



The Role Of

The Incident Command System (ICS)

Within

Auxiliary Communications Services (ACS)

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Ken Larson KJ6RZ

1 Introduction

Integrating ACS with the Government mandated Incident Command System (ICS) raises two issues:

- a. The role of ACS within the Incident Command Systems used by our supported agencies and organizations, and
- b. The role of the Incident Command System within ACS.

We have for years served in the Emergency Operation Centers (EOCs) of the agencies and organizations that we support. For most of that time we have been assigned to their ICS Logistics Section handling radio communications traffic. In the last couple of years we have also begun supporting their Planning Section as well.

There is, however, a problem. All of the agencies and organizations that we support (cities, police departments, hospitals, school districts, universities, etc.) all utilize ICS as their internal emergency management system. Supporting these organizations during a large scale crisis means that ACS could easily be serving on over 25 different ICS teams all at the same time. Each agency and organization develops and maintains its own ICS Incident Action Plan defining what it is doing in response to the crisis and how it is doing it. Our ACS operators working in the EOC of one of our agencies are working under the direction of that agency and in accordance with their Incident Action Plan. All of the Incident Action Plans are of course different since each applies to the emergency response activities of that particular agency or organization. So how does ACS implement an integrated emergency communications system throughout the County while our members are all working for different organizations and complying with different Incident Action Plans? How do we control our overall operations? What nets do we activate? How do we run those nets and keep them from overloading? How do we manage our staffing. How do we get people and supplies where they are needed. How do we handle rapidly changing situations as the crisis evolves, etc.? These are ACS problems that are well beyond the focus of the agencies and organizations that we support. Yet these problems, and many others, must be successfully handled if we are to provide these organizations with the quality of communications support that they expect from us. What emergency management system do we use?

If the agencies and organizations that we support are all successfully using ICS as their emergency management system, then we should be able to do the same. All of the ICS literature indicates that we should be able to do so very successfully. However, it turns out that applying the Incident Command System to ACS is not as straightforward as it first seemed. This paper looks at what is involved in using the Incident Command System for ACS, and how it would work to manage the County wide communication services provided by ACS.

As a foundation, a quick review is provided of the traditional ACS services that we provide to our supported agencies and organizations.

2 The Role of ACS within the Incident Command Systems of Our Supported EOCs

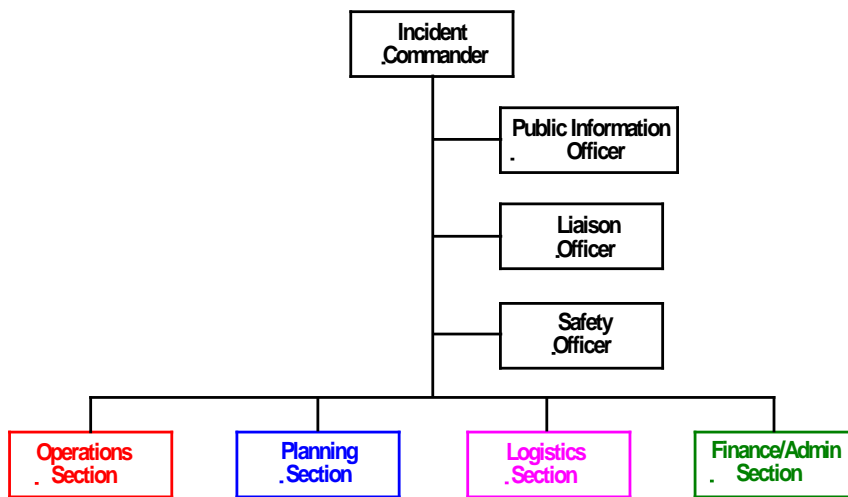


Figure 1 ICS Organizational Structure

Traditionally ACS has served (been a part of) the ICS Logistics Section at our supported EOCs.

