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## Unit 4: Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

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## Objectives

At the end of this unit, the participants should be able to:

- Describe the role and function of the Incident Commander.
  - Describe the role and function of the Command Staff.
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## Scope

- Unit Introduction
  - Unit Objectives
  - Incident Commander
    - Deputy Incident Commander
    - Changing Incident Commanders
    - Transferring Incident Commanders
  - Knowledge Review
  - Command Staff
    - Public Information Officer (PIO)
    - Safety Officer
    - Liaison Officer
    - Knowledge Review
  - Activity: Command Staff Roles
  - Summary
- 

## Methodology

The instructors will outline the objectives for this unit, and will then overview the role of the Incident Commander. The instructors will summarize the Incident Commander's responsibilities and will introduce the role of the Deputy Incident Commander.

After a Knowledge Review, the instructors will transition to the Command Staff. The presentation outlines the responsibilities of the Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer. To check for comprehension about the Command Staff, the participants will review a list of tasks and will determine which Command Staff member performs those tasks.

The instructors will then lead an activity in which the participants apply the roles of the Command Staff to a scenario. To summarize the unit, the instructors will review the unit objectives and then transition to Unit 5.

**Time Plan**

A suggested time plan for this unit is shown below. More or less time may be required, based on the experience level of the group.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Time</b>
Unit Objectives	5 minutes
Incident Commander	10 minutes
Knowledge Review	5 minutes
Command Staff	10 minutes
Activity: Command Staff Roles	15 minutes
Summary	5 minutes
<b>Total Time</b>	<b>50 minutes</b>



Visual 4.1

## Unit 4: Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions



**Visual Description:** Unit Introduction

### Instructor Notes

Tell the group that this unit will provide an overview of the role of the Incident Commander and Command Staff.



Visual 4.2

### Unit Objectives

- Describe the role and function of the Incident Commander.
- Describe the role and function of the Command Staff.



Unit 4:  
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Visual 4.2

**Visual Description:** Unit Objectives

### Instructor Notes

Tell the group that by the end of this unit they should be able to:

- Describe the role and function of the Incident Commander.
- Describe the role and function of the Command Staff.



Visual 4.3

### Incident Commander (1 of 2)

Upon arriving at an incident, the higher ranking person will either assume command, maintain command as is, or transfer command to a third party.



In some situations or agencies, a lower ranking but more qualified person may be designated as the Incident Commander.

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Visual 4.3

**Visual Description:** Incident Commander (1 of 2)

### Instructor Notes

Explain that upon arriving at an incident, the higher ranking person will either assume command, maintain command as is, or transfer command to a third party.

Point out that in some situations or agencies, a lower ranking but more qualified person may be designated as the Incident Commander.

Ask the participants the following question:

**Why is it critical to establish command from the beginning of the incident operations?**

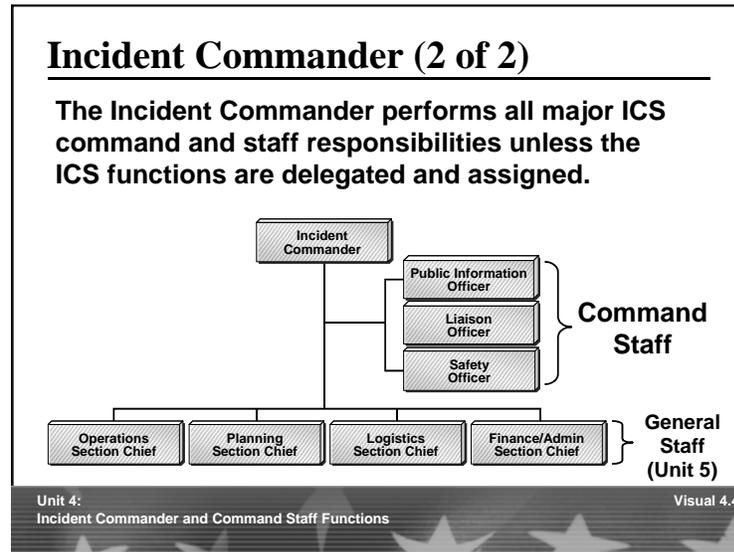
If not mentioned by the participants, add the following key points:

- Lack of command becomes a safety hazard for responders.
- Size up and decisionmaking is impossible without a command structure.
- It is difficult to expand a disorganized organization if the incident escalates.

