

ICS Canada – Communiqué

Incident Command System Canada (July 2020)



Background

The development of the Incident Command System (ICS) was the result of hard-won lessons learned by responders battling bush and forest fires in California during the 1970s. The challenges identified the need to improve and standardize command and coordination of the broad spectrum of responder personnel, jurisdictions, and equipment, regardless of the scale of an incident using an all-hazards approach.

In 2002 CIFFC took the US ICS materials and Canadianized them to become what is now known as *ICS Canada* curriculum. This effort was made to improve on-site incident efficiency, improve interoperability for mutual aid, and enhance first responder safety. All Provincial, Territorial and Federal wild land firefighting agencies across Canada subsequently adopted this ICS model. CIFFC, a leader in the ICS community, became the copyright holders of the *ICS Canada* products. In subsequent years, agencies and educational institutions started to produce their own versions of ICS training materials to meet an increasing interest to deliver some form of ICS training.

In April 2010 CIFFC was awarded funding through the National Search and Rescue Secretariat through the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (SARNIF). The project's focus was to develop an "All Hazards" *ICS Canada* curriculum for the Canadian Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) volunteer community, the primary beneficiary of the project; several provincial and federal government agencies partnered in the project. CIFFC has continued to develop advanced curriculum under additional SARNIF projects on the creation of position specific training courses under the *ICS Canada* banner.

Goals and Objectives

The recognized success of the ICS model resulted in incident management processes being widely applied and in some cases adapted by a multitude of users across Canada. With each adaptation, the standardization of the systems grew further apart. The variances puts interoperability objectives at risk, both within Canada and when dealing with our international partners.

It is recognized that to ensure success we must respect the diversity and unique jurisdictional differences among all the provinces, territories and agencies. Therefore the committee is working to understand, consider, and include a reciprocity process between the various Incident Management Structures used by other jurisdictions, agencies and academia throughout Canada.

At its inception two separate committees or working groups existed, the ICS Canada Committee was made up of the ICS Canada Authority Having Jurisdictions (AHJs). AHJ identifies the organization, office, or individual having statutory responsibility for administering and enforcing the requirements of the standard *ICS Canada* curriculum. AHJs provide quality assurance of training materials and delivery within their area of jurisdiction, training provider recognition and maintain a database of all *ICS Canada* training conducted in their respective jurisdiction. This group focused on protecting and standardizing the ICS curriculum being used across the country.

While another group identified as the IMS (Incident Management System) Committee worked on developing solutions for broader interoperability and connectivity between agencies and jurisdictions during multi agency incident management and responses. Participants for both groups came together as a “coalition of the willing”.

Over the years as goals were met, other opportunities and challenges were identified and the goals and scope of the committee expanded. The work of the two groups was eventually blended to where it is today as a single ICS Canada Committee. While the committee became one, the efforts maintained a primary focus on the maintenance and continued development of the ICS Canada products.

As a result of the work completed by the committee and the broader adoption and use of ICS Canada across the country by many Provinces, Territories and organizations (see section on committee participants) we are at a cross-road. Agencies who use ICS can come together and operate efficiently and effectively because of the common dominator that binds them together. However what is lacking is a common framework which allows and ensures interoperability for all participating agencies in the Pan-Canadian landscape. Looking at the continuum ICS Canada training can be the basis for strong interoperability and enhanced collaboration across all boundaries and response levels.

ICS Canada Objectives:

The ICS Canada Committee primary objectives are:

- Providing access to standardized course content for recognized training providers on the ICS Canada website - <http://www.icscanada.ca/> in both official languages;
- Ensuring curriculum reflects best practices, employing consistent evaluation and delivery methods;
- Developing and maintaining specific training for General, Command Staff Positions and Incident Management Teams;
- Promoting the standardized usage of ICS Canada products among agencies;

Participants

The committee has representation from each Canadian province, territory and jurisdiction, a municipality and several federal agencies. Currently participation includes all provinces/territories, totaling 27 agencies and organizations.

