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ICS FORM 208 SAFETY MESSAGE AND PLAN - SUMMARY AND REFRESHER

Refresher for Instructors, Safety Officers and
Incident Management Team members

ICS Form 208 Safety Message and Plan

Summary and refresher for Instructors, Safety Officers and Incident Management Team members

This refresher covers what the ICS Form 208 is for, who uses it and how to fill it out well. It also explains how the incident-wide safety message differs from a site safety plan, and includes completed GSAR, flood and wildfire forms for training and discussion.

What this guide covers

- How the ICS 208 supports the Incident Action Plan and operational briefing
- Responsibilities of the Safety Officer, Command and General Staff, supervisors and assigned personnel
- Box-by-box completion guidance and a review checklist
- When a separate site safety plan is appropriate, including ICP, Base and Camp evacuation planning
- Three fictional completed forms showing different incident types and Box 4 decisions

Training use: Use this guide with current jurisdictional policy, agency procedures and technical standards. The examples contain fictional incident information and do not authorize real-world operations.

Using This Guide

The ICS 208 communicates the safety direction that personnel need for a defined operational period. A good 208 tells people what they are likely to run into, what controls they have to use, when they need to stop or pull back, and what to do if something goes wrong.

Treat the form as current operational direction. Review it whenever objectives, assignments, weather, work locations, resource capabilities or identified hazards change materially.

Intended audience

The primary audience is all personnel assigned to the incident during the operational period. Supervisors use the form during briefings, and incoming resources use it to understand the safety expectations that apply before they begin work.

- Incident Management Team and Command Staff
- Section Chiefs, Branch Directors and Division or Group Supervisors
- Task forces, strike teams, crews and individual resources
- Personnel at the ICP, Base, Camp, staging areas and specialized work sites
- Cooperating-agency personnel, contractors and replacement resources

How to use the refresher

- Safety Officers can use the field guide and checklist while drafting or reviewing the form.
- Command and General Staff can use the roles and integration sections during planning meetings.
- Supervisors can use the safety-message structure to brief assignments and confirm understanding.
- Training staff can use the completed forms to compare incident-wide controls with site-specific plans.

ICS Form 208 in the Incident Action Plan

The ICS 208 may be used as a safety message, expanded safety message, safety plan or site safety plan. In an Incident Action Plan, it normally provides the safety direction that applies across the incident or across the operational period. It should be consistent with the incident objectives, assignments, communications arrangements and medical plan.

Relationship to other IAP information

Operational use

Identify	Write	Brief	Monitor
Confirm hazards, exposures, resource capabilities and changing conditions.	State the required controls, trigger points and emergency actions in clear language.	Supervisors communicate the message and any applicable site safety plan before work begins.	Observe operations, report changes and revise the safety direction when it is no longer adequate.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Safety Officer normally develops or coordinates the ICS 208, but the content depends on information from across the incident organization. Local policy determines the approval route and any required technical review.

Position or group	Responsibilities related to the ICS 208
Incident Commander or Unified Command	Sets incident priorities and risk direction. Ensures the safety message aligns with incident objectives and approves or authorizes the IAP according to jurisdictional procedure.
Safety Officer	Identifies and evaluates hazards, coordinates controls, prepares or reviews the ICS 208, reviews applicable site plans, monitors operations and recommends changes when conditions require them.
Operations Section	Provides assignment methods, operational hazards, control measures, trigger points and resource limitations. Confirms that field direction is practical and understood.
Planning Section	Integrates the current ICS 208 into the IAP, maintains version control and supports distribution for the operational period.
Logistics and Facilities	Provide facility, transportation, communications, sanitation, fuel, food, accommodation and evacuation safety information for the ICP, Base, Camp and other incident facilities.
Technical specialists	Develop or validate controls for specialized operations such as rope rescue, swiftwater, aviation, hazardous materials, utilities or structural assessment.
Supervisors	Brief assigned personnel, confirm applicable controls and site plans, maintain accountability, monitor changing conditions and stop or modify work when controls are inadequate.
All assigned personnel	Review the safety direction, ask questions, use required controls and PPE, report hazards and near misses, and stop or withdraw from work when an uncontrolled hazard threatens safety.