Emphasize that all incident responses begin by establishing command.



Visual 4.4

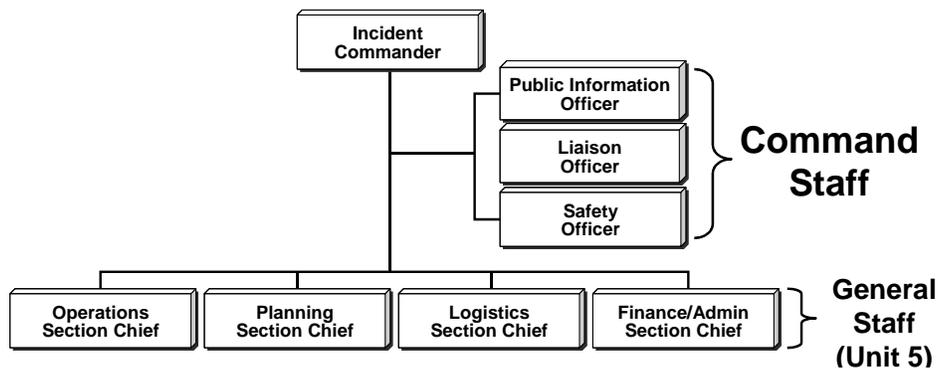


**Visual Description:** Incident Commander (2 of 2)

### Instructor Notes

Tell the participants that the Incident Commander performs all major ICS command and staff responsibilities unless these functions are delegated and assigned. As illustrated on the chart in the visual, ICS organization may be expanded to include:

- **Command Staff:** Public Information Officer, Liaison Officer, Safety Officer
- **General Staff:** Operations Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, Logistics Section Chief, Finance/Administration Section Chief



Note that this unit covers the Incident Commander and Command Staff. The next unit presents information on the General Staff.

**Remind the participants that not all Command and General Staff positions are filled on each incident. However, if a position isn't filled, then the Commander assumes that ICS management function.**



Visual 4.5

## Incident Commander Role

### The Incident Commander:

- Provides overall leadership for incident response.
- Delegates authority to others.
- Takes general direction from agency administrator/official.



Incident Commander

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Visual 4.5

**Visual Description:** Incident Commander Role

## Instructor Notes

Review the following key points with the group:

The Incident Commander's role includes the following:

- Provides overall leadership for incident response.
- Delegates authority to others.
- Takes general direction from agency administrator/official.



Visual 4.6

### **Incident Commander Responsibilities**

The Incident Commander is specifically responsible for:

- Ensuring incident safety.
- Providing information services to internal and external stakeholders.
- Establishing and maintaining liaison with other agencies participating in the incident.



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Visual 4.6

**Visual Description:** Incident Commander Responsibilities

### **Instructor Notes**

Explain that the Incident Commander is specifically responsible for:

- Ensuring incident safety.
- Providing information services to internal and external stakeholders.
- Establishing and maintaining liaison with other agencies participating in the incident.



Visual 4.7

### Incident Commander Responsibilities

#### The Incident Commander:

- Is responsible for all activities and functions until delegated and assigned to staff.
- Assesses need for staff.
- Establishes incident objectives.
- Directs staff to develop the Incident Action Plan.



Incident Commander

Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

Visual 4.7

**Visual Description:** Incident Commander Responsibilities

### Instructor Notes

Review the following key points with the group:

The responsibilities of the Incident Commander include the following:

- Is responsible for all activities and functions until delegated and assigned to staff.
- Assesses need for staff.
- Establishes incident objectives.
- Directs staff to develop the Incident Action Plan.



Visual 4.8

## Deputy Incident Commander

A Deputy Incident Commander may be designated to:

- Perform specific tasks as requested by the Incident Commander.
- Perform the incident command function in a relief capacity.
- Represent an assisting agency that shares jurisdiction.