The Logistics Section is responsible for:

- Purchasing of all goods and services needed for the incident.
- Communications.
 - Preparing and supporting the Incident Communications Plan.
 - Distributing and maintaining communications equipment.
 - Supervising the Incident Communications Center.
 - Ensuring adequate communications for the incident.
- Providing medical support for incident personnel.
- Supplying all food and water needed by incident personnel.
- Ordering, receiving, storing, and distributing all supplies needed to support the incident.
- Setting up and maintaining all facilities including providing
 - facility security,
 - maintenance,
 - sanitation,
 - lighting, and
 - cleanup.

- Ground support including
 - Arranging transportation for all personnel, supplies, food, and equipment.
 - Obtaining fuel required by vehicles supporting the incident.

ACS plays a major role in helping the Logistics Section with radio communication related tasks. ACS does this by setting up and operating extensive amateur radio voice and data communication networks between and among various EOCs, mobile units, and field sites.

Over the last few years ACS has begun helping the Planning Section as well.

The Planning Section is responsible for:

- Maintaining resource status.
 - Conducts all check-in and check-out activities.
 - Maintains the status of all incident resources.
- Gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information and intelligence.
 - Collects and analyzes information on the current situation.
 - Prepares situation displays and situation summaries.
 - Develops maps and projections.
- Preparing the Incident Action Plan (IAP).
 - Develops strategies.
 - Prepares the Demobilization Plan.
- Providing documentation services.
 - Produces copies of all needed documents and plans.
 - Maintains and archives all incident related documentation.

The second bullet on this list relating to “gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information and intelligence” is an area where ACS can and is providing considerable help. Because of our extensive ACS communication networks, including Info-Net, we have access to a considerable amount of information concerning the scope and magnitude of the evolving crisis. This is information which the Planning Section needs and wants. A number of our EOCs have become more interested in our ability to provide information than with our communication services between EOCs. This is particularly true if their own communication channels are providing them with adequate intra- and inter-agency communications. However, they still rely on our communication networks as backup should their communication channels fail.

Assisting the Planning Section is a relatively new ACS service consisting of:

- Tasking from the Planning Section on the information that they would like us to collect,
- Retrieving the information,
- Consolidating it into a form useful to the Planning Section, and
- Presenting it to them in a timely manner.

3 The Role of the Incident Command System within ACS

The Incident Command System meets all of our ACS/ARES event and emergency management needs. ICS is designed for use in all types of incidents (emergencies and events) regardless of their nature or size. ICS also has the ability to expand or contract as required to meet the needs of the situation. The full Incident Command System is large and complex, but for each incident, we only need to implement that part of ICS that we actually need. The normal approach is to start small. If the incident expands in size or complexity we implement more of the ICS structure, staffing additional ICS positions as needed to deal with the escalating crisis. Similarly, as the incident winds down, we shrink the ICS structure accordingly.

It is important to recognize that ICS is an emergency management system which exists only for the duration of an incident. ICS is activated at the onset of an incident, grows in size and complexity as the severity and consequences of the incident expands, stabilizes at the organizational level needed to deal with the crisis, and then shrinks in size as the incident is resolved. ICS is deactivated at the conclusion of the incident. The ICS leadership positions are created and exist only for the duration of the incident. The people filling those positions change with each shift change in order to continuously staff the Incident Command System 24 hours a day 7 days a week until the incident is finally resolved.

The ICS emergency management system is in contrast to an administrative management system. The ICS emergency management system exists only for the duration of an incident. An administrative management system lasts for years handling the day-to-day operations of an organization. The administrative leadership positions are each filled by a single person who generally holds that position for several years.

Emergency response organizations generally have both an administrative management system to handle day-to-day operations and an emergency management system (ICS) to handle the response to specific incidents. The people filling the ICS leadership positions are generally not the administrative managers. It is easy to see why this is so. With ICS leaders changing at every shift change there simply are not enough administrative managers to fill the ICS positions 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Add to this the fact that the skills required by the ICS leaders are often different from the skills of the administrative managers.

Our ACS/ARES program is set up the same as most other emergency response organizations. We have both administrative and emergency management systems. ARES is our administrative management system handling the day-to-day operations of our ACS/ARES program. Our ARES leaders serve in their respective positions for a long period of time, typically several years. ACS is our emergency management system. ACS exists only when activated by the Ventura County Office of Emergency Services (OES) to handle a specific emergency. ACS is deactivated at the end of the emergency when ACS services are no longer required. Like all emergency management systems, the people filling our ACS leadership positions change with each shift change to provide continuous 24 hour a day 7 day per week operations.

