CHAPTER 6

UNIFIED COMMAND

Contents 6-1
Unified Command 6-2
Initial Unified Command Meeting Checklist 6-3
Command Meeting Requirements 6-3

UNIFIED COMMAND

Experience has proven that at incidents involving multi-agencies, there is a critical need for integrating management of resources into one operational organization that is managed and supported by one command structure. This is best established through an integrated, multi-disciplined organization. In the ICS, employing what is known as Unified Command fills this critical need.

Unified Command is a team effort that allows all agencies with jurisdictional responsibility for an incident, either geographical or functional, to participate in the management of the incident. Developing and implementing a common set of incident objectives and strategies demonstrate this participation that all can subscribe to, without losing or abdicating agency authority, responsibility or accountability. Those organizations that participate in Unified Command should have statutory responsibility for some portion of the incident or event. Assisting and cooperating agencies with no statutory responsibility that nonetheless contribute resources to the incident should not function at the Unified Command level. These agencies should instead, assign Agency Representative to effectively represent their agencies and resources through the Liaison Officer. In these ways, the principles that define Unified Command provide all of the necessary mechanisms for organizational representation and interagency management within a multi-agency incident response.

At a local level, frequent training and realistic exercises involving those agencies that may be represented at actual incidents should be considered a prerequisite for successful management of multi-agency incidents. These activities serve to familiarize each participating agency of their respective roles and responsibilities and clarify the capabilities and limitations of each agency. For example, a planned event such as a parade or air show may provide an opportunity for local, state and federal agencies to operate in a Unified Command structure.

A successfully managed multi-agency incident will occur only when the participating agencies' personnel have confidence in each other's competencies, authorities, responsibilities, and limitations as they relate to the incident. Beyond the associated processes, guidelines, and exercises, is the requirement for an attitude of cooperation. Coordinated strategy, tactics, and resource utilization to accomplish incident control must be the focus of all agencies at the scene.

Within a Unified Command, one person is selected as spokesperson for the groups. Typically, the person representing the agency with the highest resource commitment or most visible activity on the incident is selected. In some cases, this task may simply be assigned to the person with the most experience.

Unified Command incorporates the following principles:

a. One set of objectives is developed for the entire incident.
b. A collective approach to developing strategies to achieve incident goals.
c. Improved information flow and coordination between all jurisdictions and agencies involved in the incident.
d. All agencies with responsibility for the incident have an understanding of one another's priorities and restrictions.

e. No agency's authority or legal requirements will be compromised or neglected.
f. Each agency is fully aware of the plans, actions and constraints of all others.
g. The combined efforts of all agencies are optimized as they perform their respective assignments under a single Incident Action Plan.
h. Duplicative efforts are reduced or eliminated, thus reducing cost and chances for frustration and conflict.

INITIAL UNIFIED COMMAND MEETING CHECKLIST

It is essential to begin unified planning as early as possible. Initiate Unified Command as soon as two or more agencies having jurisdictional or functional responsibilities come together on an incident. It is especially important on those incidents where there may be competing priorities based on agency responsibilities.

All of the jurisdictional agencies Incident Commanders need to get together before the first operational period planning meeting in an Initial Unified Command Meeting. This meeting provides the responsible agency officials with an opportunity to discuss and concur on important issues prior to joint incident action planning. The agenda for the command meeting should include the following:

a. State jurisdictional/agency priorities and objectives.
b. Present jurisdictional limitations, concerns, and restrictions.
c. Develop a collective set of incident objectives.
d. Establish and agree on acceptable priorities.
e. Adopt an overall strategy or strategies to accomplish objectives.
f. Agree on the basic organization structure.
g. Designate the most qualified and acceptable Operations Section Chief.
h. The Operations Section Chief will normally be from the jurisdiction or agency that has the greatest involvement in the incident, although that is not essential.
i. Agree on General Staff personnel designations and planning, logistical, and finance agreements and procedures.
j. Agree on the resource ordering process to be followed.
k. Agree on cost-sharing procedures.
l. Agree on informational matters.
m. Designate one agency official to act as the Unified Command spokesperson.

The members of the Unified Command must be authorized to perform certain activities and actions on behalf of the jurisdiction or agency they represent. Such activities include, ordering of additional resources in support of the Incident Action Plan, possible loaning or sharing of resources to other jurisdictions, and agree to financial cost-sharing arrangements with participating agencies.

COMMAND MEETING REQUIREMENTS

Unified Incident Commanders should meet prior to the Incident Planning Meeting to discuss a number of key items. This meeting will serve to clarify issues and provide direction to other incident personnel who will develop the formal Incident Action Plan.

The following checklist provides a series of items to be addressed during the meeting between Incident Commanders where the development of incident strategy and objectives is done:

a. The Command Meeting should include only agency Incident Commanders.
b. The meeting should be brief, and important points should be documented. The important points should include agency capabilities and limitations, functional and jurisdictional responsibilities and the individual agency's objectives.
c. Prior to the meeting, the respective responsible officials should have reviewed the purposes and agenda items described above, and are prepared to discuss them.

The end result of the planning process will be a single Incident Action Plan that addresses multi-jurisdiction or multi-agency priorities and objectives, and provides an appropriate level of tactical direction and resource assignments for the unified effort.