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Visual 4.8

**Visual Description:** Deputy Incident Commander

### Instructor Notes

Tell the group that a Deputy Incident Commander may be designated to:

- Perform specific tasks as requested by the Incident Commander.
- Perform the incident command function in a relief capacity.
- Represent an assisting agency that shares jurisdiction.

Note that if a deputy is assigned, he or she must be fully qualified to assume the Incident Commander's position.



Visual 4.9

**Discussion Question**

Can you think of a situation where a Deputy Incident Commander might be assigned?

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Visual 4.9

**Visual Description:** Can you think of a situation where a Deputy Incident Commander might be assigned?

### Instructor Notes

Ask the following question:

**Can you think of a situation where a Deputy Incident Commander might be assigned?**

Allow time to respond.

If not mentioned, tell the participants that examples of situations where a Deputy Incident Commander may be assigned is if the Incident Commander needs to:

- Leave the incident scene for an extended time period.
- Provide leadership during a large, complex incident.

Add examples based on your experiences.



Visual 4.10

### Changing Incident Commanders

Command may change to meet the needs of the incident when incidents:

- Expand or contract.
- Change in jurisdiction or discipline.
- Become more or less complex.



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Visual 4.10

**Visual Description:** Changing Incident Commanders

### Instructor Notes

Explain that incident command may change to meet the needs of the incident when incidents:

- Expand or contract.
- Change in jurisdiction or discipline.
- Become more or less complex.



Visual 4.11

### **Transferring Incident Commanders**

Transfer of command requires:

- A transfer of command briefing for the incoming Incident Commander.
- Notification to all personnel that a change in command is taking place.



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Visual 4.11

**Visual Description:** Transferring Incident Commanders

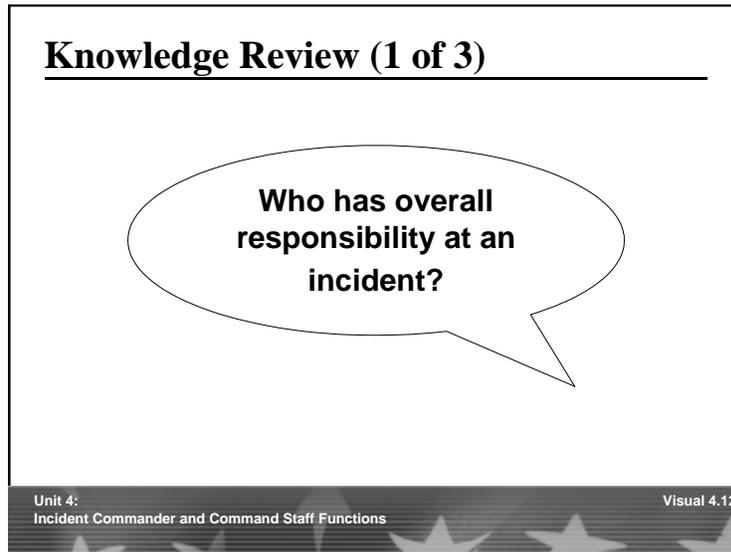
### **Instructor Notes**

Explain that a transfer of command requires:

- A transfer of command briefing for the incoming Incident Commander.
- Notification to all personnel that a change in command is taking place.



Visual 4.12



**Visual Description:** Who has overall responsibility at an incident?

### Instructor Notes

Ask the following question:

**Who has overall responsibility at an incident?**

Allow time to respond.

If not mentioned, tell the participants that the correct answer is that the Incident Commander has overall responsibility at an incident.



Visual 4.13

**Knowledge Review (2 of 3)**

**If the Operations Section has not been activated, who directs the tactical operations?**

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Visual 4.13

**Visual Description:** If the Operations Section has not been activated, who directs the tactical operations?

### Instructor Notes

Ask the following question:

**If the Operations Section has not been activated, who directs the tactical operations?**

Allow time to respond.

If not mentioned, tell the participants that the correct answer is that the Incident Commander directs the tactical operations if the Operations Section has not been activated.



Visual 4.14

**Knowledge Review (3 of 3)**

**The Deputy Incident Commander is assuming control for the next incident period. What needs to occur before he or she can do so?**

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Visual 4.14

**Visual Description:** The Deputy Incident Commander is assuming control for the next incident period. What needs to occur before he or she can do so?

