
STANDARDIZED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

APPROVED COURSE OF INSTRUCTION

FIELD COURSE

AREA COMMAND

MODULE 15

I-400

**PARTICIPANT
REFERENCE
MANUAL
2003**

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AREA COMMAND

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PARTICIPANT REFERENCE MANUAL

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The module describes why, when, where, and how Area Command is established, and the organization, facilities, and communications required. It covers the organizational relationships between Area Command and incidents, and between Area Command and jurisdictional authorities. The demobilization process under an Area Command organization is described.

Objectives:

1. Define Area Command.
2. Identify differences between Area Command, Unified Command, Interagency Coordination, and Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs).
3. List the principal advantages of using Area Command.
4. Describe how, when, and where Area Command would be established.
5. Describe the Area Command organization.
6. Identify six primary functional responsibilities of Area Command.
7. Working with a simulated scenario, develop an Area Command organization.

I. Description of Area Command

A. Definition

Area Command is an organization established to:

1. Oversee the management of multiple incidents that are each being handled by an Incident Command System organization; or
2. To oversee the management of a very large incident that has multiple Incident Management Teams assigned to it.

Area Command can be used when there are a number of incidents generally in the same area, that may be competing for the same resources.

If the incidents under the authority of the Area Command are multi-jurisdictional, a Unified Area Command should be established. This allows each jurisdiction to have representation in the Area Command, thus ensuring effective interagency coordination.

B. Responsibility

For the incidents under its authority, Area Command has the responsibility to:

- Set overall incident-related priorities.
- Allocate critical resources to incidents based on priorities.
- Ensure that incidents are properly managed.
- Ensure that incident(s) objectives are met and do not conflict with each other or with agency policy.

C. Reporting Relationships

When Area Command is established, Incident Commander(s) for the incidents under the authority of the Area Command will report to the Area Commander. The Area Commander is accountable to the agency or jurisdictional entity.

II. Area Command and Department and Emergency Operations Centers (DOCs/EOCs)

What is the difference between what happens in Jurisdictional DOCs and EOCs and what an Area Command does?

A. DOCs and Area Command

At the DOC level, there isn't much difference. If the incidents are of similar nature, and being managed primarily by a single discipline (e.g., fire or law), and are in the same political jurisdiction, the oversight of incident operations would be the responsibility of the appropriate DOC, and the functions of Area Command would be part of the DOC operations.

If the DOC was not able to perform those functions due to overload, poor communications, facility limitations or other factors, then the discipline could establish a separate Area Command facility and organization to provide the agency oversight over those incidents which were designated to be under the Area Command. The Area Command would report to the DOC.

B. EOCs and Area Command

Generally, EOCs are considered as jurisdictional coordination centers, and as such deal with DOCs which in turn interact with their field resources on specific incidents. However, there may be exceptions depending upon the operating mode the jurisdiction has adopted.

If the jurisdiction EOC is performing direct individual incident oversight, then that EOC is performing the functions of an Area Command. If however, as is normally the case, the EOC is functioning as the jurisdiction's coordinating center related to the overall emergency, it would not be performing the functions of an Area Command.

To better manage major emergencies such as earthquakes, floods, fires, etc., jurisdictional EOCs may establish one or more Area Commands. For example, dividing a city into East and West Area Commands. Each Area Command would have oversight over ICS teams managing single incidents, or incidents being managed as Incident Complexes. Incident Commanders would report to the Area Command.

The Area Commands would report to the jurisdiction EOC. Major agencies involved, (e.g., fire, police, public works) should form a Unified Area Command to ensure inter-agency coordination.

III. Area Command Applications

Major natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, fires, or major storms create a large number of incidents affecting multi-jurisdictional areas. Due to their size and potential impact, these incidents provide an appropriate environment for the possible use of Area Command.

The most common situations in which Area Command has been used are for wildland fires, civil disturbances and natural disasters.