If a Safety Officer has not been assigned, the Incident Commander should designate responsibility for developing and communicating the safety information required for the operational period.

Completing the ICS 208

Box	What to enter	Review question
1 Incident Name	Use the approved incident name exactly as it appears on the IAP and other incident documentation.	Can personnel match this form to the correct incident?
2 Operational Period	Enter the start and end date and time covered by the safety message. Use an unambiguous date format and 24-hour time when required by agency practice.	Is the safety direction current for the period shown?
3 Safety Message or Plan	Describe the hazards, controls, trigger points, communications, accountability, PPE, emergency actions and reporting expectations needed for the period.	Can personnel tell what to do, when to stop and how to get help?
4 Site Safety Plan Required	Select Yes or No. When Yes is selected, list the approved plan locations or the position that controls access to them.	Will every affected person know which additional plan applies and where to find it?
5 Prepared By	Enter the preparer's name and position, date and time. Sign according to agency procedure.	Is ownership clear, and was the form prepared in time for review and briefing?

Completion principles

- Write for the personnel who must act on the information, including people arriving after the main briefing.
- Use plain language and explain technical terms that may not be shared across agencies.
- Tie each significant hazard to a control, restriction, trigger point or emergency action.
- Use locations, assignments or conditions that personnel can recognize in the field.
- Keep the form consistent with the ICS 204, Communications Plan, Medical Plan and approved site plans.
- Replace outdated information rather than carrying it forward unchanged into a new operational period.

Writing an Effective Box 3

Box 3 is where the incident's risk picture becomes direction people can act on. Aim for an entry that is specific enough to guide action without repeating every assignment detail already contained in the IAP.

Recommended structure

1. State the operational safety objective or command emphasis.
2. Identify the significant incident-wide hazards expected during the operational period.
3. State the controls, PPE, qualifications, exclusion zones or work practices required for those hazards.
4. Explain accountability and communications expectations, including check-ins and emergency traffic.
5. Define observable trigger points for stopping, withdrawing, sheltering or changing tactics.
6. State the immediate actions for injury, exposure, responder emergency or loss of communications.
7. Include end-of-shift reporting for injuries, near misses, equipment damage and unresolved hazards.

Examples of stronger direction

Too general	Operationally useful
Be careful around water.	Do not enter moving water unless assigned, qualified and equipped. Establish upstream observation and downstream safety before launch.
Watch the weather.	Report wind shifts, rapid fire spread or thunderstorm outflow immediately. Withdraw when the division trigger point is reached.
Use proper PPE.	Wear the task-specific PPE identified in the assignment and site plan. Replace damaged PPE before returning to the work area.
Maintain communications.	Complete a radio check before deployment and report location and personnel status at each scheduled check-in.

Reasons to revise the message

Revise or supplement the ICS 208 when incident objectives, work methods, operational locations, weather, resource capability, communications, medical arrangements or known hazards change enough to affect the existing controls.

Site Safety Plans

A site safety plan provides detailed safety direction for a particular location, facility or specialized operation within the incident. It supplements the incident-wide ICS 208 when a short general message cannot adequately describe the local hazards, technical controls or emergency arrangements.

When a separate plan is appropriate

- The operation has high-consequence hazards, specialized technical procedures or restricted access.
- The location requires defined control zones, entry control, monitoring, rescue capability or evacuation arrangements.
- Several agencies or contractors need one coordinated set of site controls.
- A facility has overnight occupancy, fuel, generators, public access or another hazard requiring local emergency procedures.
- The responsible authority or technical standard requires a documented plan, hazard assessment or job safety analysis.

Typical plan content

Plan element	Expected detail
Scope and responsibility	Exact site or activity, responsible supervisor, technical oversight and personnel authorized to enter.
Hazards and controls	Known and anticipated hazards, PPE, qualifications, equipment checks, control zones and safe work practices.
Trigger points	Conditions that require work to stop, personnel to withdraw, evacuation, shelter-in-place or reassessment.
Communications and accountability	Assigned channels, check-in procedures, personnel tracking, alarm methods and briefing requirements.
Emergency arrangements	Rescue capability, medical access, evacuation routes, assembly areas, shutdown procedures and re-entry authority.
Documentation	Maps, diagrams, inspection records, approval or review signatures, revision date and plan location.