Committee membership

Agencies that have identified as the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) or Agency Authority having Jurisdiction (AAHJ) for ICS Canada include:

Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Center - AAHJ (CIFFC)
Fire and Emergency Services, Newfoundland and Labrador - AHJ
EMO, Nova Scotia - AHJ
EMO, PEI - AHJ
EMO, New Brunswick - AHJ
Manitoba Office of the Fire Commissioner - AHJ
Emergency Management and Fire Safety Branch, Saskatchewan - AHJ
Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Alberta - AHJ
Yukon Protective Services - AHJ
North West Territories EMO - AHJ
Office of Fire Marshal and Emergency Management, Ontario - AHJ
Parks Canada Agency - AAHJ
Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada - AAHJ
Canadian Coast Guard - AAHJ
City of Vancouver BC - AAHJ

Other agencies with current membership on ICS Canada Committee (use ICS Canada products and/or support the concept and development of an interoperable Pan-Canadian Incident Management System):

Sûreté du Québec
Emergency Management BC, British Columbia
Emergency Response and Recovery, Nunavut
GSAR Council Canada
National Search and Rescue Secretariat
Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP)
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
Transport Canada
Canadian Energy Regulator
Public Safety Canada (PSC)
Canadian Food Inspection Agency
Emergency Management NGOs Consortium of Canada

Benefits to Emergency Management in Canada

Over the life of the ICS Canada project one of the key deliverables was the development of a single ICS curriculum; a significant enhancement to the creation of an All-Hazards approach to emergency management in Canada. When faced with an emergency there are often many challenges which need to be overcome. Post-emergency After Action Reports such as those from Elliot Lake Mall collapse and the Lac Megantic Train derailment outline

the primary challenges being a lack of Incident Management Team training, lack of establishing or the complete absence of incident command. These challenges can be further compromised by the multiple versions that exist of the system providing little or no opportunities for interoperability.

The vision of the ICS Canada Committee is twofold; first the integrity of standardized curriculum and the development of a Canadian interoperable emergency response framework. The benefits are numerous but primarily will see:

- With ever shrinking financial resources adopting and using ICS Canada can minimize or eliminate the need to develop or create new curriculum which can reduce costs to jurisdictions and agencies through availability of consistent and standard curriculum;
- As more agencies adopt ICS Canada as the command system of choice for site or event management response agencies will be operating with the same core competencies and standard training components;
- Enhancing the interagency and cross border interoperability necessary for effective, efficient, and coordinated emergency response in Canada.

Looking at the Continuum

Membership of the committee will continue to include participation from jurisdictions and agencies to provide strategic guidance and ensure the continued development and progress of:

- Ensuring the continued integrity of ICS Canada products;
- Promoting interoperability of ICS among agencies and at all levels of government respecting jurisdictional differences and uniqueness;
- Providing input and guidance on the development of a Pan Canadian Incident Management System concept similar to US NIMS and the Australian AIIMS.

The ICS Canada Committee will continue to pursue support and recognition from the Canadian Council of Emergency Management Organizations (CCEMO) and SOREM (Senior Officials Responsible for Emergency Management).

Some Examples of Events managed using ICS Canada:

- Slave Lake Forest Fire, May 2011 – Alberta
- Calgary Floods, June 2013 – Alberta
- Exercise Operation Nanook - Frobisher Bay, August 2014 Nunavut
- Loss of Power Generation Plant – Pangnirtung, April 2015 - Nunavut
- Toronto 2015 PanAm/Para Pan Am Games July 2015 – Ontario
- Cavendish Music Festival, PEI – Since 2008 - Yearly Event
- Saskatchewan 2015 Forest Fire Evacuation - Saskatchewan
- Syrian Refugee Settlement 2015 – in various Provinces and Territories
- Fort McMurray Forest Fire, May 2016 - Alberta