NIMS

NIMS should be used as the every-day method for organizing and carrying out a response to any type of emergency – from a home fire, natural disaster, hazardous materials spill, or even an outbreak of communicable disease — and to events which will require help from neighboring jurisdictions, your state, and up to the federal government.

*For information about ICS and how it affects your county's response structure and systems, consider taking the free on-line course titled *Introduction to the Incident Command System (IS-100)*, which is available at www.training.fema.gov/emiweb/IS/is100.asp.*



There are four phases for NIMS Implementation. They are:

1. Staff Training (see Training section on page 4).
2. Evaluation of existing plans, policies, and procedures to identify aspects where NIMS needs to be integrated in them. In particular, Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) must be evaluated for NIMS incorporation.
3. Modification of existing plans, procedures, and policies to reflect NIMS adoption. This includes modification of any emergency response plans in support of the National Response Plan (NRP) and any internal emergency plans such as Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) or Continuity of Government (COG) Plans. There is a Guide for making your plans NIMS compliant for Local/Tribal Jurisdictions available at the NIMS website, www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm.
4. Verification of achievement of the NIMS standards, including conducting exercises to demonstrate compliance with the standards.

An important component of NIMS implementation is the use of the Incident Command System (ICS) to provide a flexible, but consistent structure to organize response to emergencies and disasters. Many emergency response organizations have been using some form of ICS for many years. The ICS described in NIMS recognizes local ICS usages, and often what's been used locally is acceptable for NIMS compliance, though sometimes some terminology or adaptations for ICS structure may be required.

All county agencies – Police, Sheriff, Fire, Emergency Medical Services, Emergency Management, Homeland Security, Public Health, Public Works, and all others who have a duty to respond to emergencies – should work together on NIMS implementation. In many counties, this activity is coordinated by the person designated as the lead for Emergency Management.



Disaster and Emergency Response Planning

The planning process is dynamic and involves an ongoing system of updating plans based on results of drills, exercises, responses, changes in local, state, and federal rule making, updated knowledge about hazards, or by incorporating changes based on best practices of other jurisdictions.

Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) primarily spell out roles and responsibilities during an incident/event and they are often supplemented with additional documents such as *Standard Operating Procedures* and *Emergency Operating Procedures* which describe steps to follow when an event happens, and the procedures are developed through planning and testing those plans. Plans are often tested through evaluating actual responses and making adjustments to response procedures based on objective evaluation. NIMS also calls for testing plans and procedures through response exercises.

When responding to a routine emergency that your county has all the resources to handle, it is not required to use NIMS. However, experienced responders have said that when NIMS concepts are employed on a routine basis, including the Incident Command System, it works much smoother when they require assistance from others (mutual aid) because they have practiced it on a regular basis.

Further, a well-developed response plan identifies resources that may be needed for an unusual or a large response, as well as for mutual aid.

NIMS specifies that mutual aid agreements be in writing. There are many forms of mutual aid agreements, some simple and some complex. For example, informal mutual aid agreements among intra-county communities have existed for a long time. When resources are deployed across county or state borders, more formal mutual aid agreements need to be in place.

Documenting and formalizing mutual aid agreements between agencies and jurisdictions is a major part of NIMS and one of the measurements of NIMS compliance. Agency-to-agency, city-to-city, and county-to-county mutual aid agreements exist all over the country. NIMS compliance requirements suggest that counties revisit existing mutual aid agreements to ensure that NIMS standards are incorporated in them, particularly the use of the Incident Command System (ICS.)

Samples of mutual aid agreements to model are available from www.nimsonline.com/download_center/index.htm.

A model state/county mutual aid agreement can be found at www.emacweb.org/?123.

Drills and Exercises

Drills and exercises are used often to test disaster and emergency response plans, and to provide qualitative and quantitative measurements on how the plan works, and where gaps exist or adjustments are needed.

There are many different types of drills and exercises, all of which have their plusses and minuses. There may be tabletop

exercises, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises. Exercises which involve responders from multiple disciplines and multiple jurisdictions are the best way to measure incorporation of NIMS principles and practices, and also is a measurement criterion for NIMS compliance for federal FY07.

Conducting regular drills and exercises enhance the institutionalization of NIMS, which is one of the primary measurements of NIMS compliance.

When exercises are completed, NIMS calls for incorporating corrective actions into preparedness and response plans and procedures.

Some large-scale exercises occur on a statewide basis. To determine what exercises are planned for your state or region of your state, contact your state's Homeland Security/Emergency Management agency.

Every two years, a national exercise is conducted, called TOPOFF (meaning Top Officials.) Information about how TOPOFF exercises, plus reviews of these exercises and additional information about large-scale exercises is available at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/exercises.htm.

Resource Management

Resource management under NIMS defines standardized mechanisms and establishes requirements for processes to describe, inventory, mobilize, dispatch, track, and recover resources over the cycle of the incident.