The question is, how do we actually implement our ACS emergency management system? What is being proposed in this paper is using ICS as our ACS emergency management system.

It seemed initially that the ICS structure, shown in Figure 1, should be applied directly to our ACS/ARES Organizational Chart shown in Figure 2. That is, we should have a single Incident

Command System controlling all ACS operations throughout the County. It seemed that the ICS leadership positions (Incident Commander, Operations Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, and Logistics Section Chief) should all reside at the ACS/ARES District level, most likely working out of the County EOC. However, when this approach was analyzed, the Incident Command System did not seem to fit our ACS operations. The Incident Command System appeared clumsy to use, slow to react to quickly changing conditions in our eight Local Areas, and created a lot of radio traffic. Part of the problem with this approach is that all problems occurring in the Local Areas would need to be sent to the County EOC (where the ICS leadership is located) for resolution. Instructions for solving the problems would then need to be sent back to the Local Areas for implementation. This decision making traffic places a tremendous communications load on our ACS/ARES networks. In fact, this traffic could easily overload our networks — overload them to the point that they would fail as quickly and for the same reasons that telephone, cell phone, and internet service would all fail during a disaster. For these reasons, the initial attempts to apply the Incident Command System to ACS were pretty discouraging.

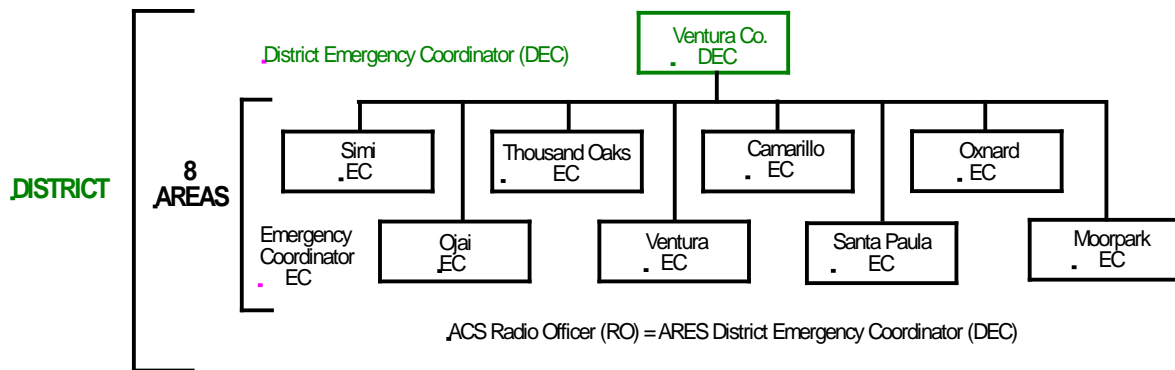


Figure 2 Ventura County ACS/ARES Organizational Chart

While it should have been obvious from the start, it actually took quite some time to realize that incidents do not occur at the ACS/ARES District level, they occur with the individual Local Areas.

The Incident Command System did not seem to work for ACS because we were trying to apply it at the District level. ICS is an “on-scene” emergency management system. On-scene means in the Local Areas where the emergencies are occurring, not at the District level.

When ICS was applied at the local level (each Local Area implementing its own Incident Command System) ICS fit perfectly, providing ACS all of the promised ICS advantages. When applied at the local level, all of the ICS leadership positions (Incident Commander, Operations Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, and Logistics Section Chief) reside in the Local Area where they can quickly identify and react to rapidly changing conditions. Problems occurring at the local level are resolved at the local level, tremendously offloading traffic from the County wide ACS/ARES networks. All of the problems associated with planning, implementing, and supporting the ACS response to local crisis are greatly simplified because all of the ACS Incident Command System leaders and members or on-scene where the problems are actually occurring.

