

# INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

## A. INTRODUCTION

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The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons highlighted the need to focus on improving emergency management, incident response capabilities, and coordination processes across the country. A comprehensive national approach, applicable at all jurisdictional levels and across functional disciplines, improves the effectiveness of emergency management/response personnel<sup>2</sup> across the full spectrum of potential incidents and hazard scenarios (including but not limited to natural hazards, terrorist activities, and other manmade disasters). Such an approach improves coordination and cooperation between public and private agencies/organizations in a variety of emergency management and incident response activities. The *National Incident Management System* (NIMS) framework sets forth the comprehensive national approach (see Table 1).

Incidents typically begin and end locally, and are managed on a daily basis at the lowest possible geographical, organizational, and jurisdictional level. However, there are instances in which successful incident management operations depend on the involvement of multiple jurisdictions, levels of government, functional agencies, and/or emergency responder disciplines. These instances require effective and efficient coordination across this broad spectrum of organizations and activities.

NIMS uses a systematic approach to integrate the best existing processes and methods into a unified national framework for incident management. Incident management refers to how incidents are managed across all homeland security activities, including prevention, protection, and response, mitigation, and recovery.

This framework forms the basis for interoperability and compatibility that will, in turn, enable a diverse set of public and private organizations to conduct well-integrated and effective emergency management and incident response operations. Emergency management is the coordination and integration of all activities necessary to build, sustain, and improve the capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, or mitigate against threatened or actual natural disasters, acts of terrorism, or other manmade disasters. It does this through a core set of concepts, principles, procedures, organizational processes, terminology, and standard requirements applicable to a broad community of NIMS users.

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<sup>2</sup> Emergency management/response personnel include Federal, State, territorial, tribal, substate regional, and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, private-sector organizations, critical infrastructure owners and operators, and all other organizations and individuals who assume an emergency management role.

Table 1. Overview of NIMS

What NIMS Is:	What NIMS Is NOT:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A comprehensive, nationwide, systematic approach to incident management, including the Incident Command System, Multiagency Coordination Systems, and Public Information</li><li>• A set of preparedness concepts and principles for all hazards</li><li>• Essential principles for a common operating picture and interoperability of communications and information management</li><li>• Standardized resource management procedures that enable coordination among different jurisdictions or organizations</li><li>• Scalable, so it may be used for all incidents (from day-to-day to large-scale)</li><li>• A dynamic system that promotes ongoing management and maintenance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A response plan</li><li>• Only used during large-scale incidents</li><li>• A communications plan</li><li>• Only applicable to certain emergency management/incident response personnel</li><li>• Only the Incident Command System or an organization chart</li><li>• A static system</li></ul>

## B. CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES

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NIMS is based on the premise that utilization of a common incident management framework will give emergency management/response personnel a flexible but standardized system for emergency management and incident response activities. NIMS is flexible because the system components can be utilized to develop plans, processes, procedures, agreements, and roles for all types of incidents; it is applicable to any incident regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity. Additionally, NIMS provides an organized set of standardized operational structures, which is critical in allowing disparate organizations and agencies to work together in a predictable, coordinated manner.

### 1. FLEXIBILITY

The components of NIMS are adaptable to any situation, from routine, local incidents to incidents requiring the activation of interstate mutual aid to those requiring a coordinated Federal response, whether planned (e.g., major sporting or community events), notice (e.g., hurricane) or no-notice (e.g., earthquake). This flexibility is essential for NIMS to be applicable across the full spectrum of potential incidents, including those that require multiagency, multijurisdictional (such as incidents that occur along international borders), and/or multidisciplinary coordination. Flexibility in the NIMS framework facilitates scalability of emergency management and incident response activities. NIMS also provides the

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flexibility for unique implementation in specified areas around the Nation. The National Integration Center (NIC), as appropriate, will review and support implementation plans, which reflect these individual requirements and organizational structures, for consistency with NIMS concepts and principles.

## **2. STANDARDIZATION**

Flexibility to manage incidents of any size requires coordination and standardization among emergency management/response personnel and their affiliated organizations. NIMS provides a set of standardized organizational structures that improve integration and connectivity among jurisdictions and disciplines, starting with a common foundation of preparedness and planning. Personnel and organizations that have adopted the common NIMS framework are able to work together, thereby fostering cohesion among the various organizations involved in all aspects of an incident. NIMS also provides and promotes common terminology, which fosters more effective communication among agencies and organizations responding together to an incident.

## **C. OVERVIEW OF NIMS COMPONENTS**

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NIMS integrates existing best practices into a consistent, nationwide, systematic approach to incident management that is applicable at all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector, and across functional disciplines in an all-hazards context. Five major components make up this systems approach: Preparedness, Communications and Information Management, Resource Management, Command and Management, and Ongoing Management and Maintenance.

### **1. NIMS COMPONENTS**

The components of NIMS were not designed to stand alone, but to work together in a flexible, systematic manner to provide the national framework for incident management. A more detailed discussion of each component is included in subsequent sections of this document.

#### **a. Preparedness**

Effective emergency management and incident response activities begin with a host of preparedness activities conducted on an ongoing basis, in advance of any potential incident. Preparedness involves an integrated combination of assessment; planning; procedures and protocols; training and exercises; personnel qualifications, licensure, and certification; equipment certification; and evaluation and revision.

#### **b. Communications and Information Management**

Emergency management and incident response activities rely on communications and information systems that provide a common operating picture to all command and coordination sites. NIMS describes the requirements necessary for a standardized framework for communications and emphasizes the need for a common operating picture. This component is based on the concepts of interoperability, reliability, scalability, and portability, as well as the resiliency and redundancy of communications and information systems.

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### c. Resource Management

Resources (such as personnel, equipment, or supplies) are needed to support critical incident objectives. The flow of resources must be fluid and adaptable to the requirements of the incident. NIMS defines standardized mechanisms and establishes the resource management process to identify requirements, order and acquire, mobilize, track and report, recover and demobilize, reimburse, and inventory resources.

### d. Command and Management

The Command and Management component of NIMS is designed to enable effective and efficient incident management and coordination by providing a flexible, standardized incident management structure. The structure is based on three key organizational constructs: the Incident Command System, Multiagency Coordination Systems, and Public Information.

### e. Ongoing Management and Maintenance

Within the auspices of Ongoing Management and Maintenance, there are two components: the NIC and Supporting Technologies.

#### ***(1) National Integration Center***

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 required the Secretary of Homeland Security to establish a mechanism for ensuring the ongoing management and maintenance of NIMS, including regular consultation with other Federal departments and agencies; State, tribal, and local stakeholders; and NGOs and the private sector. The NIC provides strategic direction, oversight, and coordination of NIMS and supports both routine maintenance and the continuous refinement of NIMS and its components. The NIC oversees the program and coordinates with Federal, State, tribal, and local partners in the development of compliance criteria and implementation activities. It provides guidance and support to jurisdictions and emergency management/response personnel and their affiliated organizations as they adopt or, consistent with their status, are encouraged to adopt the system. The NIC also oversees and coordinates the publication of NIMS and its related products. This oversight includes the review and certification of training courses and exercise information.

#### ***(2) Supporting Technologies***

As NIMS and its related emergency management and incident response systems evolve, emergency management/response personnel will increasingly rely on technology and systems to implement and continuously refine NIMS. The NIC, in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate, oversees and coordinates the ongoing development of incident management-related technology, including strategic research and development.