# Purpose

The purpose of this quick reference guide is to help department heads understand their responsibilities in the initial response to an incident.

These key decision makers work cooperatively with emergency management officials according to the responsibilities that the National Incident Management System (NIMS) describes. Additional information on the incident management roles of department heads and Multiagency Coordination Groups (MAC Groups) appears on NIMS pages 40 and 41.

This reference guide is organized into (a) overarching priorities that apply to every incident, (b) essential responsibilities, (c) action steps, and (d) public messaging examples. Intentionally broad, the guide applies to diverse organizations across the nation. FEMA recommends that emergency managers customize this reference guide according to their Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) by including organizational points of contact (POC) and relevant operational details, such as how often the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) will provide situation reports. Emergency managers should review the customized reference guide with their leadership team before an incident occurs.

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# Incident Management Overview

*As a department head, your primary responsibility is to support the senior executive in establishing overall incident policy, providing guidance on incident priorities, and ensuring that your organization’s resources are appropriately engaged in incident management. The overall incident management structure includes the following levels:*

* ***Policy Group/Multiagency Coordination Group (MAC Group)****,**which comprises your fellow department heads and senior organizational leaders*
* ***Emergency Operations Center (EOC)******director****, who oversees resource and planning support for on-scene personnel and ancillary activities such as sheltering and donations management*
* ***Department Operations Center (DOC) manager****, who coordinates closely with the EOC and manages and coordinates incident activities specific to a single functional area*
* ***Public Information Officer (PIO)****, who ensures that the public receives accurate, timely, and consistent information about the incident*
* ***Incident Commander (IC)****, who directs on-scene incident personnel responsible for saving lives, stabilizing the incident, and protecting property and the environment*

# Overarching Priorities

* **Life Safety:** Ensure the safety and security of first responders, support personnel, and the general population.
* **Unity of Effort:** Coordinate and prioritize activities across all organizations involved in the response, to achieve common objectives.
* **Incident Stabilization:** Establish leadership to stabilize the incident and reduce future impacts.
* **Protect Property and Environment:** Protect infrastructure assets, systems, and networks, whether physical or virtual.
* **Recovery:** Reestablish services and help the community return to a new normal.

# Department Head Essential Responsibilities

* Keep the media and public informed.
* Collaborate with the EOC director and support agencies.
* Request assistance from the EOC director.
* Offer agency resources to assist the incident response.
* Direct the activation of a DOC.
* Initiate Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan as required.

# Key Senior Leader Activities & Actions

* **Coordinate with other department heads** to implement protective actions and ensure the safety and welfare of incident personnel and the community.
* **Promote unity of effort** by ensuring that partner organizations are invited to participate in MAC Group, Unified Command, or EOC, as appropriate.
* **Keep stakeholders informed**,including agency personnel, the media, and the public.
* **Provide personnel** in response to incident command, EOC, or DOC requests.
* **Provide direction** based on response priorities from the DOC director or incident command.
* **Communicate departmental actions and information to the PIO/Joint Information Center (JIC)** for dissemination to the public.
* **Execute relevant plans**
* **Obtain situational awareness** across the region to understand the incident’s impact (for example, consult with subject matter experts, communicate with partner agencies, and participate in EOC briefings).

# Immediate Actions

* Gather information about the event and share it with appropriate contacts.
* Ensure that your department provides appropriate staffing for EOC and DOC.
* Consider immediate life safety actions that may be necessary (such as evacuation or boil water notice) and recommend/implement them.
* Review organizational resource status and notify personnel of organizational priorities.
* Notify appropriate personnel of the incident through established phone trees or notification systems.
* Participate in a MAC Group, if required.
* Coordinate with the PIO/JIC to determine what information to share with the media and anticipate likely questions.
* Work with the PIO/JIC on public messaging and inquire about appropriate platforms for disseminating current information (such as social media, news media, relevant websites, and a phone help line).
* Ensure that key contact information is up to date.

# Subsequent Actions

* Discuss ongoing EOC and DOC staffing requirements.
* Ensure that finance personnel know and follow disaster financial requirements.
* Gather and share information on:
  + Status of jurisdictional emergency services (fire, EMS, law enforcement) and critical infrastructure (hospitals, electric companies).
  + Lines of communication with leaders of key agencies, such as EOC director or IC on scene.
  + How weather conditions may impact the response; any actions necessary to circumvent issues.
  + Impacts on the agency’s day-to-day activities.

# Example Public Messaging

* We are aware that an incident has occurred (provide incident details, including time and location).
* At this time, (list agencies that are responding and give the response status). We are gathering additional information and will share it as it becomes available.
* At this time, we ask that the public (list requested action, such as shelter in place or evacuate).
* We will provide the public with up-to-date information via (list local media outlets, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and so on).
* Emergency Management Director: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
* Emergency Operations Center: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
* Public Information Officer: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
* Joint Information Center: (xxx) xxx-xxxx