A. The Need for Area Command

In situations where multiple incidents are occurring, the use of an Area Command makes the jobs of Incident Commanders and Agency Executives easier for the following reasons:

- Much of the inter-incident coordination normally required of each IC will be accomplished at the Area Command level. Using an Area Command allows the Incident Commanders and their incident management teams to focus their attention on their assigned incident.
- Area Command sets priorities between incidents and allocates critical resources according to priorities established by the Agency Executive.
- Area Command helps the Agency Executive by ensuring that agency policies, priorities, constraints, and guidance are being made known to the respective Incident Commanders by the Area Commander.
- Area Command also reduces the workload of the Agency Executive, especially if there are multiple incidents going on at the same time.

B. Establishing Area Command

It is best to be proactive when considering the use of Area Command. Area Command should be established for like incidents in the same proximity to ensure that conflicts do not arise. Often, agency dispatchers will first recognize inter-incident coordination problems.

It may take some hours to establish the Area Command. If there are existing facilities and communication systems that can be used, then the time needed to set up the Area Command may be reduced.

Some criteria for using Area Command are:

1. **Span of Control** - There are too many incidents reporting to a DOC (or EOC in some cases) for effective oversight. The jurisdiction or agency can establish one or more Area Command organizations to reduce the span of control.
2. **Geographically Isolated Incidents** - Several incidents are located in an area which is remote, or where poor communications exist to the DOC or EOC. A “local” Area Command can be established for oversight on these incidents.
3. **Resource Competition** - Several incidents have similar needs for critical and scarce resources. The Area Command established in close proximity to these incidents, can perform prioritization and resource allocations to these incidents.

Area Command is established by the Agency Executive. When Area Command is activated, an Area Commander will be designated and given appropriate delegated authority.

Agency policy may determine that the authority given to the Area Commander should be written as a Delegation of Authority statement. This will eliminate confusion and provides the Area Commander with authority to oversee the management of the incidents.

Depending upon the agencies and incidents involved, the Area Command may issue delegation of authority or re-delegations to the respective Incident Commanders. This will help to ensure that Agency direction is made clear to all parties.

If the incidents under the Area Command are in more than one adjacent jurisdictions, then a Unified Area Command should be established. The following could apply to either an Area Command or a Unified Area Command.

1. Incident Commanders covered by the Area Command must be notified that an Area Command is being established.
2. The Area Command team should consist of the best-qualified personnel with respect to their functional areas. The functions of Area Command require personnel that have experience in, and are qualified to oversee, complex incident situations.
3. The Area Command organization operates under the same basic principles as does the Incident Command System.
4. The Area Command organization should always be kept as small as possible. Area Command organizational positions could consist of the Area Commander and, only as necessary:
 - Area Command Planning/Intelligence Chief
 - Area Command Logistics Chief
 - Area Command Critical Resources Unit Leader
 - Area Command Situation Unit Leader
 - Area Command Information Officer
 - Area Command Liaison Officer to help in maintaining off-incident inter-agency contacts.

Note that at an Area Command, sections are not used, and operations is not included.

It is important to remember, that Area Command does not in any way replace the incident level ICS organizations or functions. The above positions, if established, are strictly related to Area Command activities. Specific duties and responsibilities will be established by the Area Commander.

Incident Commanders under the designated Area Commander are responsible to, and should be considered as part of, the overall Area Command organization. They must be provided adequate and clear delegation of authority.

Technical Specialists can be added to the Area Command organization. This will depend on the kinds of incidents involved. Technical Specialists at the Area Command would provide specific information and expertise relating to their specialty.

For example, in incidents involving use of aircraft, and where hazardous materials are involved, it may be useful to have the following specialists assigned to the Area Command team:

- Aviation Specialist
- Hazardous Materials Specialist
- Environmental Specialist
- Communications Specialist.

The responsibilities of the principal Area Command functional elements are presented in checklist form at the end of this module.

C. The Location for Area Command

The Area Command should, to the extent possible, be located in close proximity to the incidents under its authority. This will make it easier to have meetings and direct contact between the Area Commander and Incident Commanders.

It is best not to collocate Area Command with one of the incidents. Doing so might cause confusion with that incident's operations, and it could also be seen by other incidents as adding status to that single incident.

The facility used to house the Area Command organization should be large enough to accommodate a full Area Command staff, and have the capability to accommodate meetings between the Area Command Staff, Incident Commanders, Agency Executive(s), and with news media representatives.

