



Madera County Public Safety Incident Command System

Madera County Grand Jury Final Report 2223-03 June 19, 2023

Summary

The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized management program with procedures for managing temporary incidents. This nationwide program is designed to ensure effective and efficient management of incidents, regardless of their size, complexity, or location. The ICS system employs common terminology and standardized procedures to ensure that everyone involved in the response works together in a cohesive manner. The ICS is not unique to Madera County as the ICS uses common terminology and standardized procedures throughout the United States. Major event planning, community gatherings, and incidents requiring a multi-agency response, including man-made or natural disasters, can require ICS activation. This system permits a clear point of control and can be expanded and contracted as needed.

The Madera County Grand Jury (MCGJ) investigated the capabilities of the ICS in Madera County. The MCGJ found the Madera County ICS to possess the ability and resources to effectively deal with unusual occurrences or high-risk incidents in accordance with established policies and procedures of the Nationwide Incident Management System (NIMS).

Methodology

- Reviewed Cal Fire Incident Command System's Policy and Procedure Manual.
- Reviewed Madera County Sheriff Department Incident Command System's Policy and Procedure Manual.
- Reviewed Madera Police Department Incident Command System's Policy and Procedure Manual.
- Toured the Incident Command Center in Mariposa.
- Interviewed senior staff at Cal Fire, Madera County Sheriff's Department, and Madera Police Department.
- Attended the Incident Command System daily briefing at the Madera County Sheriff's Department Command Center along with all partnering agencies.
- Participated in a roundtable discussion with Cal Fire at the Tri-County Mariposa Incident Command System Center
- Participated in a roundtable discussion with the Madera County Sheriff's Department.
- Participated in a roundtable discussion with the Madera City Police Department.

Background

The ICS is a standardized system used Nationwide. The ICS concept was formed in 1968 at a meeting of Fire Chiefs in Southern California and is a component of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). In the United States, ICS has been tested for over 50 years in emergency and non-emergency situations. The ICS was fully developed during a series of catastrophic wildfires, starting with the massive Laguna Fire in 1970. Studies from past fire critiques determined that response problems were related to inter-agency jurisdictional management conflicts and communication problems rather than a lack of resources or failure of tactics. According to Cal Fire, the ICS was first used in the fight against California wildfires during the 1970s. Locally, ICS was used to access resources and personnel to combat the California Creek Fire, the Madera Community Hospital closure, and the Winter Storm of 2023.

Discussion

The Madera County ICS has effective plans to enlist the many departments and resources required to carry out its mission in a cohesive manner minimizing the loss of life or damage to property or natural resources. The ICS can take whatever actions are deemed necessary to defuse an emergency. The ICS is widespread in its use from law enforcement to everyday business, as the basic goal of clear communication, as well as daily operations. The ICS is a

standardized management program with procedures for managing unusual or high-risk incidents. Events are defined within ICS as planned situations such as fairs, concerts, parades, and community events. The ICS is increasingly applied to events both in emergency management and non-emergency management settings. Incidents are defined within ICS as unplanned situations necessitating a response.

The ICS program is designed to ensure effective and efficient management of incidents regardless of their size, complexity, or location, and uses common terminology and standardized procedures to ensure that everyone involved in the response can work together in a cohesive manner. This ICS program permits a clear point of control and can be expanded or contracted as needed. The ICS emergency operation center is activated whenever an incident causes a significant impact on residents or businesses. Law enforcement is required to place a higher priority on public safety over damage or destruction to public or private property. The ICS has access to personnel and resources to combat:

- Train derailments
- Fire (both structural and wildfire)
- Landslides
- Search and rescue
- Earthquakes
- Explosions
- Hazardous material incidents
- Oil spills

The first individual to arrive at the scene of the emergency assumes the role of Incident Commander until relieved by a higher-ranking officer or the appropriate agency. The first individual will be expected to respond to the directions of the 9-1-1 dispatcher:

- Take whatever actions are deemed necessary to prevent loss of life and property.
- Immediately notify 9-1-1 of the type or nature of the emergency.
- Assess and report casualty estimates.
- Communicate as specifically as possible about emergency medical needs.
- Direct all responding units to the scene, advising them of hazards.

A large incident will have multiple teams to address the immediate emergency needs. The Incident Commander has the responsibility to allocate critical resources based on priorities to ensure incidents are properly managed and ensure objectives are met. If an evacuation order

is necessary, the location determines from whom an evacuation order may come. In the city, it is the police chief; in the county, it is the sheriff' and in the forest, it is the fire department. The ICS program is the process of building both the personnel and organizational structure to meet the needs of the specific event or emergency.

The command is established in a top-down fashion. Each individual participating in the operation reports to only one superior thus eliminating the potential for individuals receiving conflicting orders from numerous supervisors. This organizational structure increases accountability, improves the flow of information, assists in coordinating operational efforts, and enhances operational safety for all involved in the incident. This organizational concept is fundamental to the ICS chain of command. Critical roles are handled by supervising officers who communicate directly with the Incident Commander and their teams. The Incident Commander manages all requests and resources available to bring the event or emergency to a successful conclusion.

Each team has a specific responsibility:

- **Incident Commander:** The Commander defines the incident's goals and operational objective within any given incident.
- **Operations Team:** Responsible for managing operations.
- **Logistics Team:** Responsible for providing resources and support to incident operations.
- **Planning Team:** Responsible for collections and analyzing information and developing action plans.
- **Finance Team:** Responsible for managing the financial aspects of the incident response.
- **Safety Team:** Responsible for monitoring and assessing safety and environmental hazards and developing measures to ensure personnel and public safety.
- **Information Team:** Responsible for providing information to the public and media.
- **Liaison Team:** Responsible for coordinating with representatives from cooperating agencies.