This may sound more difficult than it really is. A resource typing system allows responders to keep track of all resources required and used for response. This is especially important when the county is receiving or providing mutual aid. Typed resources are easy to identify for replacement, upgrading, or exchange.

Resources are organized in these ways:

- **Category** – function for which the resource is most useful (firefighting, law enforcement & security, transportation, communications, public works & engineering, information & planning, mass care, etc.)
- **Kind** – broad class of characterization, such as teams, personnel, equipment, supplies, vehicles, and aircraft.
- **Components** – what composes the resource (e.g., hose, pump, ladder, truck, personnel, cots, blankets, water storage containers, syringes, etc.)
- **Metrics** – measurement standards that identify capability or capacity. Metrics will differ depending on the kind of resource being typed.
- **Type** – refers to the level of resource capability, and provides managers with additional information to aid the selection and best use of resources. A type is based on a minimum level of capability described by the identified metrics for that resource or component. Type I implies a higher capability than Type II.



Counties should use resource typing definitions to describe or inventory their resources. A description of the typing definitions and approach can be found at www.fema.gov/pdf/nims/NIMS_basic_resource_typing_system.pdf.

Homeland Security grant funds can be used to update or create an inventory of county resources in accordance with the Resource Typing Definitions.

A “freeware” database management software from the NIMS Integration Center assists communities in the inventory and loading of NIMS Typed Resources. This software is titled “Incident Resource Inventory System” (IRIS).

For more information about NIMS/IRIS, visit the NIMS Integration Center at www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/nims.shtm.

Communications and Information Management

NIMS and ICS describe standardized communications procedures. There is also an emphasis in NIMS for increasing the capacity for interoperable communications among responders, particularly those from multiple jurisdictions.

During federal FY07 and beyond, the use of standardized and consistent terminology, including the establishment of plain language communications standards across the public safety sector, are required for NIMS compliance.

Ten-codes were created when radio communications were the only method that emergency responders in the field could communicate with each other. The quality of sound and voice transmission was often poor. “10-4” was easier to hear on the radio. With today’s technology, quality of voice transmissions have improved dramatically.

While using “10-” codes locally may work just fine and is a common practice today, these codes are not used the same way by different agencies within a jurisdiction (such as police and EMS), nor in different counties, cities, or states. Also, emergency communications occur now not only over a radio, but

also by text messaging via wireless devices, cell phones, and other technology.

For all of these reasons, there is an emphasis now on using plain language when responders from multiple jurisdictions will be involved.

More information on the use of plain language and standardized terminology may be found at www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/More10Codes02-08-06.pdf

Glossary

EMPG: Emergency Management Performance Grant: One of the largest grant programs offered by the Department of Homeland Security through states that counties use to fund emergency planning and preparedness activities.

HSPD-5: Homeland Security Presidential Directive #5, released February 28, 2003, which applies to federal agencies developing and adopting NIMS. Federal agency implementation of NIMS affects states and counties by requirements to become “NIMS Compliant” in order to be eligible for federal preparedness funding in the form of DHS Grants and UASI funds.

ICS: Incident Command System. This is a system of coordinating people and resources under a flexible but common structure providing for a span of control that can expand as the response dynamics indicate.

NIMS: National Incident Management System, as described in HSPD-5.

NIMCAST: National Incident Management System Capabilities Assessment and Support Tool. This is an on-line method to determine where your county stands regarding its compliance with NIMS standards.

NIMS-IRIS: NIMS “Incident Resource Inventory System” – a freeware database provided by the NIMS Integration Center to help counties and localities classify their response resources according to NIMS standards.

NRP: National Response Plan, a written plan that provides direction to the federal government and the 32 signatory agencies on response to disasters that require federal intervention. This plan evolved from the earlier *Federal Response Plan*.

UASI: Urban Area Security Initiative. This DHS program provides financial assistance to address the unique planning, equipment, training, and exercise needs of high-threat, high-density urban areas, and to assist them in building an enhanced and sustainable capacity to prevent, respond to, and recover from threats or acts of terrorism.

More information on the Internet:

• **Current list of federal preparedness funding:**
www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm

• **Complete list of NIMS-related training:**
www.training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/crslist.asp

• **NIMCAST:**
www.fema.gov/nimcast/index.jsp

• **Samples of mutual aid agreements:**
www.nimsonline.com/download_center/index.htm

• **Model state/county mutual aid agreements:**
www.emacweb.org/?123

• **Information about large-scale exercises:**
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/exercises.htm

• **NACo’s Homeland Security section:**
www.naco.org/techassistance

About NACo

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation's 3,066 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public's understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.

About IAEM

IAEM is a non-profit organization representing 2,700+ emergency management and homeland security professionals for communities, state and federal disaster officials, private sector, non-governmental organizations and others involved in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from all types of disasters including acts of terrorism. The IAEM (www.iaem.com) is dedicated to promoting the goals of saving lives and protecting property during emergencies and disasters.



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