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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
  - Standardized ICS Position Titles
  - Management Functions
  - Incident Commander
    - Establishing Command
    - Delegating Incident Management Functions
    - Audio Clip: Incident Commander Role
    - Incident Commander Responsibilities
    - Audio Clip: Incident Commander Responsibilities
    - Deputy Incident Commander
    - Audio Clips: Voices of Experience
    - Selecting and Changing Incident Commanders
    - Transferring Incident Commanders
  - Knowledge Review
  - Command Staff
    - Expanding the Organization
    - Audio Clips: Meet the Command Staff
    - Command Staff Qualifications
  - Activity: Who Am I?
  - Activity: Command Staff Roles
  - Summary
- 

## Methodology

The instructors will outline the objectives for this unit. The instructors will explain the importance of using standardized ICS position titles. Next, they will overview the management functions that are part of every incident, and will then overview the role of the Incident Commander. The participants will listen to an audio clip in which an Incident Commander talks about his role. Next, the instructors will summarize the Incident Commander's responsibilities. The participants will then listen to another audio clip in which an Incident Commander talks about responsibilities. After the audio clip, the instructors will introduce the role of the Deputy Incident Commander. They will also listen to experienced Incident Commanders share their perspectives. The instructors will then cover selecting, changing, and transferring Incident Commanders.

### Methodology (Continued)

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. The participants will listen to three audio clips in which members of the Command Staff speak. The participants will complete an activity in which they identify Command Staff members from descriptions of their actions.

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.

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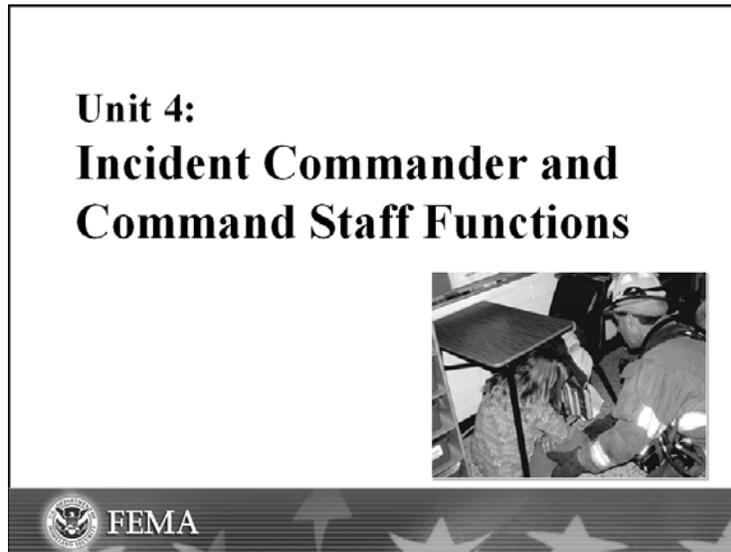
### Time Plan

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.

Topic	Time
Unit Introduction and Unit Objectives	5 minutes
Standardized ICS Position Titles	2 minutes
Management Functions	5 minutes
Incident Commander	10 minutes
Knowledge Review	5 minutes
Command Staff	10 minutes
Activity: Who Am I?	5 minutes
Activity: Command Staff Roles	15 minutes
Summary	3 minutes
<b>Total Time</b>	<b>60 minutes</b>



Visual 4.1



**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, including these topics:

- Five major management functions
- ICS organizational structure
- Incident Commander roles and responsibilities
- Selection and transfer of Incident Commanders
- Command Staff roles and responsibilities



Visual 4.2

### Unit Objectives

- Identify the five major ICS management functions.
- Identify the position titles associated with the Command Staff.
- Describe the role and function of the Incident Commander.
- Describe the selection and transfer of Incident Commanders.
- Describe the role and function of the Command Staff.



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Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Unit Objectives

### Instructor Notes

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

- Identify the five major ICS management functions.
- Identify the position titles associated with the Command Staff.
- Describe the role and function of the Incident Commander.
- Describe the selection and transfer of Incident Commanders.
- Describe the role and function of the Command Staff.