Development and approval

The supervisor, facility manager or technical specialist responsible for the work normally develops the site plan in coordination with the Safety Officer. The word “approved” in Box 4 should follow the applicable agency, jurisdictional and technical-review process; it does not imply that one position always approves every type of plan.

Examples of Site Safety Plans

The exact format may be an agency form, technical rescue plan, job hazard analysis, facility emergency plan or another approved document. What matters is that it gives site-specific direction to the people actually exposed to the hazard.

Plan example	Typical application	Selected controls
ICP, Base or Camp emergency plan	Responder facilities	Alarm, evacuation or shelter-in-place, routes, assembly areas, accountability and re-entry.
Helibase or helispot plan	Aviation sites	Flight-line access, rotor hazards, approach routes, loose equipment, fuelling and emergency shutdown.
Rope rescue plan	High-angle or low-angle rescue	Edge control, anchors, system checks, qualified personnel, backup system and patient evacuation.
Swiftwater or boat-operations plan	Flood and water rescue	Hot, warm and cold zones, PFDs, upstream observation, downstream safety and recovery points.
Hazardous-materials plan	Hazardous substance release	Control zones, monitoring, PPE, entry control, decontamination and emergency withdrawal.
Damaged-structure entry plan	Flood, earthquake or explosion	Structural assessment, utility isolation, entry control, monitoring and collapse withdrawal triggers.
Fuel storage and refuelling plan	Helibase, Base or equipment site	Ignition control, separation, bonding or grounding as required, spill response and fire protection.
Heavy-equipment work-zone plan	Debris, wildfire or flood operations	Exclusion zones, spotters, backing controls, communications and separation from the public.
Confined-space entry plan	Tank, vault, sewer or similar space	Entry permit, atmospheric monitoring, attendant, communications and rescue capability.
Debris-removal plan	Storm or structural debris	Unstable material, sharp objects, equipment separation, hazardous substances and disposal routes.
Public shelter safety plan	Evacuation reception centre or shelter	Fire evacuation, security, accessibility, medical response, occupancy and staff accountability.
Traffic-control site plan	Roadblock or work zone	Visibility, warning devices, escape position, communications and separation from moving traffic.

ICP, Base and Camp Evacuation Plans

An evacuation plan for the Incident Command Post, Incident Base or Camp is normally a site safety plan or a component of a broader facility safety plan. It addresses responder-facility emergencies and should be coordinated with any community evacuation plan when the incident may threaten the facility.

Core elements

Element	Questions the plan should answer
Triggers and authority	What conditions require evacuation or shelter-in-place, and who can initiate the action?
Notification	What alarm, public-address, runner or radio methods will reach daytime and sleeping personnel?
Routes and destinations	What are the primary and alternate routes, assembly areas and relocation sites?
Accountability	Who maintains the occupancy list, who conducts roll call and how are missing people reported?
Accessibility and assistance	How will people requiring mobility, language or other assistance be supported?
Site hazards	How will fuel, propane, generators, kitchens, parking, traffic, utilities and severe weather affect the evacuation?
Emergency access	How will fire, ambulance, police and utility vehicles reach the facility while personnel leave?
Re-entry	Who confirms the site is safe and authorizes personnel to return?

One plan or several

A single plan can cover a co-located ICP, Base and Camp when it clearly identifies the different areas, alarm methods, routes, assembly locations and accountability responsibilities. Separate facilities normally need separate plans or site-specific annexes.

Example Box 4 entry

Site Safety Plan Required: Yes. Approved plans located at the ICP entrance and briefing area, Base Manager's office, Camp Manager's office and the electronic IAP repository.

ICS 208 Review Checklist

Use this checklist before the form is placed in the IAP or distributed for briefing. Apply any additional agency approval, documentation and recordkeeping requirements.

Content and coordination

- ☐ The incident name and operational period match the current IAP.
- ☐ The message reflects current objectives, assignments, weather, resource capability and known hazards.
- ☐ Each significant hazard has a clear control, restriction, trigger point or emergency action.
- ☐ Radio, medical, evacuation and accountability directions agree with the ICS 205, 205A and 206.
- ☐ Box 4 is completed, and every referenced site safety plan has an identifiable location or responsible position.
- ☐ Technical specialists and responsible supervisors have reviewed specialized controls where required.

