

Ten Ways to Use NIMS in Your Exercise

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is mandated by Homeland Security Presidential Decision Directive 5. Compliance with NIMS will be a factor in eligibility for many types of funding. Exercises are one of the ways personnel can be oriented to NIMS and start learning to use it appropriately in their organizations.

The first **four** components are easily integrated into an exercise. There are also other simple things you can do during the planning process to help familiarize all personnel.

- ① Have exercise participants complete a brief orientation to NIMS, such as the online “Introduction to NIMS”
- ② Provide copies of the most recent NIMS document to all personnel (or make it available for download). Require that all exercise planning documents and presentations use the common terminology required by NIMS.
- ③ The planning phase of many exercises doubles as a time to revise plans and procedures. Make sure that compliance with NIMS is one of the criteria in the review.
- ④ Include the Incident Command System and, if applicable, Unified Command in your exercise. Require that players use NIMS organization and terms. Make this part of the learning experience if NIMS is new to your organization. If personnel already have some familiarity with NIMS, make its use part of what is evaluated.

The Six Components of NIMS

COMMAND AND MANAGEMENT

Incident Command, Unified Command, Multi-Agency Coordination Systems, and Public Information Systems

PREPAREDNESS

Plans, training, exercises, personnel qualification and certification, equipment acquisition and certification, mutual aid, and document control

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Description, inventory, mobilization, dispatch, tracking, and recovery



COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Incident management communications and information management

SUPPORTING TECHNOLOGIES

Voice and data communications, information management systems, data display systems

ONGOING MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT

... of the NIMS system over time, by the NIMS Integration Center in the Department of Homeland Security

- ⑤ Use your exercise planning process as a way to assess organizational preparedness as described in NIMS. Include in your evaluation packet a sheet that asks people to assess items related to NIMS preparedness factors, such as plans, training, exercises, personnel qualification and certification, equipment acquisition and certification, and mutual aid arrangements.
- ⑥ Use the exercise as a way to practice NIMS resource management processes. These include resource description, inventory, mobilization, dispatch, tracking, and recovery. If your organization already uses a NIMS compatible resource management system, make it part of what is evaluated.
- ⑦ Include developing a Joint Information System and setting up a Joint Communications Center as part of your exercise, even if only on paper. This will help ensure that your plans for joint communications are ready when you need them.
- ⑧ If communications are part of what you plan to exercise, review the NIMS materials and be very precise about whether you mean the content, the procedures for sharing information, the systems set up to manage that flow, or the equipment used.
- ⑨ If you are ramping up to a full-scale exercise, run a tabletop or two to see which types of Multi-Agency Coordination Systems would be appropriate for which kinds of incidents. When you reach the point of exercising an Emergency Operations Center or a Multi-Agency Coordination Entity, make sure its role and its relationship to the Incident Command Post and other Multi-Agency Coordination Systems is clearly defined and evaluated.
- ⑩ When in doubt, try it out. Use exercises as a way of figuring out how to make NIMS work for your organization. It is designed to be flexible, so make sure your evaluation strategy includes a way for people to provide feedback on how to best integrate it into future operations.