

Why train in ICS?

By Michelle Kleinhans, managing director, Dynamic Incident Management



Think of what is mostly shared as the reason why incidents 'got away' from responders. Yes, 90 percent of the time it is said or written that "We just did not have enough resources".

Well with that said and just before you unleash the comments and opinions, just think about it for a minute, "Not enough resources"? What does that really mean to you?

Ask yourself, maybe as a tactical responder or even as an incident commander, during an incident, do all resources know:

- What to do and who to report to?
- Do you know who they are or did they check in?
- Are they all using one incident management system?
- Do they all know who is currently in command?
- Are they aware of the current incident management structure in place?

Emergency response personnel, whether operational or functional as well as emergency operation centres (EOCs) should be trained in the incident command system (ICS) on a regular basis, so that everyone is familiar with their role and responsibilities as defined within the plan of the organisation, local

municipality, district municipality, province or country.

Supervisory roles should receive a higher level of ICS training, as leadership bears a higher responsibility and accountability to lead a team or responders under crisis conditions.

A well-developed incident command system (ICS) training programme that both guides and promotes all levels of ICS training is vital to the successful nationwide implementation of a National Incident Management System (NIMS). However, ICS training requires a continuous series of planning, organising, equipping, exercising, evaluating, taking and implementing corrective action.

Simulations (known and unknown) and exercises should also be conducted to test emergency response, continuity and communications plans and to evaluate the ability of personnel to carry out their assigned roles and responsibilities during incidents.

There is clearly a need to effectively communicate, coordinate, control and manage resources during incidents and someone must be in charge, objectives and priorities must be established that will provide direction and control to avoid conflict and to establish order out of chaos.

So let's get back to the "not enough resources."

Do you still feel that you do not have enough resources or do you start to see that it is not always quantity but it is the quality and management of the deployed resources that will make the difference during all levels of incidents.

To summarise

- ICS theoretical training alone is not enough!
- Trained incident management teams (theory) is not enough!

What can we do?

We can make ICS training more meaningful, focused on practical implementation; in other words, structure it around practical learning and exercises.

There is a need for refresher training and not through your own personnel but with a subject matter expert that can see the 'missing' elements, refresh and strengthen the core skills in the group, without being part of the team but rather the original facilitator with a fresh pair of eyes.

One thing nobody can argue is that knowledge and skills deteriorate over time and don't say it is not so; what is not used is lost!

So why not do refresher training through the experts that trained you in the first place, instead of continuing training what "you" think is correct in your mind and your own rules, instead of using a generic trained system in the country.

Without proper, well trained personnel and correct implemented incident management systems we will remain in chaos during incidents.

Now that it is said, by training in ICS regularly, hopefully the phrase of "not enough resources" will change to "the incident was managed effectively and efficiently with well-trained and equipped resources".