HISTORY OF

Fire Incident Command in the US

In early firefighting, every department managed incidents differently, per their own rules and procedures. The modern incident command system as we know it didn't get its start until the second half of the 20th century.

1945

Large Fire Organization

Following WWII, many returning veterans applied their military command experiences to the firefighting services, forming the Large Fire Organization (LFO) and adopting the T-card systems to track the status of key firefighting resources.

1970

California Fires

During devastating fires in Southern California, neighboring departments experienced a great deal of confusion and disorganization as multiple command posts were established for the same incident. The situation taxed their organizational capability, which lead fire leaders to search for a solution to coordinated multiagency response with the FIRESCOPE program.

MID 1970s

Wild Fire Service Roll out

The wild fire service began implementing standard procedures for incident management and after-incident reporting. These largely involved radio communication and paper-based forms to record activities and outcomes. These pen-and-paper measures would later pave the way for the Incident Action Plans (IAP) and specific ICS forms.

1976

All-Hazards Approach

Instead of just wild fires, the focus began to shift to development of an all-risk, all-hazard system that could be used to manage any incident. The first proposal for an incident command system (ICS) was developed in April 1976.

1990s

Coast Guard Adoption

One early-adopter emergency response agency was the U.S. Coast Guard. Following the Valdez oil spill in March 1989, the Coast Guard began looking for way to better coordinate information, planning, and tactical response. Several Coast Guard members started a grassroots campaign to use ICS, which led to adoption of the system.

2000s

NIMS Following September 11th Attacks

The horrific terrorist attacks of September 11th demonstrated the need for a national approach to incident management. Moving forward, President George W. Bush issued HSPD-5, directing the development of a single, national incident management system, which would become the NIMS we know today.

TODAY

National Framework

NIMS now acts as a national framework to manage domestic incidents of all sizes and types. Individual departments have flexibility in how they apply ICS, provided that they meet the standards of NIMS. The ICS tactics and terminology have also influenced departments outside of the US, including in the UK, Canada, and Australia.

FUTURE

Technology and Improvements

New technology is being designed to make incident command more efficient and safe, based on the principles of NIMS. Moving forward, many agencies will likely adopt specific incident command technology to communicate key information and make informed decisions. With the rise of instantaneous information-sharing, the opportunities are endless.

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