ARES defines the duties that each Local Area Emergency Coordinator (EC) is to perform. These duties are focused on working with local leaders, organizations, and agencies to identify the emergency communication needs of the community. Once these needs are identified, the EC is expected to work with his ARES members to develop an emergency communications plan that meets community needs, develop the required communication networks, test and operate the networks, and train the local ARES members to deliver the communication services which the community is depending on. By performing these duties, the EC and his ARES members are laying the groundwork necessary to implement the Incident Command System when emergencies occur within their Local Area. The objectives of ARES and the requirements of ICS are thus perfectly aligned.

The ACS Radio Officer, located at the County EOC, is the next level of management above ICS. The Radio Office provides the Office of Emergency Services with direct communications to the ACS Incident Commanders throughout the County, allowing OES to coordinate overall ACS operations. The Radio Officer also serves as the ACS liaison providing the County EOC staff with direct communications to each of the eight Local Areas, and providing them with information on conditions in the eight Local Areas. The Radio Officer is an emergency management system position, not a person. The person filling the Radio Officer position changes with each shift change.

4 Implementing the Incident Command System

This section provides the details for implementing an ACS Incident Command System.

When activated, ACS is organized into the same eight geographical Local Areas, shown in Figure 3, as ARES. The Ventura County Office of Emergency Services (OES) will usually authorize ACS operations in only those Local Areas affected by the emergencies. However, ACS members throughout Ventura County will typically respond to the activation if required and when available. The activated Local Areas will:

- Provide emergency communication services to selected OES approved agencies and organizations within the activated areas,
- Provide those agencies and organizations with communications to and from the County EOC,
- Provide the County EOC with information on the situation in the activated areas.
- Utilize the Incident Command System (ICS) as its ACS Local Area emergency management system, as shown in Figure 4.
- Report to the ACS Radio Officer located at the County EOC as shown in Figure 5.

The organization shown in Figure 4 differs from the standard ICS organization in that there is not a Finance Section or a Public Information Officer (PIO).

A Finance Section is not required since ACS is a volunteer organization and thus does not deal with financial issues during an incident.

ACS generally avoids providing any information concerning an incident to the general public or media. That is the job of the served agency Public Information Officer (PIO). Thus the Incident Command System for ACS does not need the PIO function.

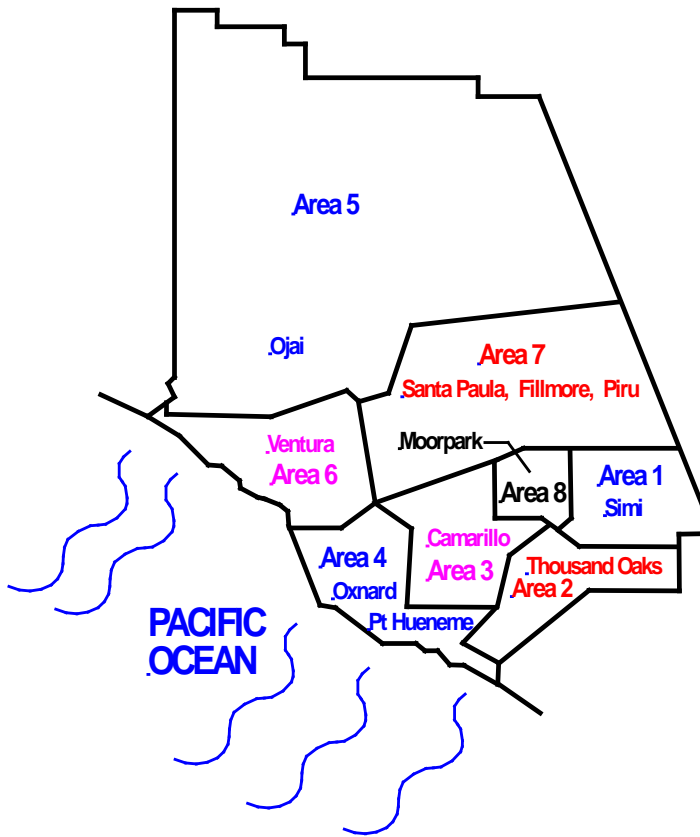


Figure 3 ACS/ARES 8 Geographical Areas

Liaison with the ACS Radio Officer at the County EOC, other ACS Areas, and supported organizations will generally be directly handled by the ACS Local Area Incident Commander. If the Incident Commander becomes overloaded, he or she may appoint a Liaison Officer.