Usability and briefing

- ☐ The language is understandable across participating agencies and avoids undefined acronyms.
- ☐ Personnel can identify what applies to them, where it applies and when they must stop or withdraw.
- ☐ Supervisors know how the form will be briefed and how understanding will be confirmed.
- ☐ Incoming and replacement personnel can access the current form and applicable site plans.
- ☐ The preparer's name, position, date, time and signature are complete according to procedure.

Common problems to correct

Problem	Correction
Generic slogans without direction	Name the hazard, required control and condition that changes the action.
Copied message from the previous period	Reassess current operations and remove or revise outdated information.
Site plan marked Yes with no location	Name the physical or electronic location and the position controlling access.
Conflicting information among IAP forms	Resolve the difference before briefing and replace superseded copies.
No emergency or withdrawal trigger	Add observable conditions and the immediate action personnel must take.

Remember that a completed ICS 208 only supports safe operations when supervisors brief it, personnel understand it and the incident organization updates it as conditions change.

Appendix A: GSAR Training Example

This fictional example addresses a missing-hiker search. Box 4 indicates that no separate site safety plan is required for the operational period; a separate plan should be added if a high-risk site or specialized operation requires one.

TRAINING EXAMPLE - FICTIONAL DATA	
 Safety Message/Plan (ICS 208)	
1. INCIDENT NAME Pine Ridge Missing Hiker Search	2. OPERATIONAL PERIOD: From: Date <u>2026-10-15</u> Time <u>0600</u> To: Date <u>2026-10-15</u> Time <u>2000</u>
3. SAFETY MESSAGE/EXPANDED SAFETY MESSAGE, SAFETY PLAN, SITE SAFETY PLAN: SAFETY OBJECTIVE Conduct the search without preventable injury. Every person may stop work when a hazard is not controlled. Report changing conditions to your supervisor before continuing. ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNICATIONS - Check in and out through your team leader. Work in assigned teams; no one searches alone. - Carry the assigned radio, map/navigation tools, whistle, light, first aid supplies, water and clothing for an unplanned overnight. - Complete a radio check before deployment. Follow the Communications Plan. If contact is lost, move only to the nearest pre-identified communications point; do not continue deeper into the search area without direction. - Team leaders report location, status and personnel count at each scheduled check-in and whenever the assignment or route changes. TERRAIN AND TRAVEL - Expect steep slopes, loose rock, wet roots, deadfall and concealed drop-offs. Slow down, maintain spacing and use three points of contact where practical. - Wear a helmet in rockfall, steep-slope, rope-rescue and aircraft zones. Use eye protection when moving through dense brush. - Only qualified personnel may build or operate rope systems. Establish edge control, inspect anchors and equipment, and use a separate safety check before loading the system. - Mark hazards and communicate them to following teams. Do not enter abandoned structures, caves, cliffs or swift water unless specifically assigned, equipped and supervised. WEATHER EXPOSURE AND WILDLIFE - Monitor weather and daylight. Prevent cold stress by managing layers, keeping dry and eating and drinking regularly. Rotate or return personnel showing fatigue, confusion, shivering or loss of coordination. - Make noise in low-visibility vegetation. Do not approach wildlife. Report aggressive wildlife, nests and carcasses so the area can be avoided. VEHICLES ATVS AND AIRCRAFT - Use seat belts and trained operators. Match speed to road and trail conditions. Use a spotter when backing or when visibility is restricted. - Secure loose equipment. Approach or leave a helicopter only when directed by the crew, from the approved direction, in a crouch, with tools horizontal and below shoulder height. MEDICAL OR URGENT EVENT - Stop the task, protect the team from the immediate hazard and provide care within your training. - Transmit PRIORITY TRAFFIC to Communications. Give team identification, location/grid, hazard, patient condition and access needs. Follow the Medical Plan and keep an access route open. - Report injuries, near misses and damaged equipment to the team leader and Safety Officer before reassignment. END OF SHIFT - Team leaders confirm all personnel accounted for, return radios and equipment, and identify hazards or unfinished assignments during debrief.	
4. SITE SAFETY PLAN REQUIRED? Yes ☐ No ☒ Approved Site Safety Plan(s) Located At: Not applicable	
5. PREPARED BY (Name and Position) Morgan Lee, Safety Officer	Date Prepared: 2026-10-14
SIGNATURE <i>Morgan Lee (training sample)</i>	Time Prepared: 1800

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Appendix B: Flood Training Example

This fictional example addresses flood response, including swiftwater, electrical, contamination, structural and pumping hazards. Box 4 identifies separate site safety plans and where they are located.