Visual 4.3

### Standardized ICS Position Titles

**Use of standardized ICS titles:**

- Provide common standards for all responding agencies.
- Allows positions to be filled with most qualified personnel.



 FEMA Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Standardized ICS Position Titles

### Instructor Notes

Tell the participants that in this course, standardized ICS titles are used. Using standardized ICS position titles serves three important purposes:

- Titles provide a common standard for all responding agencies. For example, if one school uses the title Incident Commander, another School Commander, etc., this lack of consistency can cause confusion at an incident.
- The use of distinct titles for ICS positions allows for filling ICS positions with the most qualified individuals rather than by seniority.
- Standardized position titles help ensure that the personnel in those positions are qualified.



Visual 4.4

**Management Function Descriptions (1 of 2)**

<b>Incident Command</b>	Sets the incident objectives, strategies, and priorities and has overall responsibility for the incident.
<b>Operations</b>	Conducts operations to reach incident objectives. Establish the tactics and directs all operational resources.
<b>Planning</b>	Supports the incident action planning process by tracking resources, collecting/analyzing information, and maintaining documentation.

 **FEMA** Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Management Function Descriptions (1 of 2)

### Instructor Notes

Present the following points:

Every incident requires that certain management functions be performed. The problem must be identified and assessed, a plan to deal with it developed and implemented, and the necessary resources procured and paid for.

Regardless of the size of the incident, these management functions still will apply.

There are five major management functions that are the foundation upon which the ICS organization develops. These functions include:

**Incident Command** Sets the incident objectives, strategies, and priorities and has overall responsibility for the incident.

**Operations** Conducts operations to reach the incident objectives. Establishes the tactics and directs all operational resources.

**Planning** Supports the incident action planning process by tracking resources, collecting/analyzing information, and maintaining documentation.



Visual 4.5

**Management Function Descriptions (2 of 2)**

<b>Logistics</b>	Provides resources and needed services to support the achievement of the incident objectives.
<b>Finance &amp; Administration</b>	Monitors costs related to the incident. Provides accounting, procurement, time recording, and cost analysis.

 **FEMA** Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Management Function Descriptions (2 of 2)

### Instructor Notes

Present the following points.

The remaining major management functions include:

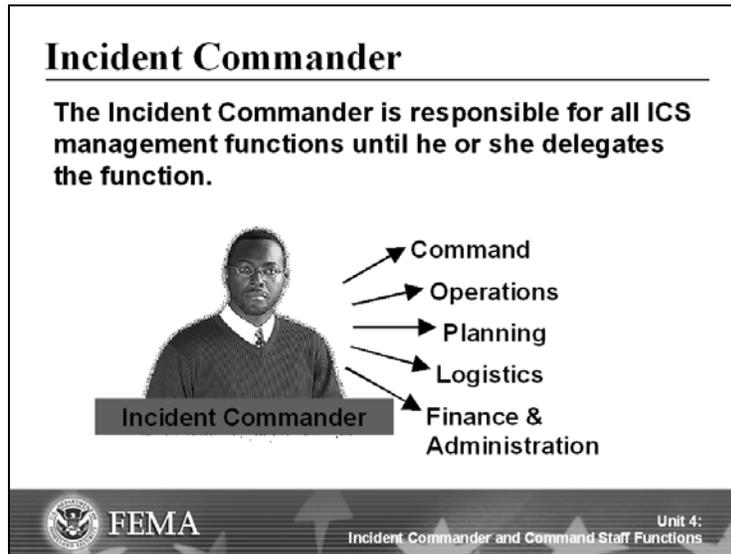
**Logistics** Provides resources and needed services to support the achievement of the incident objectives.

**Finance & Administration** Monitors costs related to the incident. Provides accounting, procurement, time recording, and cost analyses.

These functions apply whether you are handling a routine emergency, organizing for a major nonemergency event, or managing a response to a major disaster.



