

Incident Command for Energy Infrastructure Emergencies

A Practical Guide for Utilities in Understanding Incident Command Systems

Understanding the Incident Command System (ICS) by utility personnel, helps ensure a safer response for all.

Utilities respond daily to many incidents that can range from a minor system disruption, damage caused by “dig-ins,” to a major event with property damage or worse, injuries or fatalities. Utility personnel working at a scene must have the skills to be aware of changing conditions, recognize when the incident is evolving into a larger emergency, and understand the need to call for more resources.



Utility ICS begins at the moment when utility responders become aware the event is not a routine incident and recognize it's the start of a serious emergency. Failure to alert supervisors of impending problems can start the operation on the road to disaster. Utility personnel should initiate their company's emergency response plan. At this critical point, the senior utility person on the scene must begin initial command functions until relieved by a public emergency responder or when a company supervisor arrives.



The second stage of ICS engages the role of the utility supervisor who arrives at the scene. This leader (a supervisor, superintendent or manager) will have responsibility to assume command of the utility's emergency operations. They will make decisions regarding activities at the local scene in conjunction with local emergency responders.

UNIFIED COMMAND AT UTILITY EMERGENCIES

In large incidents, it is common to use a modified incident command structure called “unified command.” Under a unified command, representatives from both the emergency services command and utility company work together. They share information, coordinate personnel and develop an incident action plan that uses agreed upon strategies and tactics to accomplish the mission.



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