TRAINING EXAMPLE - FICTIONAL DATA	
 Safety Message/Plan (ICS 208)	
1. INCIDENT NAME Riverview Flood Response	2. OPERATIONAL PERIOD: From: Date <u>2027-04-16</u> Time <u>0700</u> To: Date <u>2027-04-16</u> Time <u>1900</u>
3. SAFETY MESSAGE/EXPANDED SAFETY MESSAGE, SAFETY PLAN, SITE SAFETY PLAN: SAFETY OBJECTIVE Keep responders out of uncontrolled water, electrical, structural and contamination hazards. Stop work and notify your supervisor when water level, current, weather, access or site conditions change. ACCOUNTABILITY AND ZONES - Check in and out through the assigned supervisor. Use the buddy system and maintain visual or radio contact. - Supervisors establish hot, warm and cold zones around moving water, unstable banks, damaged structures, electrical hazards and heavy equipment. - Keep the public outside work zones. Use barriers, lighting, traffic control and spotters appropriate to the site. FLOODWATER AND BOAT OPERATIONS - Treat all floodwater as moving, cold and contaminated. Do not wade into moving water. Never enter water above agency limits or outside your training and assignment. - Wear an approved personal flotation device when working from a boat or within the designated distance of water. Hip or chest waders are not flotation devices. - Only qualified swiftwater or boat personnel may conduct rescues or operate watercraft. Complete the approved site safety plan and boat check before launch. - Use upstream spotters and downstream safety where required. Keep throw bags and recovery equipment immediately available. Avoid strainers, culverts, bridge openings, ice and undercut banks. ELECTRICAL AND STRUCTURAL HAZARDS - Assume downed lines, submerged services, panels and equipment are energized until the utility confirms isolation. Maintain the utility-specified exclusion distance. - Do not enter a damaged or flooded structure until it has been assessed and entry is authorized. Watch for collapse, shifting foundations, gas odour, confined spaces and sharp debris. - Stop operations and withdraw for new cracking, movement, rapid water rise, gas alarms or loss of lighting or communications. HEALTH PPE AND HYGIENE - Wear task-appropriate gloves, eye protection, high-visibility clothing, safety footwear and protective clothing. Cover cuts before work. - Avoid contact with sewage, fuel, chemicals, animal waste and unknown containers. Do not eat, drink or smoke in contaminated zones. - Wash hands and exposed skin before breaks. Bag contaminated clothing and equipment for cleaning. Report exposures promptly and follow public-health or occupational-health direction. SANDBAGGING PUMPS AND VEHICLES - Use team lifts, mechanical aids and job rotation for sandbags, hose and pumps. Keep lift paths level and clear. - Place pumps and generators outdoors with exhaust directed away from people and buildings. Refuel only when shut down and cooled; maintain spill control and fire protection. - Use trained operators, seat belts and spotters. Do not drive through water when depth, current, road condition or edge location is uncertain. WEATHER FATIGUE AND EMERGENCIES - Monitor forecasts, upstream gauges and evacuation triggers. Suspend exposed work for lightning according to agency procedure. - Rotate wet, cold or fatigued personnel. Use warming, hydration and meal breaks. - For an emergency, transmit PRIORITY TRAFFIC, state the location/site name, hazard, number of patients and safest access. Follow the Medical Plan and preserve an evacuation lane. - Report injuries, exposures, near misses and damaged PPE or equipment before returning to duty.	
4. SITE SAFETY PLAN REQUIRED? Yes ☒ No Approved Site Safety Plan(s) Located At: ICP Safety; Swiftwater Group; Divisions A and B staging.	
5. PREPARED BY (Name and Position) Alex Chen, Safety Officer	
SIGNATURE Alex Chen (training sample)	
Date Prepared: 2027-04-15 Time Prepared: 1830	

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Appendix C: Wildfire Training Example

This fictional example addresses LACES, fire behaviour, aviation, heavy equipment, PPE, smoke, heat and entrapment. Box 4 identifies separate plans for the Helibase and Structure Protection Branch.