Visual 4.6



**Visual Description:** Incident Commander

### Instructor Notes

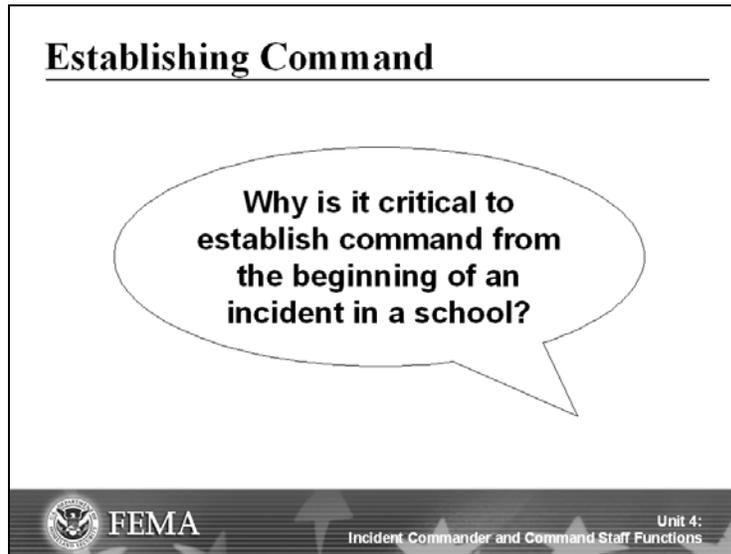
Explain that the Incident Commander has overall responsibility for managing the incident by establishing objectives, planning strategies, and implementing tactics.

Emphasize that the **Incident Commander is the only position that is always staffed in ICS applications**. On small incidents and events, one person, the Incident Commander, may accomplish all management functions.

Remind the participants that the Incident Commander is responsible for all ICS management functions until he or she delegates the function.



Visual 4.7



**Visual Description:** Establishing Command

### Instructor Notes

Ask the participants the following question:

**Why is it critical to establish command from the beginning of an incident in a school?**

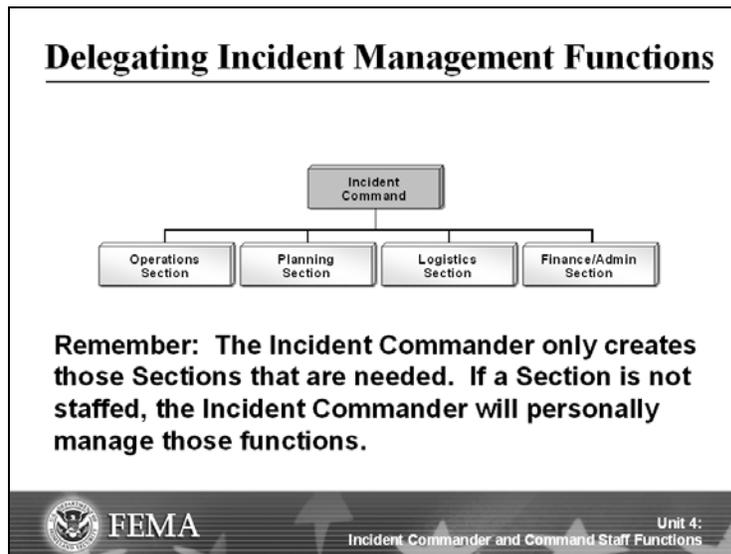
If not mentioned by the participants, add the following key points:

- Lack of command becomes a safety hazard for responders, students, and school staff.
- Size up and decisionmaking are 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 4.8



**Visual Description:** Delegating Incident Management Functions

### Instructor Notes

Remind the participants that the ICS organization is modular and has the capability to expand or contract to meet the needs of the incident. On a larger incident, the Incident Commander may create Sections and delegate the Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance/Administration functions.



Visual 4.9

### Incident Commander Role

Listen to one Incident Commander talk about his role.



Incident Commander

 Click icon to play.

**Audio Key Points:**  
**The Incident Commander:**

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

 FEMA Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Incident Commander Role

### Instructor Notes

Tell the group that they will now listen to an audio clip in which an Incident Commander talks about his role.

