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Unity of Command

2003





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- Safer Communities through integrated Emergency Management (Mission Statement from the CIMS Manual)
- Consider the control of those events where a number of agencies have a legitimate role within the Incident Management team
 - Natural Disasters
 - Full scale local emergencies

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The American Approach: Unified Command

- *“A team effort process, allowing all agencies with responsibility for an incident, either geographical or functional, to establish a common set of incident objectives and strategies that all can subscribe to”. “This is accomplished without losing or abdicating agency authority, responsibility or accountability”.*

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AMERICAN ICS SYSTEMS:

- ICS-The management system used to direct all operations at the incident scene. The Incident Commander (IC) is located at an Incident Command Post (ICP) at the incident scene.

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UNIFIED COMMAND

- An application of ICS used when there is more than one agency with incident jurisdiction. **Agencies work together through their designated Incident Commanders** at a single ICP to establish a common set of objectives and strategies, and a single Incident Action Plan.

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Issues that may arise in multi-agency IMT's

- Differences in Command systems and cultures- hierarchies, competencies and rank.
- Legal Issues
- The capacity of agencies
- Personalities.

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Practical Considerations for the Multi-agency IMT.

- All agencies will have different initial objectives.
- All agencies will have their own SOP's and duties to attend to in the early part of the incident.
- At some point (as early as practical) agencies have to manage the transition from a lead/single agency I/C (ICP) to a more 'unified command' situation.

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Points to Consider going into a ‘Unified Command’ scenario.

- True agency heads/ reps need to be present.
- One person must be the I/C.
- Build on existing management structures in place at the incident- ‘the car bonnet team’
- Have pre planned the set up of the IMT-Roles, responsibilities, the how, where and when.

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ADVANTAGES OF UNIFIED COMMAND

- One set of objectives is developed for the entire incident.
- A collective approach is made to developing strategies to achieve incident objectives.
- Information flow and co-ordination is improved between all jurisdictions and agencies involved in the incident.
- All agencies with responsibility for the incident have an understanding of one another's priorities and restrictions.

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- No agency's authority or legal requirement will be compromised or neglected.
- Each agency is fully aware of the plans, actions and constraints of all others.
- The combined efforts of all agencies are optimised as they perform their respective assignments under a single Incident Action Plan.

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- Duplicated efforts are reduced or eliminated thus reducing costs and the chances of frustration and conflict.
- Agreement on the individual/agency fulfilling the role of Incident Controller.

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A local example-Auckland International Airport.

- An IMT to manage aircraft incidents.
- The need to pre-plan the IMT evolved out of the need to run successful emergency exercises.
- The agencies involved identified the need for a unified command which grew from literally “standing together and planning together”.

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- The silo effect had to be managed.
- Underscored the value of pre planning-it works

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Accomplished Unified Command requires advance planning, understanding and acceptance within respective agencies. If it is not fully understood it can cause confusion or be rejected. Once understood and applied it is a highly desirable feature of ICS

The only way to defeat parochialism, internal and external politics and a systemic lack of communication is to literally get around a table and agree on how and who will manage your emergency.

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