TRAINING EXAMPLE - FICTIONAL DATA	
 Safety Message/Plan (ICS 208)	
1. INCIDENT NAME North Fork Wildfire	2. OPERATIONAL PERIOD: From: Date <u>2026-07-22</u> Time <u>0600</u> To: Date <u>2026-07-22</u> Time <u>2000</u>
3. SAFETY MESSAGE/EXPANDED SAFETY MESSAGE, SAFETY PLAN, SITE SAFETY PLAN: SAFETY OBJECTIVE Maintain Lookouts, Anchor Points, Communications, Escape Routes and Safety Zones before engagement. Any person may disengage or stop work when conditions no longer match the briefing or when a critical control is missing. LACES AND FIRE BEHAVIOUR - Supervisors confirm lookouts, primary and alternate communications, at least one viable escape route and adequate safety zones before crews engage. Reassess LACES after every move or material change. - Anchor where practical and avoid working above an active fire. Identify trigger points for withdrawal and communicate them to every person in the assignment. - Monitor wind, temperature, humidity, smoke column, spotting and thunderstorm outflows. Report rapid spread, wind shifts, long-range spotting or loss of visibility immediately. - Withdraw to the identified safety zone when a trigger point is reached, escape time increases, communications fail or the fire crosses the control feature. SNAGS TERRAIN AND EQUIPMENT - Look up, down and around. Identify hazard trees, rolling material, ash pits, steep ground and weakened roads. Mark and avoid hazards until assessed or controlled by qualified personnel. - Maintain separation from falling, bucking and chipping operations. Follow the established exclusion zone and approach heavy equipment only after eye contact and acknowledgement from the operator. - Use spotters for backing and congested areas. Park for a prompt exit where practical. Chock vehicles on slopes and keep access routes clear for emergency traffic. AVIATION - Follow aircrew and helibase direction. Secure loose items and maintain the established exclusion distance from aircraft. - Clear the drop zone. When a retardant or water drop cannot be avoided, move away from snags and loose material, lie face down with head toward the aircraft, secure helmet and tools, and wait for the all-clear. - Report drones or unauthorized aircraft immediately; suspend affected aviation operations as directed. PPE SMOKE HEAT AND FATIGUE - Wear required wildland PPE: helmet, eye protection, gloves, flame-resistant clothing and approved boots. Carry water, fire shelter if required by agency policy, radio and hand tool appropriate to the assignment. - Manage smoke exposure through location, work rotation and breaks. Do not work or rest in areas where visibility, breathing or alertness is impaired. - Drink regularly, eat throughout the shift and use scheduled rest and rehabilitation. Report headache, dizziness, confusion, cramps, unusual fatigue or reduced coordination. COMMUNICATIONS MEDICAL AND ENTRAPMENT - Complete a radio check before deployment and monitor the assigned tactical and command channels. Use clear text and report changes in location or assignment. - For injury or urgent hazard, transmit PRIORITY TRAFFIC with division/group, location, hazard, patient count and access. Follow the Medical Plan and identify ground or air evacuation needs. - If escape is threatened, notify supervision immediately, use the best available escape route and move to the designated safety zone. Follow agency entrapment procedures; fire-shelter deployment is a last resort. - Report injuries, near misses, shelter damage, entrapment indicators and equipment defects before reassignment. END OF SHIFT - Confirm personnel accountability, advise incoming resources of unresolved hazards and document any changed trigger points, safety zones or access routes.	
4. SITE SAFETY PLAN REQUIRED? Yes ☒ No ☐ Approved Site Safety Plan(s) Located At: <u>ICP Safety; Helibase; Structure Protection Branch staging</u>	
5. PREPARED BY (Name and Position) <u>Jamie Cardinal, Safety Officer</u>	Date Prepared: <u>2026-07-21</u>
SIGNATURE <u>Jamie Cardinal (training sample)</u>	Time Prepared: <u>1800</u>

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