Deployments..and the dreaded ICS paperwork
by KI5UAJ

I'm sharing this as we have had recent involvement with deployment but more important to me, have newer membership who are learning the concept of the Incident Command System. My report this evening isn't describing the ICS structure itself but more of what the basic forms within an Incident Action Plan are for and to encourage participation in the creation of these documents by volunteering as a Sections Chief or as their assistant.

There are lots of ICS forms online and it can be really overwhelming and they all have their purpose. Knowing a few basic ones ,can be really beneficial, especially seeing them when we are training (and appreciating) a really well prepared document. After reading it, there may be little to no questions asked of what the mission is. I've seen those kind of reports generated within this group.

As ARES team members, we train in communications a lot in weekly Nets, SKYWARN activations and during events in which we volunteer for within our communities.

This training provides us with a wealth of valuable skills which we rely upon as we serve in deployments. Nets let us practice how to program our radios, test how well our equipment can hit the repeaters, how to operate in a directed net and how to use complex digital modes. Events allow us to learn how to deploy to a location and operate portable or mobile stations and recently, how to cross-band the two. We learn how to communicate in real-time with events going on around us, how to make important observations and how to properly

inform Net Control of a situation like a medical emergency during a marathon.

In addition, our ARES organization and served agencies ask us to obtain formal training in FEMA's **Incident Command System (ICS**) and **National Incident Management System (NIMS)**. We need all of this training to perform well as emergency communicators. You can't just show up to the scene of a disaster, pick up a microphone and talk without all of this training and practice! It has its purpose and is just as important to know as how to use the radio.

One of the most important aspects of our deployments, whether events or actual emergencies, is the planning and documentation process. We will not be successful, either individually or as a team, if we don't plan effectively. And without a good plan, we may be setting our team members up to fail.

Many criticize the Incident Command System as "just a bunch of forms." Nothing could be further from the truth! The forms are an important way to make sure that there is a solid plan and base during the deployment, that it's fully thought-out and that it is communicated to members in an effective way. By operating within the plan, each of us becomes a force-multiplier to achieving the goal of the deployment. It has lots of uses and helps establish the game plan and helps prevent duplication of efforts and useless expenses and depletion of supplies. The plans definitely can change during an event.

In addition, forms collect important information about what happened and when during a deployment so that leadership can go back and analyze it later and suggest improvements for the next one. They play an important role during an after action report. They also may support reimbursements for expenses that have occurred during the incident.

Here are some of the forms we use to plan a deployment, and which you'll see and use when you participate:

- The **Incident Briefing (ICS 201)** provides the Incident Commander and staff with basic information regarding the incident situation and the resources allocated to the incident.
- An **Incident Action Plan (IAP)** documents incident goals, operational period objectives and the response strategy. Please be sure to read it thoroughly to understand all its details.
- The **Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205)** provides information on all radio frequencies and radio system assignments.
- The **General Message (ICS 213)** is used to send any message or notification to incident personnel that requires hard-copy delivery.
- The **Activity Log (ICS 214)** records details of notable activities at any ICS level including single resources, equipment, Task Forces, etc. These logs provide basic incident activity documentation, and a reference for any after-action report. ARES members should always carry an ICS 214 in their go-kits and immediately use it to start a log of your activities during a deployment. Also remember that anything you write down will become a matter of the public record as well as that which you SHOULD have written down. I refer to this as your daily diary. Make notations often!
- The **Communications Log (ICS 309)** records the details of message traffic and is used by either an individual or a Net Control Operator (NCO). These logs provide the basic

reference from which to extract communications traffic history.

After the incident concludes, you may be requested to submit an After-Action Report in which you gather and record your thoughts about what worked and what didn't; important information which will be used in future plans.

Practice makes perfect. Participating in events can help you practice using your equipment and communicating in real-time with things going on all around you. It provides opportunities to practice using the ICS Forms which will help you understand the plan for the deployment and your part in it.

I have worked under the ICS in my different careers. Usually, it was word passed down from the chain of command and orders to follow. No real direct contact with the leaders and planners during an event unless it was at a briefing we sat in on.

Within this ARES group though, we use the system a lot for Chain of Command/leadership/duties functions and the appropriate forms to generate the IAP. Yes, it is involved for those who are participating in its preparation...we mostly have enough time to create the document collectively if you are one of the sections leaders. We use these forms during are planned training events and I encourage members to volunteer for these positions as a section leader or as their assistant to help out in the preparing of the documents necessary. You will appreciate the planning and preparation more as you are a part of the document.

That concludes tonight's training.

Thanks, this is KI5UAJ, Rudy, returning to net control.