

The importance of ICS training and applications: In particular, Change of Command and Incident Posts.

By KD5BJ

Too many times we think that trainings or classroom courses are the usual bla, bla, bla. A waste of time, although necessary to get a certificate that will not help us in our activities. We obtain it, file it, forget about it.

The Uvalde School Shooting, however, sounds another resolute alarm for all of those volunteers and professionals that take the teaching of ICS for granted and elect not to use them.

Before I go on, let's remember that law enforcement officers of all agencies, no matter the color of their uniform, are people with a heart of gold, with excellent intentions, who try their best to keep us safe. But, unfortunately, not all incidents evolve in the way we want or expect.

These are a few lessons learned from that horrible and catastrophic incident. As we read in the Texas House Report:

1. The first person on the scene assumes the role of Incident Commander until someone more capable or better suited for the incident arrives. This did not happen in Uvalde.
2. A Command post was not setup. A Command Post could have transformed chaos into order. Including deliberate assignment of tasks and flow of communication necessary to make informed critical decisions, like informing responders that students and teachers had survived the initial burst of fire and needed immediate medical care.
3. An Incident Commander located away from the heat of the action would have realized that radios were mostly ineffective, that responders needed other lines of communications to communicate or hear important information like the victims' phone calls to 911
4. An Incident Commander in a Command Post outside, but near the building, would have been more likely to locate the master key more quickly or to suggest to try to open the door without keys.
5. An Incident Commander in an Incident Post might have recognized the situation as an active shooter scenario and act accordingly by directing the Chief of operations inside the building and activate an active shooter plan.

These are just a very few of the points, just in the introduction of the report, where ICS was not followed, but would have been greatly beneficial.

Unfortunately, no responders during the crisis seized the initiative to establish an incident command post. No one, not even high rank officials of any agency, approached the Chief and provided suggestions or assistance, or relieved him from the position, as prescribed by basic ICS FEMA 100. Being relieved, or asking to be relieved, of a position of command is always honorable and always a good choice when needed.

When we are under tremendous stress, or scared, our minds stop working and retrieve to what we know and practice. If we mindfully train over and over and over again, if we train like we fight, like Army Rangers say, we will fight like we train. Mindfully training means we consider and play games of what ifs in our mind while applying ICS tools and other skills that we learn by constantly repeating what we learn and do. It takes repeating a behavior at least ten times to make it a habit.

When the E.C. calls us for duty, we have the eyes of our served agency looking at us. When they call us, that means they count on us, individually and as a team. We must succeed beyond expectation. Please learn and cultivate the tools that ICS or any ARES training in the Task Book has to offer. Don't treat it like another easily learned certificate. Those skills have been proven successful, and when not applied, disastrous. Please let's keep training on equipment, too.

Then, when the moment comes when we can make a difference, we know fear will knock at our door, but, we will be able to put it at a side with confidence. Like Winston Churchill once said, fear is a reaction, but courage is a decision. We will be able to choose courage and perform well, especially when we prepare and commit to it before it is needed.

These were my prepared remarks until this past weekend. I spent the last 2.5 days training with CERT, Citizens Emergency Response Team, in Bastrop County.

On Sunday afternoon we had an exercise with actors playing their parts, kids, hysterical teachers, and moms, victims of a storm with straight winds and possible tornado that hit Bastrop High School. We had four tries, or rounds, in which we changed roles from IMT to medical operation teams, etc. It was total chaos.

By the fourth and final try we improved much, and chaos became an organized chaos, but chaos it remained. I have now a much better understanding of what happened in Uvalde and what happens anywhere else ground zero of a major incident.

Please let's get to know very well our roles, our team members' roles, the ICS system, and, last but not least, our equipment. You never know when chaos knocks at our door and throw us off our feet in a real event.

This is KD5BJ, please put me down as short time, back to net.