4.1 ACS Radio Officer

The ACS Radio Officer is an Emergency Management System position similar to the Incident Commander positions in each of the Local Areas. The ACS Radio Officer position exists only when ACS is activated. The person filling the Radio Officer position changes with each shift change.

The ACS Radio Officer works in the County EOC performing functions which include:

- Serving as the interface between OES and the ACS Local Area Incident Commanders to coordinate overall ACS operations,
- Serving as the liaison between ACS and the County EOC staff,
- Directing communications between the County EOC and the ACS Local Areas,
- Obtaining information for the County EOC on conditions in each of the Local Areas as the crisis evolves,
- Coordinating mutual aid between the ACS Local Areas.

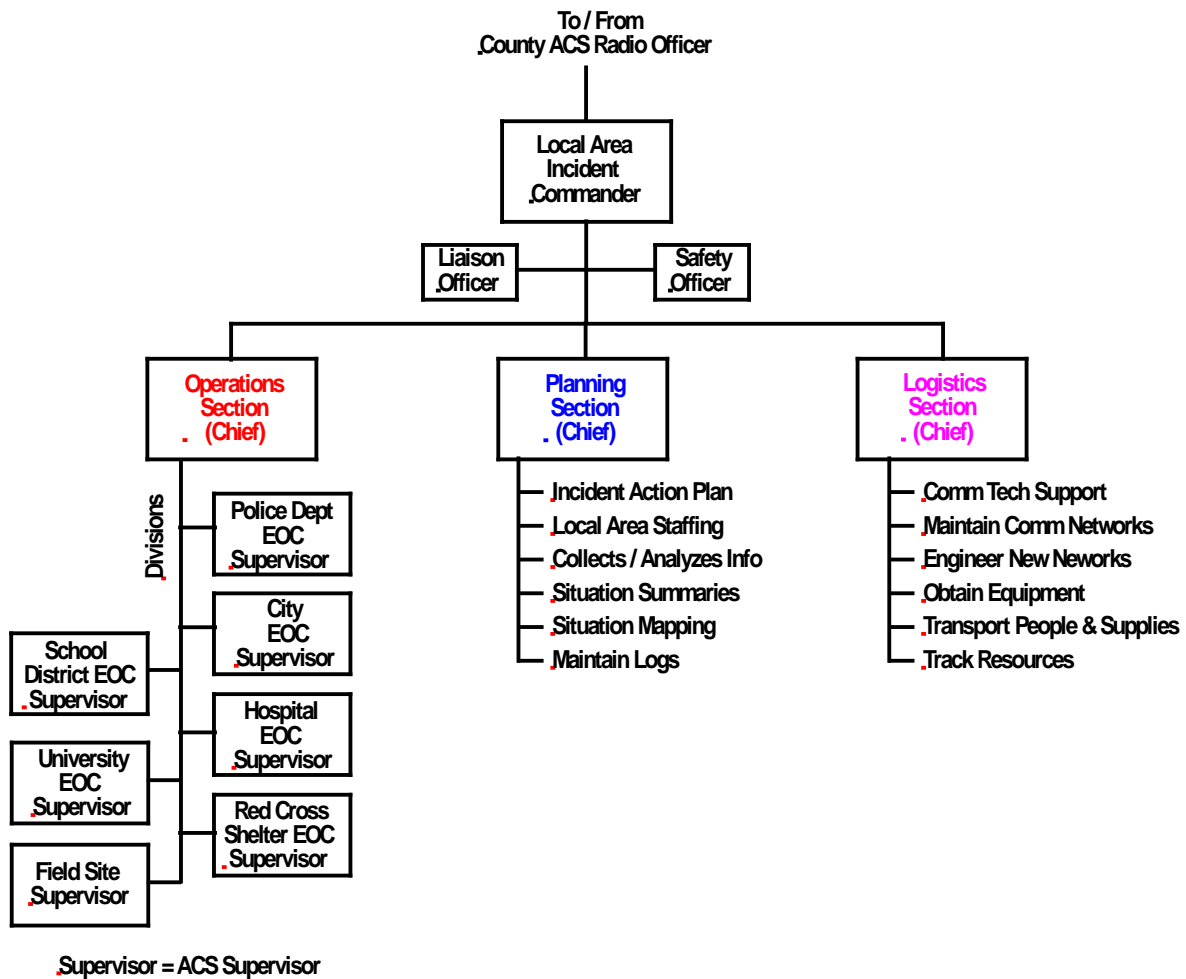


Figure 4 Incident Command System Organization for an ACS Area

The Radio Officer’s staff consists, at a minimum, of the ACS radio operators required to maintain voice and digital (packet) communications with each of the activated ACS Local