### Instructor Notes

Ask the participants the following question:

**The Deputy Incident Commander is assuming control for the next incident period. What needs to occur before he or she can do so?**

Allow time to respond.

If not mentioned, tell the participants that the correct answer is that before the Deputy Incident Commander can assume control for the next incident period, there must be a transfer of command briefing and notification to all personnel that a change in command is taking place.

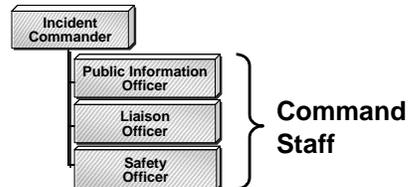


Visual 4.15

## Command Staff

It may be necessary for the Incident Commander to designate a Command Staff who:

- Provide information, liaison, and safety services for the entire organization.
- Report directly to the Incident Commander.



Unit 4:  
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Visual 4.15

**Visual Description:** Command Staff includes Public Information Officer, Liaison Officer, and Safety Officer

### Instructor Notes

Tell the participants that the next section of this unit will focus on the Command Staff. It may be necessary for the Incident Commander to designate a Command Staff who:

- Provide information, liaison, and safety services for the entire organization.
- Report directly to the Incident Commander.

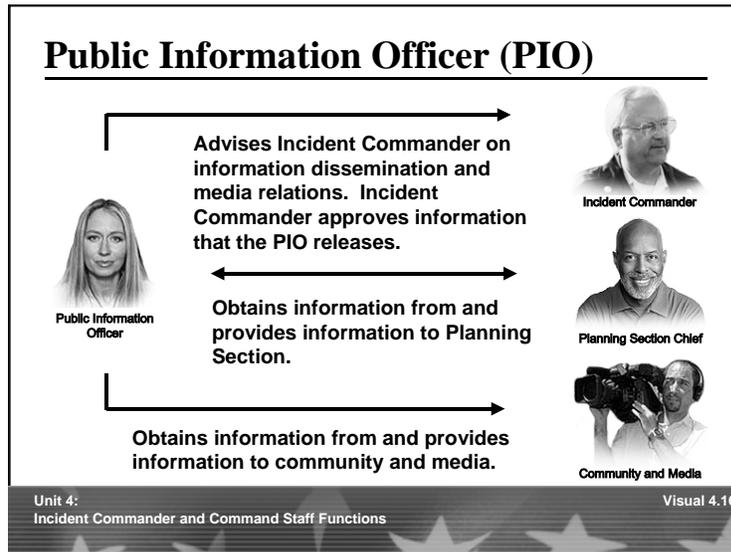
Explain that as the chart on the visual shows, the Command Staff includes the following positions:

- Public Information Officer
- Liaison Officer
- Safety Officer

The next visuals will provide details about the roles of the Command Staff.



Visual 4.16



**Visual Description:** Public Information Officer

### Instructor Notes

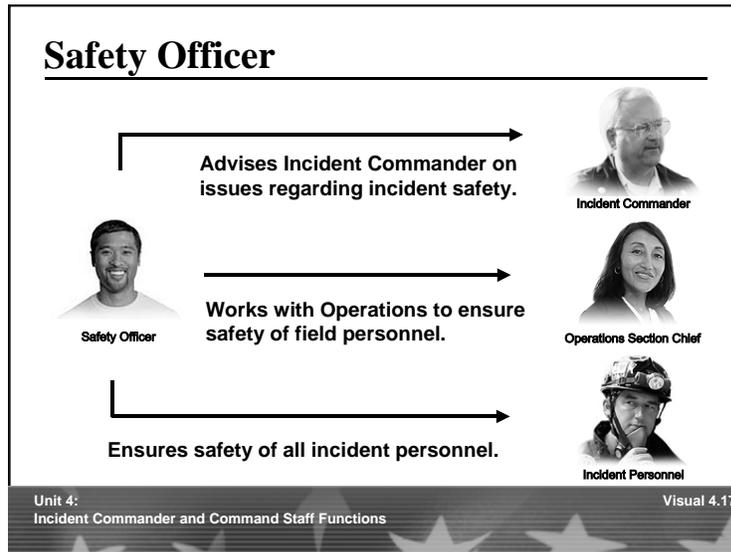
Explain that the Public Information Officer (PIO) serves as the conduit for information to internal and external stakeholders. The PIO:

- Advises the Incident Commander on information dissemination and media relations.
- Obtains information from and provides information to the Planning Section.
- Obtains information from and provides information to the community and media.