Using common terminology and standardized procedures enables the teams to work in a cohesive and cooperative manner to combat emergencies and unplanned situations necessitating a response. Maintaining constant precision and readiness at all times is achieved through continual training across all agencies.

In recent history, Madera County has experienced several incidents where the ICS has been activated. For example, the Creek Fire was a large wildfire that started on September 4, 2020, near Big Creek, California. The fire burned approximately 400,000 acres and was the fourth-largest wildfire in modern California history. Evacuations were issued for North Fork

Bass Lake, Big Creek, Shaver Lake, Huntington Lake, Tollhouse, and Auberry, California. The Creek Fire destroyed at least 856 structures, with over \$193 million in fire suppression costs, while total property damage is currently unknown.

Another example of ICS activation occurred with the closure of the Madera Community Hospital on December 30, 2022. Madera Community Hospital had been available to service nearly 160,000 Madera County residents. The financial burden of Covid-19 and the lack of government reimbursement payments from Medi-Cal was not sustainable for the Madera Community Hospital which closed and filed for bankruptcy. Madera County residents now must travel to either Merced or Fresno which is 30 to 40 miles away. In an emergency, the needed 30 to 45 minutes of drive-time can create a life-or-death situation. The added patient load for the Merced and Fresno hospitals had a significant impact resulting in both Fresno and Merced Counties declaring a State of Emergency.

The closure of the Madera Community Hospital has also affected City and County law enforcement departments in Madera County. State prisoners and residents, some of whom may suffer from mental disorders, must now be transported to either Merced or Fresno hospitals. Drive-time coupled with understaffed law enforcement units to transfer patients puts additional strain on city and county resources. The closure caused the Madera County Sheriff to declare a State of Emergency on January 9, 2023.

A third example are the winter storms of 2023 which brought massive amounts of snow leaving many homes uninhabitable. Some residents had to relocate to shelters, motels, and schools. The impact of the Winter Storms triggered an ICS activation.

On March 8, 2023, the MCGJ observed the daily ICS briefing at the Madera County Sheriff's Department headquarters of the ICS. The storms of February and March prompted the visit by the MCGJ. Specific areas of concern were highlighted at the daily briefing. Partner-agencies representatives from PG&E, Red Cross, California Office of Emergency Services, the California Highway Patrol, the Community Action Partnership of Madera County, Madera County Public Works, the Flood Control District, the North Fork Rancheria, Sierra Ambulance, police, sheriff, and Cal Fire all provided up-to-date information. The National Weather Service provided a weather risk outlook. Updates were provided to address the changing conditions of the roads and priority access routes to ICS and resident locations. The MCGJ also learned that all departments worked around the clock. Assistance was also available for residents from other community volunteers, who cleared roofs, and driveways checked for medical needs, food needs, needs of pets, and pulled stuck vehicles out of the snow-covered ditches and driveways.

The MCGJ found that when the ICS was triggered, the calls were received at the Sheriff's 9-1-1 Call Center. To secure government funds, on March 8, 2023, the governor of California declared a State of Emergency. The Sheriff's Office became the hub for disseminating and coordinating information for the County. The ICS assessed the needs and gathered and deployed

personnel to address the incident. Public information was provided by television, radio, and social media. Using various disaster areas as a backdrop, the sheriff presented video updates surrounding the storms and advised residents to heed the message of road closures and barriers, to avoid flooded areas including water over the roads or overflowing streams, and to avoid any unnecessary travel.

Findings

F1. The MCGJ finds that Madera City Police, Cal Fire, and the Madera County Sheriff's Department are well-prepared to work in cooperation with outside agencies to address incidents.

F2. The MCGJ finds that Madera City Police, Cal Fire, and the Madera County Sheriff's Department follow the National Incident Management System (NIMS) guidelines.

F3. The MCGJ finds that Madera City Police, Cal Fire, and the Madera County Sheriff Department use common terminology and standardized procedures.

F4. The MCGJ finds that Madera City Police, Cal Fire, and the Madera County Sheriff Department train on ICS procedures on a regular basis across all agencies.

Recommendations

R1. The MCGJ recommends that the Madera City Police, Cal Fire, and the Madera County Sheriff's Department continue to engage outside agencies while addressing incidents.

R2. The MCGJ recommends that the Madera City Police, Cal Fire, and the Madera County Sheriff's Department continue to follow the NIMS guidelines.

R3. The MCGJ recommends that the Madera City Police, Cal Fire, and the Madera County Sheriff's Department continue to work in a cooperative and collaborative manner using common terminology and standardized procedures.

R4. The MCGJ recommends that the Madera City Police, Cal Fire, and the Madera County Sheriff's Department continue to train on a regular basis across all agencies.

Required Respondents

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Madera County Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

From the following elected county officials within 60 days:

Madera County Sheriff
2725 Falcon Drive
Madera CA. 93637

Madera County Board of Supervisors
200 W. 4th Street Fourth Floor
Madera, CA 93638

Invited Respondents

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Madera County Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

From the following elected county officials within 90 days:

Cal Fire Battalion Chief
200 W. 4th Street Fourth Floor
Madera, CA 93638

Madera Police Chief
300 S. C Street
Madera, CA 93638

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify the individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.