To play the audio, click on the icon. The total running time for this clip is 26 seconds.

### Audio Transcript:

My job is to provide the overall leadership for incident response. I am able to delegate my authority to others to manage the ICS organization. I take general direction and receive my delegation of authority from school administration. However, at the incident scene, I am in charge.



Visual 4.10

### Incident Commander Responsibilities

In addition to having overall responsibility for managing the entire incident, 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.



Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**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.

The Incident Commander may appoint one or more Deputies. **Deputy Incident Commanders must be as qualified as the Incident Commander.**



Visual 4.11

### Incident Commander Responsibilities

**Listen to the Incident Commander talk more about his responsibilities.**



Incident Commander

 Click icon to play.

**Audio Key Points:**

**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.



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Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Incident Commander Responsibilities

### Instructor Notes

Tell the group that they will now listen to an audio clip in which an Incident Commander talks about his responsibilities.

To play the audio, click on the icon. The total running time for this clip is 41 seconds.

### Audio Transcript:

As the Incident Commander, I am responsible for all activities and functions until I delegate them. So, one of the first things I do is assess my need for staff. I know that for an incident that is both complex and long term, I will need more staff. In addition, I may decide that I need a Deputy.

Also, I establish incident objectives for the organization based on the situation and direction given by the school administration. The type of plan depends on the magnitude of the incident. Most simple incidents don't require written plans. If it were a complex incident, I would direct my staff to develop a written Incident Action Plan. The benefit of ICS is that the organization can be tailored to match the need.



Visual 4.12

### 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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Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**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 4.13

### Voices of Experience

	Sister Carol Mathe Teacher Gila River Indian Community Bapchule, AZ	 Click icon to play.
	Anna Parrill Principal Soule Elementary School Salem, NH	 Click icon to play.
	Rose Colby Former Principal Mountain View Middle School Goffstown, NH	 Click icon to play.

 FEMA Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Voices of Experience

### Instructor Notes

Tell the participants they will be hearing “voices of experience” from three school personnel who have served as Incident Commanders for school-based incidents.

Click on each icon to hear the “voice of experience.”

### Audio Transcripts:

Sister Carol Mathe  
Teacher  
Gila River Indian Community  
Bapchule, AZ

I have served as an incident commander. My job was to see the children were evacuated because of a bomb threat. When the police arrived there was a transfer of command, and at that point I became the liaison. Some of the challenges that I faced as the incident commander was dealing with other people, trying to take over your position, thinking they're in charge. Another was deciding who needed to be in what positions, who needed to be where the event was taking place.

**Audio Transcripts: (Continued)**

Anna Parrill  
Principal  
Soule Elementary School  
Salem, NH

My first assistant principalship I, in a lot of the situations, was the commander, and the principal actually fell in under operations, and again it really went on the strengths and the skills and the experience that each person had in the building.

The beauty of incident command is it allows you the flexibility to move people in and out of the positions so you're looking for people that have a calmness and ability to work with students and be able to really empower them to move in and out of the positions and that's again through a lot of practice and planning and drills and simulations that you go through and really allow them the opportunity to go through each of the positions.

Rose Colby  
Former Principal  
Mountain View Middle School  
Goffstown, NH

The first lesson we learned was the incident commander. We actually started into our whole safety programming when we had a need to respond to a bomb threat in the school. It was a number of years ago and I personally was not in the building at the time. I was principal and I realized when I got the phone calls that no one knew what to do when this happened and then some people from another building came in and no one knew who to take orders from and who to listen to. Who was in command? So that was when we really did our, our initial work in safety planning and it was clear to me that it shouldn't make any difference who was in the building but there was a need to have several people able to take charge in an emergency response as the incident commander, and so we, we actually looked at that role first and so we were, felt pretty comfortable as we went through our planning. What we would do is we would just rotate who would become the incident commander as we went through our drills so that everyone had the opportunity to be the incident commander in a variety of different settings when we used the incident command response.