Emphasize that the Incident Commander approves all information that the PIO releases.



Visual 4.17



**Visual Description:** Safety Officer

### Instructor Notes

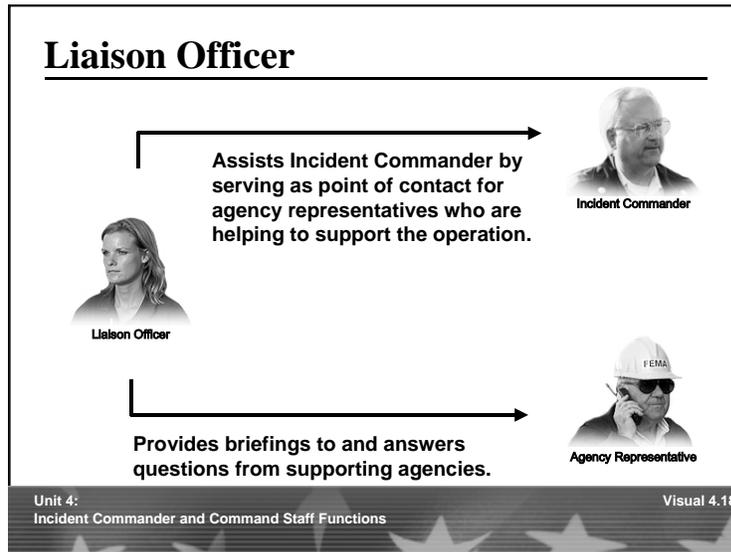
Explain that the Safety Officer monitors safety conditions. The Safety Officer:

- Advises the Incident Commander on issues regarding incident safety.
- Works with the Operations Section to ensure the safety of field personnel.
- Ensures safety of all incident personnel.

**Ask the participants to identify types of incidents where it would be critical to assign a Safety Officer.**



Visual 4.18



**Visual Description:** Liaison Officer

### Instructor Notes

Point out that the Liaison Officer serves as the primary contact for supporting agencies assisting at an incident. The Liaison Officer:

- Assists the Incident Commander by serving as a point of contact for agency representatives who are helping to support the operation.
- Provides briefings to and answers questions from supporting agencies.

**Ask the participants to identify types of incidents that would warrant the assignment of a Liaison Officer.**



Visual 4.19

## Knowledge Review

**Instructions:** Identity which member of the Command Staff performs the following tasks.



**Tasks:**

- Advises Incident Commander on issues related to information dissemination and media relations.
- Serves as primary contact for anyone who wants information about the incident.
- Serves external and internal audiences.
- Obtains information from Planning Section.

Unit 4:  
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Visual 4.19

**Visual Description:** Knowledge Review (1 of 3)

### Instructor Notes

Ask the participants to identify which member of the Command Staff performs the following tasks:

- Advises Incident Commander on issues related to information dissemination and media relations.
- Serves as primary contact for anyone who wants information about the incident.
- Serves external and internal audiences.
- Obtains information from Planning Section.

Allow participants time to respond

If not mentioned, tell the participants that it is the **Public Information Officer**.



Visual 4.20

## Knowledge Review

**Instructions:** Identify which member of the Command Staff performs the following tasks.



**Tasks:**

- Makes sure everyone does their job safely.
- Advises Incident Commander on issues regarding incident safety.
- Conducts risk analyses and implements safety measures.
- Promotes safe driving habits.
- Eliminates tripping hazards.

Unit 4:  
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Visual 4.20

**Visual Description:** Knowledge Review (2 of 3)

### Instructor Notes

Ask the participants to identify which member of the Command Staff performs the following tasks:

- Makes sure everyone does their job safely.
- Advises Incident Commander on issues regarding incident safety.
- Conducts risk analyses and implements safety measures.
- Promotes safe driving habits.
- Eliminates tripping hazards.