Some of the criteria that should be considered when selecting an Area Command facility include:

- Close proximity to incidents (but not at an ICP).
- Sufficient size (for staff, displays, and conferences).
- Capable of continuous operation.
- Adequate communications facilities (telephones, FAX, computer connections).
- Availability of backup power.
- Capable of supporting radio communications to incidents and agency offices.
- Adequate and secure parking.
- Near commercial sources of support for food and lodging.

IV. Primary Functions of Area Command

Area Command has six primary functions. Each will be briefly discussed:

- Provide agency or jurisdictional authority for assigned incidents.
 - Ensure a clear understanding of agency expectations, intentions, and constraints related to the incident among Incident Commanders.
 - Establish critical resource use priorities between various incidents based on incident needs and agency policy and direction.
 - Ensure appropriate incident management team personnel assignments and organizations for the kind and complexity of the incidents involved.
 - Maintain contact with officials in charge, assisting and cooperating agencies, and other interested groups.
 - Coordinate the demobilization or reassignment of resources between assigned incidents.
1. Provide effective agency or jurisdictional management authority for assigned incidents. If the incidents are multi-jurisdictional, a Unified Area Command should be established.

Upon assignment, the Area Commander should arrange a meeting with the agency/jurisdiction executive to obtain the delegation of authority and receive agency/jurisdiction policy, objectives, limitations, and constraints. At this time, the Area Commander should determine the following:

- General situation.
- Incidents assigned to Area Command.
- Jurisdictional delegation of authority.
- Assumption of command timing and notifications procedure.
- Names and qualifications of assigned Incident Commanders.
- Incidents operating under Unified Command.
- Limitations on the Area Commander's authority over Incident Commanders (should be in the Delegation of Authority).
- Incident Action Plans available.
- Policies, political factors, or other constraints.
- Agency advisor assigned.

- Area Command facility designated.
- Status of communications systems to incidents and agency/jurisdictional headquarters.
- Critical resource designations.
- Policy and expectations for interaction with the media.
- Area Command reporting responsibility to agency.
- Schedules for required briefings and contacts.

The Area Commander has the authority and the responsibility to do the following for incidents within the Area Command:

- Set overall objectives
- Establish priorities
- Allocate/reallocate critical resources

This should be done by working in cooperation with the agency/ jurisdictional executive and the assigned Incident Commanders.

The Area Commander should allow the respective Incident Commanders as much latitude as possible in implementing their respective Incident Action Plans.

2. Ensure that Incident Commanders have a clear understanding of agency expectations, intentions, and constraints related to the incidents.

It is possible that the assigned Incident Commanders may not have had a full briefing on agency/jurisdictional expectations related to their incidents prior to the time that Area Command is established.

Some incidents operating under an Area Command may be multi-agency and/or multi-jurisdictional, and may have a Unified Command structure in place. If this is the case, then the Area Command should also be a Unified Area Command. This will require full jurisdictional representation at the Area Command.

It is essential that all parties are clear on agency/jurisdictional expectations, intentions, and environmental and political constraints. Some considerations are:

- Area Command will normally be established after incident management teams are in place on the various incidents.
- It is likely that the Incident Commanders have already developed objectives, strategies, and Incident Action Plans.

- The Area Commander must rapidly assess the situation for each incident and ensure that incident action planning is addressing the priorities and direction set by the Agency Executive.
- The Area Commander should establish, in writing, priorities related to assigned incidents, based upon Agency Executive directions and other available information.

This information should be part of the written delegation of authority coming to the Area Commander from the Agency Executive.

The Area Commander should also develop procedures to be followed. These procedures should be reviewed with the respective Incident Commanders. These could include such things as:

- Incident and agency/jurisdictional priorities
- Priorities for assignments of critical resources
- Schedules of meetings and briefings
- Reports, and Incident Action Plans
- Points of contact with Agency Executives
- Media relations and contact procedures
- Unusual situation or emergency procedures reporting
- Demobilization procedures

The Area Commander should have an initial joint meeting with Incident Commanders at one location. The meeting should follow a prescribed format. The agenda for this meeting should cover the following:

- Obtain concise individual incident briefings.
- Explain the role and responsibilities of an Area Commander.
- Review the general policy and direction for the incidents as stated by the Agency Executive.
- Resolve any conflicts that may exist between Agency Executive policy and situations at the incidents.
- Review appropriate procedures as outlined above.
- Be open for questions.

