

Enhancing Housing Resilience:

Leveraging the National Incident Management (NIMS) Framework

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a comprehensive approach to effectively manage and coordinate emergency response efforts across different agencies and organizations during incidents and disasters.

This guide explains how housing organizations can leverage the NIMS framework before, during, and after a natural disaster or emergency incident.



Why use the National Incident Management System framework in housing?

NIMS provides stakeholders across a community with common vocabulary, systems, and processes to successfully meet objectives or needs as outlined within emergency preparedness plans. NIMS defines operational systems that guide how personnel work together during emergency incidents.

Leaders of housing organizations typically balance many responsibilities and are often expected to serve in numerous roles to support operations. These responsibilities range from establishing policies and budgets that influence residents' livelihoods, to answering questions from community members and media. Responsibilities usually increase during disasters and emergencies, and housing organization leaders often need help to conduct their jobs. Using the NIMS framework for delegating duties in emergencies may benefit housing organizations.



Housing organization leaders can respond more effectively pre- and post-disasters when their leadership teams are familiar with emergency management processes and have established relationships with their emergency managers to understand how they operate. These same staff make significant decisions before, during, and after emergencies. By collaborating with emergency managers, housing leaders can better understand the community's needs and make informed decisions.

Leveraging the Incident Command System during an emergency

The NIMS framework utilizes the Incident Command System (ICS), a standardized approach to the command, control, and coordination of on-scene incident management. ICS is the combination of procedures, personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications operating within a typical organizational structure, designed to aid in managing on-scene resources during incidents.

ICS is used for various incidents, no matter the size and complexity, as well as planned events. The ICS command structure creates a clear chain of command within the ranks of a fire department and any other agencies assisting in the emergency response.

Under ICS, an incident commander has overall authority and responsibility for conducting incident operations. The executive director is typically the highest-ranking official within a housing organization and most likely takes on the “incident commander” role.



Public information officer:

The PIO interfaces with the public, media, and other agencies with incident-related information needs. The PIO gathers, verifies, coordinates, and disseminates accessible, meaningful, and timely information on the incident for internal and external audiences. An organization's PIO should be trained to manage and respond to media inquiries during crises. A member of an organization's communications, human resources, legal, or executive management team is ideal for this position.

Safety officer:

The safety officer monitors incident operations and advises the incident commander on matters relating to the health and safety of incident personnel. An organization's director of operations or risk management is ideal for this position.

Liaison officer:

The liaison officer is the incident commander's point of contact for representatives of governmental agencies, jurisdictions, non-governmental organizations, and private-sector organizations not included in the command support staff. An organization's deputy executive director, or another executive management team member, is ideal for this position.

Activating section chiefs

ICS also appoints general staff and section chiefs responsible for the functional aspects of the incident command structure, including operations, planning, logistics, and finance/administration. The incident commander activates these section chiefs as needed.

These functions default to the incident commander until a section chief is assigned. The incident commander selects section chiefs based on incident priorities and should review selections periodically as the incident evolves.

Operations section:

- Operations section personnel plan and perform tactical activities to achieve the incident commander's objectives.
- Objectives typically focus on saving lives, reducing immediate hazards, protecting property and the environment, establishing situational control, and restoring normal operations.

Planning section:

- Planning section personnel collect, evaluate, and disseminate incident situation information to the incident commander.

Logistics section:

- Logistics section personnel provide services and support for effective and efficient incident management, including ordering resources.

Finance/administration section:

- The incident commander establishes a finance/administration section when the incident management activities involve on-scene or incident-specific finance and administrative support services.

A structured approach to emergency preparedness, response, and recovery

In a world where natural disasters and emergencies are becoming increasingly prevalent, the role of housing organizations in ensuring the safety and well-being of communities cannot be understated. NIMS offers a comprehensive framework that empowers housing organizations to effectively navigate the challenges posed by these incidents. By adopting NIMS principles, housing leaders can establish a structured approach to emergency preparedness, response, and recovery, ultimately safeguarding residents and minimizing the impact of disasters.



Through the deployment of ICS roles, such as incident commanders, public information officers, safety officers, and liaison officers, housing organizations can ensure efficient decision-making, communication, and resource allocation during critical times. Furthermore, NIMS enables housing leaders to forge partnerships with emergency managers and other relevant entities, fostering a deeper understanding of community needs and informed decision-making.

By embracing NIMS principles, housing leaders can navigate emergencies with confidence, leading their teams with a structured approach and safeguarding the well-being of residents and communities in times of crisis.

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