Allow the participants time to respond.

If not mentioned, tell the participants that it is the **Safety Officer**.



Visual 4.21

### Knowledge Review

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**Instructions:** Identity which member of the Command Staff performs the following tasks.



**Tasks:**

- Serves as point of contact for assisting and cooperating agency representatives.
- Identifies problems between supporting agencies.
- Participates in planning meetings by providing the status on current resources, resource limitations, and resource capabilities of other agencies.

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Visual 4.21

**Visual Description:** Knowledge Review (3 of 3)

### Instructor Notes

Ask the participants to identify which member of the Command Staff performs the following tasks:

- Serves as point of contact for assisting and cooperating agency representatives.
- Identifies problems between supporting agencies.
- Participates in planning meetings by providing the status on current resources, resource limitations, and resource capabilities of other agencies.

Allow the participants time to respond.

If not mentioned, tell the participants that it is the **Liaison Officer**.



Visual 4.22

### **Activity: Command Staff Roles (1 of 2)**

#### **Instructions:**

1. Working as a team, review the scenario presented on the next visual.
2. Identify which Command Staff positions would be assigned.
3. Next, if you were the Incident Commander, what specific activities would you delegate to each Command Staff member?
4. Select a spokesperson. Be prepared to present in 10 minutes.

Unit 4:  
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Visual 4.22

**Visual Description:** Activity: Command Staff Roles (1 of 2)

### **Instructor Notes**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this activity is to illustrate how ICS can be used to address incident management issues.

**Instructions:** Follow the steps below to conduct this activity:

1. Working as a team, review the scenario presented on the next visual.
2. Identify which Command Staff positions would be assigned.
3. Next, if you were the Incident Commander, what specific activities would you delegate to each Command Staff member?
4. Select a spokesperson. Be prepared to present in 10 minutes.



Visual 4.23

### Activity: Command Staff Roles (2 of 2)

**Scenario:** An unexpected flash flood has struck a small community. As a result:

- Homes, schools, and the business district are being evacuated.
- Critical infrastructure has been damaged including contamination of the water supply, downed power lines, and damaged roads.
- Perimeter control and security in the business district are needed.
- Mutual aid is arriving from several surrounding communities.
- Media representatives are arriving at the scene.

Unit 4:  
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Visual 4.23

**Visual Description:** Activity: Command Staff Roles (2 of 2)

### Instructor Notes

#### Review the following scenario that was first presented in Unit 2:

An unexpected flash flood has struck a small community. As a result:

- Homes, schools, and the business district are being evacuated.
- Critical infrastructure has been damaged including contamination of the water supply, downed power lines, and damaged roads.
- Perimeter control and security in the business district are needed.
- Mutual aid is arriving from several surrounding communities.
- Media representatives are arriving at the scene.

**Debrief:** Monitor the time. When 10 minutes have passed, ask the spokesperson from each group to present their command staff assigned and the activities that are delegated. If not mentioned by the group, add the following potential activities:

- **Public Information Officer:** Work with the media to ensure that evacuation orders are communicated to affected neighbors. Prepare releases with information about the status of the business district prior to the next morning. Arrange a press briefing in advance of the next news cycle.
- **Liaison Officer:** Coordinate with communities that are providing mutual aid and with private-sector utilities that are supporting the response. Work with the business community to identify response needs.
- **Safety Officer:** Ensure the safety of incident personnel from contaminated water, electrical hazards, and fatigue.



Visual 4.24

## Summary

Are you able to describe the roles and functions of the:

- Incident Commander?
- Public Information Officer?
- Safety Officer?
- Liaison Officer?

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Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

Visual 4.24

**Visual Description:** Summary

## Instructor Notes

Ask the participants if they are able to describe the roles and functions of the:

- Incident Commander.
- Public Information Officer.
- Safety Officer.
- Liaison Officer.

Answer any questions the participants might have about this unit. Explain that the next unit will discuss the roles and responsibilities of the General Staff.