Visual 4.14

### Selecting and 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.



Unit 4:  
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**Visual Description:** Selecting and 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 4.15

### 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.



**Visual Description:** Transferring Incident Commanders

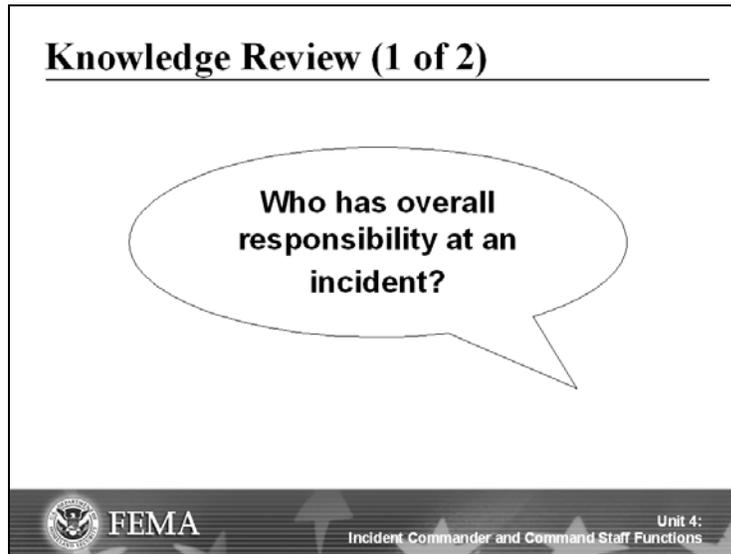
#### Instructor Notes

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 4.16



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

### Instructor Notes

Ask the following question:

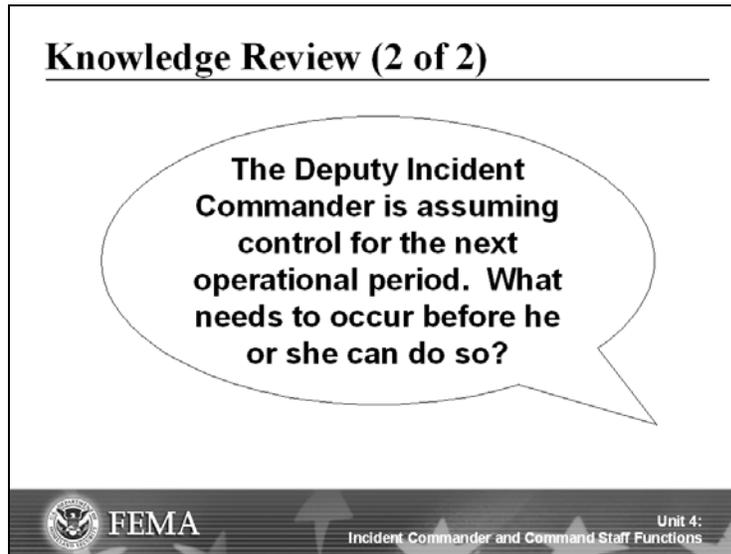
**Who has overall responsibility at an incident?**

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 4.17



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

### Instructor Notes

Ask the following question:

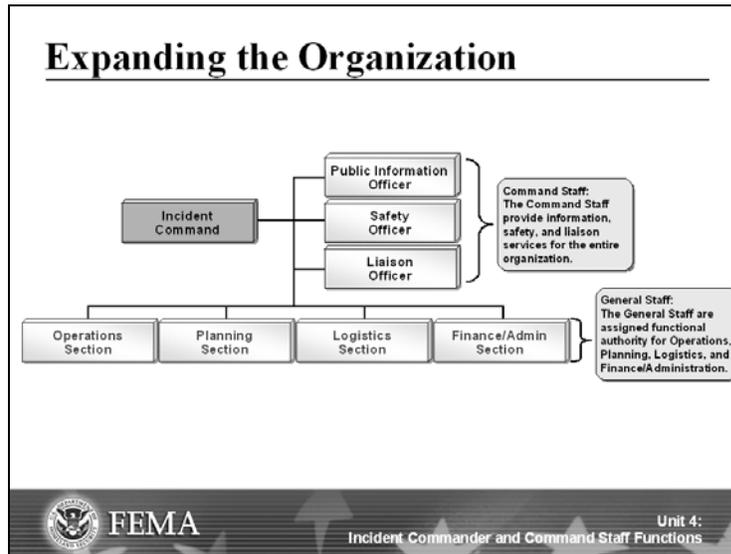
**The Deputy Incident Commander is assuming control for the next operational period. What needs to occur before he or she can do so?**