Areas. If needed, and staffing resources permit, the Radio Officer may also establish a Planning Section and a Logistics Section. The duties performed by the Planning and Logistics Sections will usually include those shown in Figure 5.

The Radio Officer position will typically be filled initially by the ARES District Emergency Coordinator. Following shift changes the position may be filled by the Assistant District Emergency Coordinator, ECs from Local Areas not directly involved in the crisis, or other senior ACS personnel. All ACS members serving in the County EOC must be approved by the Office of Emergency Services and have gone through County EOC operations training. The Local Areas are responsible for staffing the additional ACS position at the County EOC.

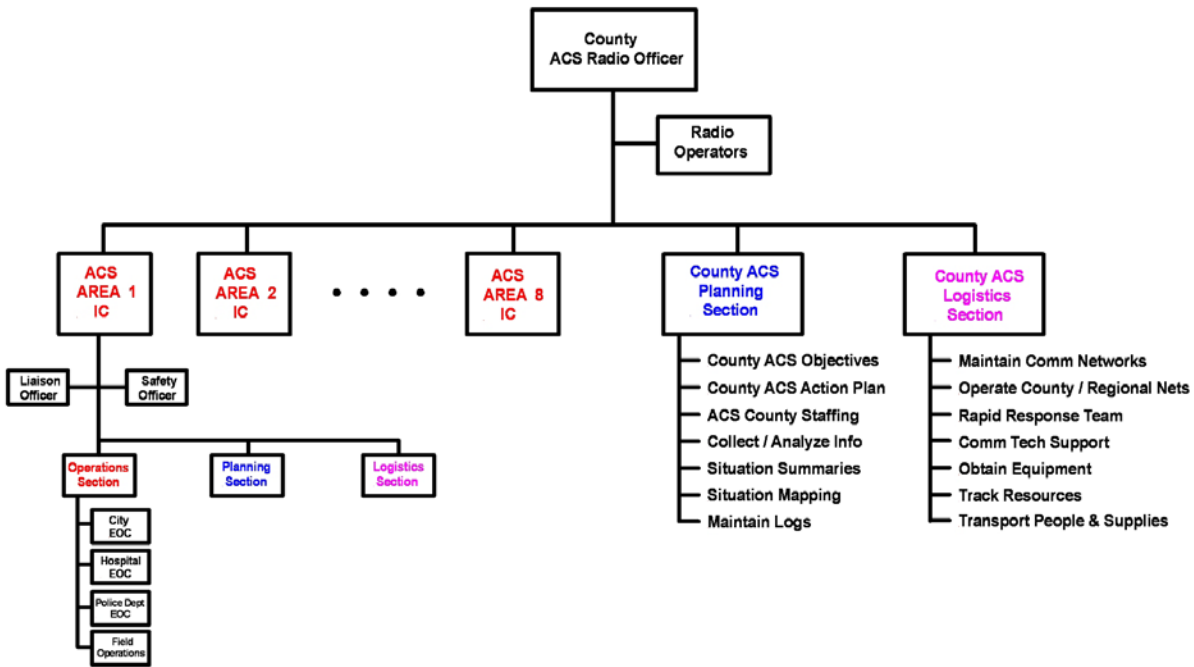


Figure 5 County ACS Radio Office and Staff

4.2 Local Area ACS Organizational Structure

When activated, each ACS Local Area affected by the emergency will implement the Incident Command System to manage the “on scene” ACS emergency communications activities in its Area.

