



PREPARING FOR THE WORST: EMERGENCY TRAINING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY TELECOMMUNICATORS

FEMA has updated its Incident Command System online training courses and telecommunicators should stay abreast of the changes.

By Christine Massengale

By federal fiscal year 2005, Homeland Security Presidential Directives 5 and 8 required the adoption and use of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) by state and local agencies receiving federal preparedness assistance. In turn, these directives also influenced some minimum training recommendations for emergency communications center personnel. HSPD-5, “Management of Domestic Incidents,” contains the key concepts of the Incident Command System, while HSPD-8, “National Preparedness,” further outlined agency readiness requirements and ability to meet certain priorities to emergency response, including the implementation of NIMS and the strengthening of information-sharing, collaboration and communications interoperability.

What did all of this mean for the frontline telecommunicator? Typically, it meant existing employees and anyone hired after these directives were instructed to complete FEMA’s online training courses, IS-100, 200, 700 and in some instances, 800. In most cases, employees complied—whether or not there was full buy-in or understanding at the administrative level or for the frontline telecommunicator.

In October 2017, ICS courses 100, 700, and 800 were updated from their 2008 versions. There are quite a few changes, some of which

are outlined below. What does that mean for those who have taken these courses in the past? It means that, ideally, everyone should take the updated courses.¹

However, the real question is: What is the significance of these courses for the frontline telecommunicator? Taking the courses and getting the certificates is entirely different from understanding the content and implementing the concepts. If the coursework was a checkmark on your to-do list, this may be a great time to revisit the updated material,

and not only refresh your certificates, but also your understanding of the importance of the concepts.

The recommended order for navigating the courses is to start with IS-100.c, “Introduction to the Incident Command System,” which outlines the relationship between ICS and NIMS as well as the purpose and organizational structure of ICS. Here you will see some changes that include additional guidance on the Intelligence and Investigations function within the ICS structure, discussions about command and coordination accomplished through use of the Incident Command System, Emergency Operations Centers, Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Groups, and Joint Information System (JIS).²

Next, IS-700.b, “An Introduction to the National Incident Management System,” which gives us a broad overview of the concept of NIMS and the scalable process for government, private-sector, and other organizations working together during domestic incidents and events. Some updates incorporate more recent real-world case studies. They introduce a new NIMS guiding principle: Unity of Effort. And they consolidate NIMS components from five to