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Focus on First Responders

The Importance of NIMS to Campus Emergency Response

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Too often, evil acts seem to occur anywhere in society. Recently, some of the most shocking incidents have taken place on the grounds of highly esteemed colleges and universities, institutions that exist to better society. These occurrences have helped highlight the need for authorities to have effective countermeasures in place to address threats to campus safety.

Understanding the importance of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to colleges and universities

requires a recognition of what it means to emergency response capabilities. NIMS was developed in March 2004 by the Department of Homeland Security to provide a systematic, proactive approach for government agencies at all levels, nongovernment organizations, and the private sector to work seamlessly to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents—regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity—to reduce the loss of life, destruction of property,

and harm to the environment. It gives campuses a much-needed method of protection.

UNDERSTANDING NIMS

What It Offers

A recent report funded through the Illinois Criminal Justice Authority examined the relationship between local law enforcement and postsecondary institutions in Illinois and across the nation.¹ One of its key findings revealed that many campuses have experienced critical incidents of some sort within

the past 5 years. Considering this fact, along with the importance of NIMS to the effective and efficient planning for or response to an emergency incident, every college and university should become compliant.

Institutions also can reap important financial benefits. Responding to and recovering from an emergency can cost a considerable amount of money. Only organizations that have implemented NIMS can recoup any portion of such expenses from the federal government.

Additionally, NIMS offers a predefined, yet flexible, organizational structure that can be altered, as necessary, to ensure maximum effectiveness during small operations or complex responses and extended in scope if an incident grows in size. NIMS can adapt according to geographical boundaries, operational function, or a combination of both.

How It Works

NIMS allocates responsibilities among four main areas—planning, operations, logistics and administration, and finance. Each has its own assigned primary and secondary functions that then can break down further into branches, divisions, groups, task forces, or strike teams. An incident commander is necessary in any operation, but the positions in each of the

four realms of responsibility are staffed only if the event dictates the need.

The establishment of uniform titles, with accompanying responsibilities, allows for an easy-to-understand command structure. This practice helps emergency responders from diverse communities work together effectively and efficiently under a single banner of operations. For instance, two officers from fire departments at opposite ends of a state could understand the responsibilities of a planning section chief.

NIMS-compliant agencies working together all gain an understanding of and share common terminology and acronyms to effectively communicate and accomplish objectives. Also standardized, the typing, or sufficiently

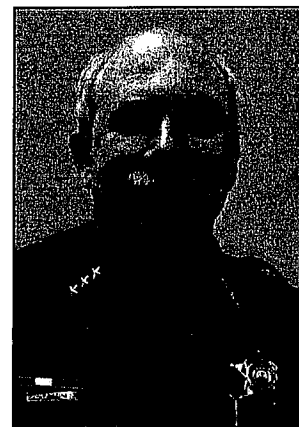
defining, of resources ensures that emergency managers request the right equipment, supplies, and other provisions for a particular purpose. For example, a section chief may need a tanker. Some personnel instinctively may think of an airplane tanker and others a fire truck tanker. Standardized typing of equipment eliminates any potential confusion.

NIMS also employs standard forms to document different aspects of a response. Each department shares these same familiar forms. Documentation of all activities records important information, such as resources deployed, safety precautions taken, media messages written, and equipment ordered, pertaining to the response to an incident, as well as the necessary justification

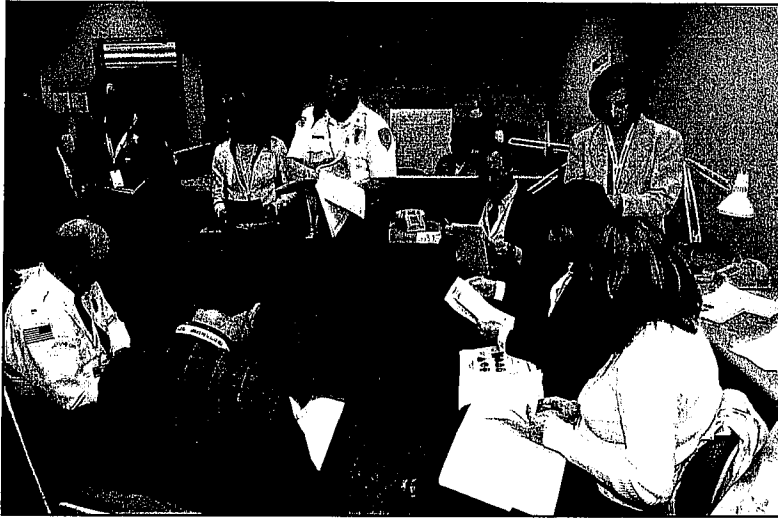
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EOC in operation during May 2008 Tri-City Team's full-scale exercise

for requesting reimbursement of expenses from the federal government. And, if necessary, it helps in the defense of any lawsuits that potentially can result from a response effort.

BECOMING COMPLIANT

Institutions interested in implementing NIMS must follow the five steps that constitute the "continuum for compliance." To this end, a college or university must have its governing board initiate the institution's work within the NIMS structure, train personnel toward the effort, establish an all-hazard emergency operations plan, test the campus' efforts, and implement a continual review of the system.

Accepting the System

The governing board or authority has to adopt NIMS for all departments and agencies. It

can accomplish this by passing a resolution and incorporating NIMS compliance into school policies and procedures. The institution's contract specifications also may include compliance language where appropriate. Additionally, the authority should encourage the school's nongovernment associates to pursue compliance.

Training All Personnel

Next, staff members must undergo NIMS training, which consists of various incident command system (ICS) classes, the level of which depends on the nature of the involvement they will have during a crisis response. Currently, six basic ICS classes exist that various members of the campus need to take. Personnel can complete several courses, ICS-100: Introduction to the Incident

Command System; ICS-200: ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents; IS-700: National Incident Management System (NIMS), an Introduction; and IS-800: National Response Plan (NRP), an Introduction, independently through the Internet. They must take ICS-300: Intermediate ICS and ICS-400: Advanced ICS in a classroom setting. These two classes provide the fundamentals of using the standard forms, and students work through several scenarios to familiarize themselves on how the entire NIMS system works.

Individuals who will make major decisions during an emergency and who may act, perhaps, as an incident commander or section chief need to complete all six basic classes. Personnel who will serve as support for the highest level of decision making should take at least the 100, 200, 700, and 800 courses. All administrators and supervisors should gain a familiarity with the NIMS system by completing classes 100 and 700. Some members of the incident management team also may want to take other specialized courses; for instance, the public information officer may want to complete IS-702: NIMS Public Information.

As a way to reduce costs, institutions may wish to have designated staff members attend train-the-trainer classes. This