The Incident Command System implemented in each Area will initially be staffed by ACS members living in the Local Area. Members in unaffected Areas of the County will be called upon, as needed and as available, to help staff ICS positions in those Local Areas involved in the emergency.

The Local Area EC will usually serve as the initial ACS Local Area Incident Commander. Local Area AECs and other senior ACS members will typically be assigned as the Incident Commander on following shifts.

4.2.1 Incident Commander

The ACS Local Area Incident Commander is the individual responsible for all ACS incident activities, including the development of strategies and tactics and the requesting and releasing of resources, within his/her Local Area. The Incident Commander has overall authority and responsibility for conducting ACS incident operations and is responsible for the management of tactical operations within his/her Local Area. The Incident Commander expands and contracts the ICS organizational structure as required. Initially, and for small incidents, the Incident Commander may handle all of the ICS management functions. As the incident evolves the Incident Commander will typically create and staff the Operations, Planning, and Logistic Sections and delegate authority to the respective Section Chiefs. The Incident Commander may also assign a Safety Officer and a

Liaison Officer as needed. The Incident Commander is typically the ARES Local Area EC or one of the Local Area AECs but does not have to be. The person filling the Incident Commander position will change on lengthy activations as shift changes occur. The same is also true for the other ICS leadership positions.

The Incident Commander must in general:

- Have clear authority and know Office of Emergency Services policy.
- Ensure incident safety.
- Estimate the time duration of the incident.
- Set priorities, and determine incident objectives and strategies to be followed.
- Establish the level of Incident Command System organization needed to manage the incident, expanding or contracting the organization as needed.
- Approve the Incident Action Plan.
- Coordinate Command and General Staff activities.

Specifically the ACS Incident Commander:

- Takes general direction from the Office of Emergency Services,
- Determines the level of ACS Local Area response to the incident based on:
 - The level of OES activation.
 - Requests for support from local agencies and organizations.
 - Reports from local ACS members concerning the extent and magnitude of the evolving crisis.
- Identifies the initial locations to be staffed and the urgency in doing so.
- Identifies the initial Local Area networks to be activated and net control responsibility.
- As the incident grows, the Incident Commander will activate and staff the ICS Operations, Planning, and Logistics Sections as needed and delegate authority to the respective Section Chiefs.
- With assistance from the Safety Officer, ensures the safety of ACS personnel involved in the incident.
- Provides information to the ACS Radio Officer, the County EOC, and to served local agencies and organizations on measures being taken to ensure adequate ACS local communications support.
- Establishes and maintains liaison with other organizations and agencies within the Local Area that are responding to the incident.
- Request mutual aid from the ACS Radio Officer if the crisis evolves beyond the personnel and equipment resources of the Local Area.
- Negotiates with the ACS Radio Officer on requests for personnel and resources being sent as mutual aid to another ACS Local Area.

4.2.2 Command Staff

The ACS Command Staff typically includes the Safety Officer and Liaison Officer.

4.2.2.1 Safety Officer

The Safety Officer monitors incident operations and advises the Incident Commander on all matters relating to operational safety, including the health and safety of emergency responder personnel.

4.2.2.2 Liaison Officer

The Liaison Officer serves as the interface between the ACS team and local agencies and organizations responding to the emergency.

4.2.3 Operations Section Chief

The Operations Section Chief reports to the Incident Commander and is responsible for the direct management of all incident-related operational activities. The Operations Section Chief will establish tactics for the assigned operational period and be directly involved in development of the Incident Action Plan.

Specifically, the ACS Operations Section Chief is responsible for:

- Activating and deactivating ACS Local Area networks.
- Assigning network control responsibility for each activated net.
- Coordinating all radio operations at each EOC and field site with:
 - The ACS Operations Supervisor at each EOC.
 - The ACS Field Operations Supervisor at each field site.
- Deploying mobile units.
- Ensuring that correct radio operating procedures and protocols are being followed.
- Working with the Incident Commander, Planning, and Logistics Sections on development of the ACS Incident Action Plan.
- Working with the Logistics Section on resource issues.