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 operational period, there must be a transfer of command briefing and notification to all personnel that a change in command is taking place.



Visual 4.18



**Visual Description:** Expanding the Organization

### Instructor Notes

As incidents grow, the Incident Commander may delegate authority for performance of certain activities to the Command Staff and the General Staff.

The Incident Commander will add positions only as needed.



Visual 4.19

### Meet the Command Staff

 Public Information Officer  Click icon to play.

.....

 Safety Officer  Click icon to play.

.....

 Liaison Officer  Click icon to play.

 FEMA Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Meet the Command Staff

### Instructor Notes

Tell the participants they will hear the Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, and Liaison Officer explain their roles as part of the Command Staff.

Click on each position to hear the audio transcript.

#### Audio Transcript:

##### Public Information Officer

I report directly to the Incident Commander. I am the primary contact for anyone who wants information about the incident and our response to it. I provide information to the media, public, and parents. School incidents attract a lot of media attention. Without me, media requests would overwhelm the Incident Commander. I also coordinate communications to our internal audiences including both incident staff and school personnel. It's very important for me to coordinate with other public information staff to ensure that we do not issue confusing or conflicting information.

Accurate information is essential. In the end, the Incident Commander will approve all information that I release. During a complex incident, I will probably need several Assistant Public Information Officers to help me.

**Audio Transcript: (Continued)**

## Safety Officer

My job is to make sure everyone is safe. I advise the Incident Commander on issues regarding incident safety, but I would like to emphasize that safety is everyone's responsibility. I work very closely with responders to make sure they are as safe as possible under the circumstances. I conduct risk analyses and implement safety measures. I have the authority to stop any unsafe activity that I observe. During a complex incident, I will need quite a few assistants to be my eyes and ears.

## Liaison Officer

I'm the go-between. I assist the Incident Commander by serving as the point of contact for other response organizations participating in the operation. I provide briefings to school administration and other agencies involved in the operation. I respond to requests from incident personnel for contacts among the assisting and cooperating agencies. I also monitor incident operations in order to identify any current or potential problems between the school and response agencies.



Visual 4.20

**Command Staff Qualifications**

Provide information, liaison, and safety services for the entire organization.

**In a school incident, what are the unique Command Staff qualifications?**

Incident Commander

Public Information Officer

Liaison Officer

Safety Officer

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Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Command Staff Qualifications. In a school incident, what are the unique Command Staff qualifications?

### Instructor Notes

Depending upon the size and type of incident or event, the Incident Commander may designate personnel to provide information, safety, and liaison services. In ICS, the following personnel comprise the Command Staff:

- Public Information Officer, who serves as the conduit for information to internal and external stakeholders, including the media or parents.
- Safety Officer, who monitors safety conditions and develops measures for assuring the safety of all response personnel.
- Liaison Officer, who serves as the primary contact for supporting agencies assisting at an incident.

**Ask the participants:** In a school incident, what are the unique Command Staff qualifications?

**Command Staff Qualifications**

<b>Incident Commander</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Authority to commit school resources</li><li>▪ Past experience as incident responder</li><li>▪ Ability to:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Take command</li><li>▪ Balance response initiatives with safety concerns</li><li>▪ Motivate responders</li><li>▪ Communicate clear directions</li><li>▪ Size up the situation and make rapid decisions</li><li>▪ Assess the effectiveness of tactics/strategies</li><li>▪ Be flexible and modify plans as necessary</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Public Information Officer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Media relations training/experience</li><li>▪ Authority as designated spokesperson</li><li>▪ Ability to maintain grace under fire</li></ul>
<b>Safety Officer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Worker safety and HazMat training/experience</li><li>▪ Ability to assess risk and develop safety measures</li></ul>
<b>Liaison Officer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Ability to represent the concerns and needs of all parties involved in a response</li></ul>



Visual 4.21

**Activity: Who Am I?**

**Instructions:** Read each statement in your Student Manual and determine which of the Command Staff positions named below is being described. Write the answers in your Student Manual.