- Collect available Incident Action Plans and any other essential documentation.

The Area Commander must ensure that all appropriate decisions and procedures are made clear to agency dispatchers and any other organizations involved in the Area Command.

Concerns or unresolved issues brought up at the meeting should immediately be discussed with Agency Executive(s). These could include environmental issues, cost concerns, etc.

3. Establish priorities among various incidents based on incident needs and agency policy and direction.

When two or more incidents are competing for critical resources and services, someone must make quick decisions based on an objective analysis of the total situation. Establishing priorities is one of the most important functions an Area Commander performs. The intent is to establish critical priorities for the common good of the total situation.

There are three different types of priorities that Area Command may need to establish between incidents (often related to the level of life and property values at risk)

- Priorities related to allocating critically needed resources
- Priorities related to demobilization.

Incident Commanders must acknowledge the requirement to establish critical priorities by an Area Command.

Incident Commanders may not always concur with Area Command decisions on priorities and critical resource allocations. Therefore, it is essential that each Incident Commander understands that the ability to obtain critical resources and services is balanced with the priorities established for that incident.

It is also essential that Incident Commanders understand that they may have to adjust incident strategies, tactical objectives, and resource assignments due to the lack of critical resources during a given operational period.

4. Ensure that incident management team personnel assignments and organizations are appropriate to the kind and complexity of the incidents involved.

The Area Commander is responsible for the overall management of the assigned incidents. It is essential that appropriate assignments of personnel be made within the respective incident organizations.

At the earliest opportunity, the Area Commander should review with the Incident Commanders their respective organizations and primary position personnel assignments.

The Area Commander can recommend or make appropriate changes and shifts in personnel assignments as necessary. Sometimes one incident may have personnel assigned which would be better suited to another incident.

Determine with Incident Commanders if aviation procedures and temporary flight restrictions are adequate, and if any changes should be made to air operations to provide better overall support to the incidents operating in the Area Command.

5. Maintain liaison with officials in charge, assisting and cooperating agencies, and other interested groups.

This function, if accomplished at the Area Command, may reduce the level of coordination that individual Incident Commanders and Command Staffs must perform, and will increase the flow of information to all interested parties.

There are three major coordinating services that the Area Command should perform.

- a. Between Agency/Jurisdictional Executives and Incident Commanders

Once an Area Command or a Unified Area Command is established, contact between Agency/Jurisdictional Executives and the respective incidents should be channeled through the Area Command. This will ensure a proper chain of command, and help to eliminate mixed signals or confusion.

- b. Between Area Command, Incidents, and Assisting and Cooperating Agencies

Agencies who are assisting and/or cooperating on more than one of the incidents but are not part of the Incident Command structure could, if necessary, provide representatives to the Area Command. These representatives should be fully integrated into the Area Command organization as Agency Representatives.

- c. Between the Media and the Incidents

Media relations will be especially important in an Area Command setting. Incidents of significant size or scope are likely to attract tremendous media attention.

The Agency or Jurisdiction Executive should establish a policy with the Area Commander for handling the media. These decisions should be passed on to Incident Commanders and Information Officers.

One solution related to keeping the media informed is to schedule periodic media briefings at the Area Command facility location which will update the situation for all incidents. Information Officers from the various incidents can provide the updates and schedule future media tours as appropriate.

6. Coordinate the Demobilization of Assigned Incidents

The Area Command involvement in the demobilization process is important. Area Command does not demobilize resources directly. The role of Area Command is to coordinate the demobilization of critical resources with the respective incidents.

A primary purpose of Area Command is to ensure that critical personnel and equipment resources being released from demobilizing incidents can be made available to other active or growing incidents.

