



F46 Examples of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) Protocols Within a Local Medical Examiner's Office

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This presentation will provide an example of where forensic odontology fits within the Medical Examiner's Incident Command System. How the Medical Examiner office integrates within the scope of a larger disaster will also be discussed. Participants will learn the basics of the NIMS-ICS protocols and basic terminology.

This presentation of NIMS-ICS will impact the forensic science community by improving rescue and recovery in a major disaster.

First responders and rescue workers have found large and small disasters to be logistical nightmares. Multiple jurisdictions responding to an incident can cause over utilization, shortages and redundancy of assets. Command and control of these incidents becomes more difficult under these circumstances. In addition, inadequate communication among local responders from various jurisdictions can compromise safety.

In 1970 California had experienced a series of devastating wildfires in which sixteen people lost their lives. In addition 700 structures were destroyed and the cost was approximately \$18 million per day.

"Although all of the responding agencies cooperated to the best of their ability, numerous problems with communication and coordination hampered their effectiveness." To protect life and property, the United States Congress mandated the U.S. Forestry Service to design a system that would allow the local firefighters, police and other responders to merge themselves into a larger organization. The command structure that arose out of these disasters was the origin of the National Incident Management Systems (NIMS). Originally, this was referred to as Firescope (Firefighting RESources of California Organized for Potential Emergencies). The system was simple in design, allowing for an easy expansion and contraction throughout any fire disaster.

The federal government and emergency management organizations quickly realized the flexibility of Firescope. Eventually Firescope became known as Incident Command System (ICS), an all hazards system.

For example the Incident Commander (IC), the person in charge, will be the most qualified to run the event. Reporting to the IC will be the operations, logistics, planning, and finance sections. As the flow chart continues beneath each section, there are Divisions. Under the Divisions are Branches, then Groups or Units. This flow chart system creates a title and description for each position. Command and control are immediately more manageable. Common terminology became essential for everyone to be able to understand each other.

As additional jurisdictions are requested for the event, the ICS is able to change to a Unified Command System. This allows for individuality of the organizations participating in the disaster. NIMS-ICS, as it is now called, provides for a set of standardized protocols for multi-agency coordination. Incident action planning becomes paramount in order to coordinate the influx of personnel and equipment from multi jurisdictions. Proper use of these resources will result in a successful outcome.

The medical examiner's office is one of the agencies that is incorporated into a mass casualty disaster plan. Forensic odontology is within the Operations Section. Understanding and training of NIMS-ICS is essential for all dental personnel who participate in a mass casualty incident. For example, most private dental offices have a command and control built into their flow of the office. The dentist is the incident commander. The office manager is the operations section chief and runs the day-to-day activities. When dentists participate in a mass casualty incident, they invariably forget that they are a part of a larger organization and command system. Understanding and following the command structure often gets lost in the "I know best, I am a forensic odontologist here to identify human remains" attitude.

NIMS, ICS, Forensic Odontology