Public  
Information  
Officer



Safety  
Officer



Liaison  
Officer


**FEMA**
Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Activity: Who Am I?

### Instructor Notes

**Instructions:** Read each statement and determine which of the Command Staff positions named below is being described. Write the answers in your Student Manual.



Public  
Information  
Officer



Safety  
Officer



Liaison  
Officer

	Statement	Who Am I?
<b>A</b>	During the gymnasium roof collapse incident, I determined if search and rescue teams could enter the site to begin operations.	
<b>B</b>	During the hostile intruder incident, I answered questions and concerns to ensure a smooth interface between SWAT responders and school administration.	
<b>C</b>	The media and parents deserve to have accurate, timely information. I serve as the primary contact to disseminate approved messages.	

**Answers:**

- A. During the gymnasium roof collapse incident, I determined if search and rescue teams could enter the site to begin operations. Who Am I? **The correct answer is: Safety Officer.**

The Safety Officer's job is to make sure everyone is safe. The Safety Officer advises the Incident Commander on issues regarding incident safety. The Safety Officer works very closely with responders to make sure they are as safe as possible under the circumstances, and has the authority to stop any unsafe activity that is observed.

- B. During the hostile intruder incident, I answered questions and concerns to ensure a smooth interface between SWAT responders and school administration. Who Am I? **The correct answer is: Liaison Officer.**

The Liaison Officer is the go-between. The Liaison Officer assists the Incident Commander by serving as the point of contact for other response organizations participating in the operation. The Liaison Officer provides briefings to school administration and other agencies involved in the operation. The Liaison Officer responds to requests from incident personnel for contacts among the assisting and cooperating agencies, and also monitors incident operations in order to identify any current or potential problems between the school and response agencies.

- C. The media and parents deserve to have accurate, timely information. I serve as the primary contact to disseminate approved messages. Who Am I? **The correct answer is: Public Information Officer.**

The Public Information Officer reports directly to the Incident Commander, and is the primary contact for anyone who wants information about the incident and the response to it. The Public Information Officer provides information to the media, public, and parents. School incidents attract a lot of media attention. Without the Public Information Officer, media requests would overwhelm the Incident Commander. The Public Information Officer also coordinates communications to internal audiences, including both incident staff and school personnel. It's very important for the Public Information Officer to coordinate with other public information staff to ensure that no one issues confusing or conflicting information.

Accurate information is essential. In the end, the Incident Commander will approve all information that the Public Information Officer releases. During a complex incident, the Public Information Officer will probably need several Assistant Public Information Officers to help.



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.



**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.



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

### Instructor Notes

#### Review the following 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.

**Debrief:** Monitor the time. When 10 minutes have passed, ask the spokesperson from each group to present their Command Staff positions 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 waste water, electrical hazards, and fatigue.



Visual 4.24

### Summary

Are you now able to:

- Identify the five major ICS management functions?
- Identify the position titles associated with the Command Staff?
- Describe the role and function of the Incident Commander?
- Describe the selection and transfer of Incident Commanders?
- Describe the role and function of the Command Staff?



Unit 4:  
Incident Commander and Command Staff Functions

**Visual Description:** Summary

### Instructor Notes

Ask the participants if they are able to:

- Identify the five major ICS management functions.
- Identify the position titles associated with the Command Staff.
- Describe the role and function of the Incident Commander.
- Describe the selection and transfer of Incident Commanders.
- Describe the role and function of the Command Staff.

**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.