The Operations Section is typically staffed with:

- Radio operators handling radio communications.
- Non-radio operator message handlers and operation coordinators

4.2.4 Planning Section Chief

The Planning Section Chief reports to the Incident Commander and directs operation of the Planning Section.

The Planning Section is responsible for developing and maintaining the ACS Local Area Incident Action Plan.

- The Incident Commander, Operations, Logistics, and Planning Chiefs participate in development of the Incident Action Plan.
- The plan identifies the Local Area agencies and organizations being supported, the communication services to be provided and how the services are to be accomplished.
- The Incident Action Plan covers a specified time period.
- The plan will be periodically updated and changed as appropriate to reflect the evolving crisis.

The Planning Section is also responsible for:

- Determining which Local Area EOCs and facility sites are to be staffed.
- Determining when and where field sites are to be established.
- Maintaining ACS staffing for the incident.
 - Compiles the staffing needs of all Sections (Operations, Planning, Logistics).
 - Establishes operational shifts if the incident is expected to last for more than 8 hours.
 - Assembles the required staffing for each shift.
 - Handles shift check-in and check-out of all ACS personnel.
 - Provides personnel being dispatched with information including:
 - The site or location to which they are being assigned.
 - Directions on how to get to the site, which may not be the normal route.
 - The person to whom they are to report.
 - Their anticipated assignment at that site or location.
 - Radio frequencies to use in route to assignment.
 - Personal equipment that they should bring with them.

In addition, the Planning Section:

- Collects and analyzes information received from the ACS networks on:
 - The extent and magnitude of the evolving crisis,
 - The situation in the Local Area,
 - Information on specific issues requested by the served organizations and agencies.
- Creates and distributes situation reports, including a “top of the hour report,” to the Area’s served organizations, agencies, EOCs, field sites, and to the County EOC.
- Maintains logs of the ACS Local Area operations during the incident.

The Planning Section typically consists of:

- Non-radio operators, and
- A few radio operators for communicating with other sites, supported organizations and ACS personnel.

4.2.5 Logistics Section Chief

The Logistics Section Chief reports to the Incident Commander and directs operation of the Logistics Section.

The Logistics Section is responsible for

- Providing all technical communications support required by:
 - The ACS team, plus supported
 - Organizations,
 - Agencies, and
 - Field sites.
- Participating in development of the Incident Action Plan.
- Maintaining all ACS Local Area communication networks.
- Obtaining communication related equipment as needed to support the incident.
- Transporting ACS people and supplies as needed.
- Tracking ACS resources.

The Logistics Section typically consists of:

- The ACS Local Area communications technical team.
- Radio operators for communicating with mobile units and other sites.
- Non-radio operators.

5 Summary

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) recognizes that many organizations involved with disaster response will have two organizational structures, an Administrative structure to deal with the daily operation of the organization, and an Emergency Management structure which deals with the organization's response to actual disasters.

Nationally recognized Administrative and Emergency Management organizational systems suitable for the ACS/ARES program already exist. There is no reason for us to invent our own. ARES is an excellent Administrative system. NIMS defines ICS as the Emergency Management System that we are expected to follow during natural and civil disasters in accordance with FEMA mandates.

We have, in fact, implemented the ARES Administrative system for years. ARES is the basis for dividing our program into the eight operational Areas. ARES defines the Emergency Coordinator (EC) and District Emergency Coordinator (DEC) positions as well as the duties of each position.

NIMS mandates use of the Incident Command System for on-scene emergency management. As described in this paper, each of our eight Local Areas becomes an ICS team dealing with the crisis occurring in its Local Area. The NIMS plan is very flexible. In some situations two or more Local Areas could be combined into a single ICS team based on the situation and available manpower. The means by which the individual ICS teams report up the chain of command to OES, receive direction

from OES, and the process by which mutual aid is coordinated between the eight Local Areas are described in this paper following the guidance provided by NIMS.

Together, the ARES Administrative organization and the NIMS ICS Emergency Management System provide the complete organizational structure needed to run a very successful ACS/ARES program.