The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazards incident management approach that:

- Allows for the integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure.
- Enables a coordinated response among various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private.
- Establishes common processes for planning and managing resources.

ICS is flexible and can be used for incidents of any type, scope, and complexity. ICS allows its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single or multiple incidents.

ICS is used by all levels of government—Federal, State, tribal, and local—as well as by many nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. ICS is also applicable across disciplines. It is typically structured to facilitate activities in five major functional areas: Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance/Administration. All of the functional areas may or may not be used based on the incident needs. Intelligence/Investigations is an optional sixth functional area that is activated on a case-by-case basis.

As a system, ICS is extremely useful; not only does it provide an organizational structure for incident management, but it also guides the process for planning, building, and adapting that structure. Using ICS for every incident or planned event helps hone and maintain skills needed for the large-scale incidents.

FAQs

Q. How does NIMS relate to local incident command?

A: A basic premise of NIMS is that all incidents begin and end locally. NIMS does not take command away from State and local authorities. NIMS simply provides the framework to enhance the ability of responders, including the private sector and NGOs, to work together more effectively.   The Federal Government supports State and local authorities when their resources are overwhelmed or anticipated to be overwhelmed. Federal departments and agencies respect the sovereignty and responsibilities of local, tribal, and State governments while rendering assistance. The intention of the Federal Government in these situations is not to command the response, but rather to support the affected local, tribal, and/or State governments.

Q. Why is ICS needed?

A: When an incident requires response from multiple local emergency management and response agencies, effective cross-jurisdictional coordination using common processes and systems is critical. The Incident Command System (ICS) provides a flexible, yet standardized core mechanism for coordinated and collaborative incident management, whether for incidents where additional resources are required or are provided from different organizations within a single jurisdiction or outside the jurisdiction, or for complex incidents with national implications.

Q. What is ICS Designed To Do?

A: The ICS is a widely applicable management system designed to enable effective, efficient incident management by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure. ICS is a fundamental form of management established in a standard format, with the purpose of enabling incident managers to identify the key concerns associated with the incident—often under urgent conditions—without sacrificing attention to any component of the command system. It represents organizational "best practices" and, as an element of the Command and Management Component of NIMS, has become the standard for emergency management across the country. Designers of the system recognized early that ICS must be interdisciplinary and organizationally flexible to meet the following management challenges:

- Meet the needs of incidents of any kind or size.
- Allow personnel from a variety of agencies to meld rapidly into a common management structure.
- Provide logistical and administrative support to operational staff.
- Be cost effective by avoiding duplication of efforts.

ICS consists of procedures for controlling personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications. It is a system designed to be used or applied from the time an incident occurs until the requirement for management and operations no longer exists.

Q: In order to meet NIMS compliance, does it matter which brand of ICS is used (i.e. NIIMS, FIRESCOPE, NWCG)?

A: To be NIMS compliant, you need to use the Incident Command System (ICS) structure described in the current version of NIMS. The foundation for ICS principles embedded in NIMS is derived from the National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS), Firefighting Resources of California Organized for Potential Emergencies (FIRESCOPE), and National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG).

For more information on the Incident Command System:
https://www.fema.gov/incident-command-system-resources