Another purpose is to ensure that transportation resources and other services are not being duplicated. Resources from an agency or jurisdiction which may have been divided to support other incidents can be consolidated prior to departure.

It is essential that the Area Command establish procedures with the Incident Commanders and agency dispatch centers to coordinate the demobilization of designated resources with the Area Command.

Demobilization planning will start at the incident level. The role of Area Command is to identify to the respective Incident Commanders what the priorities will be for demobilization, and what, if any, critical resources will be required to move to other assignments.

This information should be provided to the Incident Commanders in the form of a list which describes the critical resources, and provides instructions on clearing those resources with Area Command before demobilization. Some agencies have developed forms for this purpose.

Given this information, incident level demobilization planning can proceed. Incidents should provide copies of their demobilization schedules to the Area Command prior to actual demobilization and wait for approval.

V. Area Command Primary Function Responsibilities

The following checklists cover the major activities and responsibilities of three primary Area Command positions.

A. Area Commander (Unified Area Command)

The Area Commander is responsible for the overall direction of incident management teams assigned to the same incident or to incidents in close proximity. This responsibility includes ensuring that conflicts are resolved, incident objectives are established, and strategies are selected for the use of critical resources.

Area Command may have the responsibility to coordinate with local, state, federal, and volunteer assisting and/or cooperating organizations.

Checklist of Actions:

These actions will generally be conducted in the order listed:

- Obtain briefing from the Agency Executive(s) on agency expectations, concerns, and constraints.
- Obtain and carry out delegation of authority from the Agency Executive for overall management and direction of the incidents within the designated Area Command.
- If operating as a Unified Area Command, develop working agreement for how Area Commanders will function together.
- Delegate authority to Incident Commanders based on agency expectations, concerns, and constraints.
- Establish an Area Command schedule and timeline.
- Resolve conflicts between incident "realities" and Agency Executive "wants."
- Establish appropriate location for the Area Command facilities.
- Determine and implement an appropriate Area Command organization. Keep it manageable.
- Determine need for Technical Specialists to support Area Command.
- Obtain incident briefing and Incident Action Plans from Incident Commanders, (as appropriate).
- Assess incident situations prior to strategy meetings.
- Conduct a joint meeting with all Incident Commanders.
- Review objectives and strategies for each incident.
- Periodically review critical resource needs.
- Maintain a close coordination with the Agency Executive.
- Establish priority use for critical resources.
- Review procedures for interaction within the Area Command.
- Approve Incident Commanders' requests for and release of critical resources.
- Coordinate and approve demobilization plans.

- Maintain log of major actions/decisions.

B. Area Command Planning/Intelligence Chief

The Area Command Planning/Intelligence Chief is responsible for collecting information from incident management teams in order to assess and evaluate potential conflicts in establishing incident objectives, strategies, and the priority use of critical resources.

Checklist of Actions:

- Obtain briefing from Area Commander.
- Assemble information on individual incident objectives and begin to identify potential conflicts and/or ways for incidents to develop compatible operations.
- Recommend the priorities for allocation of critical resources to incidents.
- Maintain status on critical resource totals, (not detailed status).
- Ensure that advance planning beyond the next operational period is being accomplished.
- Prepare and distribute Area Commander's decisions or orders.
- Prepare recommendations for the reassignment of critical resources as they become available.
- Ensure demobilization plans are coordinated between incident management teams and agency dispatchers.
- Schedule strategy meeting with Incident Commanders to conform with their planning processes.
- Prepare Area Command briefings and status reports for dissemination as requested or needed.
- Maintain log of major actions/decisions.

C. Area Command Logistics Chief

The Area Command Logistics Chief is responsible for providing facilities, services, and materials at the Area Command level, and for ensuring effective use of critical resources and supplies among the incident management teams.

Checklist of Actions:

- Obtain briefing from the Area Commander.

- Provide facilities, services, and materials for the Area Command organization.
- Ensure coordinated airspace temporary flight restrictions are in place and understood.
- Ensure coordinated communication links and frequencies are in place.
- Assist in the preparation of Area Command decisions.
- Ensure the continued effective and priority use of critical resources among the incident management teams.
- Maintain log of major actions/decisions.