

# Unified Command For B.C. SAR Management

## INTRODUCTION

The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized command and control system for organizing and managing an event of virtually any size. In 1996 an effort was made to bring ICS into the realm of Search and Rescue in British Columbia. This effort introduced a standardized set of forms for controlling information during a SAR operation as well as some basic titles and roles and responsibilities consistent with ICS. However, certain compromises were made in an effort to adapt ICS to the way things were done in SAR in BC. Since then basic ICS training has been a consistent part of the SAR Management course as provided by the Justice Institute.

Recently, the Justice Institute has undertaken a project to produce a CD ROM-based training package for SAR Management, SAR Management Recurrency and SAR Commanders. As part of the project an effort has been made to identify areas of SAR management training in need of improvement. Improvements involve making terminology consistent, providing more and up-to-date reference tools, providing more complete guidance on various responsibilities and actions and a review of our use of ICS. The ICS form set was completely revised and updated to better suit current needs and to bring them more closely in-line with true ICS.

For the operational aspects of ICS the review of the forest fire response of 2003 provided some assistance in identifying shortcoming in the use of ICS by various agencies within BC.

It should also be noted that during such disasters as forest fires, floods, man-made disasters, etc., where other agencies have the jurisdiction for command and control, the involvement of SAR would not be at the command level if requested to provide assistance. In such cases SAR involvement would be limited to the Operations Section, likely as Strike Teams or a Task Force and reporting to the Operations Section Chief. Obviously a good understanding of ICS is required for SAR Managers and SAR groups to fit in to the ICS structure in use as quickly and easily as other agencies can.

In the Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review by the Honourable Gary Filmon, certain inconsistencies in training, implementation and uniformity in the use of ICS - which is supposed to be a standard – were identified. PEP Search and Rescue groups played a major role in the response to the fires and worked closely with other agencies and PEP. Such use of SAR groups is likely to continue. The following are some excerpts from the report.

- [To gain their full value, the] British Columbia Emergency Response Management System (BCERMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) should be universally adopted and used in a consistent way by all provincial and local government agencies. Training course material, delivery and examination for the ICS should be standardized across organizations.

ICS is only as good as its application and delivery by the emergency management personnel in charge of operations. It is essential that all staff know their responsibilities, understand the reporting relationships, and use a common language.

The following quote sums it up: "Words must have a single definition, functional areas must have one set of responsibilities, and no two words may have the same definition. If this axiom is changed, confusion is introduced into the conveyance of information, orders, et cetera." - from Command and Control of Fire Department Operations at Target Hazards, Student Manual, United States Fire Administration National Fire Academy.

The province should consider the establishment of a single, province-wide focus for training within British Columbia to achieve:

- Implementation of consistent standards and policies for the Office of the Fire Commissioner, Ministry of Forests, and the Provincial Emergency Program to allow integration from within the province's emergency response structure.
- Development and continual upgrading of a common curriculum for all ICS training in British Columbia.

Our efforts to move closer to ICS are not solely to meet these objectives. ICS offers many benefits, not all of which were previously being utilized.

## UNIFIED COMMAND

When comparing the ICS model that had been in use for SAR in BC to that of true ICS as the Filmon report addresses, there were some glaring differences identified. Many minor differences in the roles, responsibilities and positioning of titles at the lower levels of the ICS organization chart were identified and easily corrected. One major difference remained, that of the use of the Deputy Incident Commander position for the SAR Manager.

The D.I.C. role had been created in 1996 in an effort to find a position on the ICS Organization Chart for the SAR Manager. Obviously the police (or any other jurisdictional agency) needs to be at the top of the organization structure as they hold ultimate authority for the response; that can't change. However, under ICS the title of Deputy is given to someone who has the same qualifications as their superior as they are expected to be available to step into their superior's role whenever needed, such as during breaks. Clearly a SAR Manager, as a Deputy Incident Commander, cannot simply step into the role of Incident Commander as they do not hold the same authority as the police.

Also, the D.I.C. does not appear on proper ICS organization charts as an intermediate role between the Incident Commander and the rest of the organizational functions. This does not make SAR's version of ICS compatible with the ICS models used by BCERMS and all the other agencies that a SAR group may work with during a response, including many of the agencies authorized to callout a SAR group. This difference exists at the highest level in the Organization Chart.

ICS offers a solution to the dilemma of where to position the SAR Manager on the Organization Chart while remaining compatible with ICS and maintaining the higher authority of the police. It is called Unified Command. Unified command is a unified team effort, which allows all agencies with jurisdictional responsibility for the incident, either geographical or functional, to manage an incident by establishing a common set of incident objectives, strategies and action plans. This is accomplished without losing or abdicating agency authority, responsibility, or accountability.

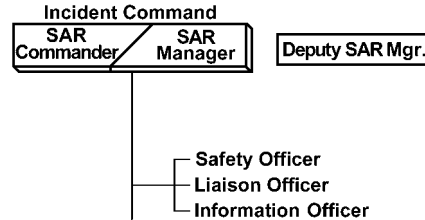
What this basically means is that the Incident Command role can be composed of two people who bring different capabilities to the role, specifically the SAR Commander and the SAR Manager.

The capabilities they bring to the role are:

**Jurisdiction + Function**

## Changes to the ICS Organization Chart

On the Organization Chart the Incident Command is represented by one box in two halves. Together the SAR Commander, who brings authority to the role, and the SAR Manager, who brings the functional management to the role, form the Incident Command. The SAR Commander speaks for the Jurisdiction behind the call-out while the SAR Manager directs and manages the tactics and resources. Representing this relationship on the ICS Organization Chart more clearly illustrates this collaborative effort. This change also allows the Organization Chart to better reflect what is already being done.



*Command level roles utilizing Unified Command. (Family Liaison remains a responsibility of the SAR Commander and does not need to be shown separately on the chart.)*

### SAR Commander

The SAR Commander role is filled by a representative of the agency with jurisdiction and fills half of the Unified Command. For the typical search task, the SAR Commander would be a police officer. In a National Park, where Parks Canada has jurisdiction, the SAR Commander would be a Park Warden. Other jurisdictional agencies are discussed below.

### SAR Manager

The SAR Manager fills the functional side of Unified Command and works in conjunction with the SAR Commander to ensure the task progresses effectively and efficiently towards the objectives. Other individuals who are certified as SAR Managers may fill positions in Operations, Planning and Logistics or as Deputy SAR Manager. When these other individuals call ECC they should not identify themselves as SAR Managers but state the position that they are filling such as Operations Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, etc. Each task must have only one SAR Manager at a time, generally acting for the duration of one operational period before being replaced by another SAR Manager. While the SAR Manager takes a break the Deputy SAR Manager can be designated to temporarily act as the SAR Manager.

### Deputy SAR Manager

The Deputy SAR Manager is shown in the Command portion of the Organization Chart above. The Deputy SAR Manager is an optional position, usually for large-scale searches or as an apprenticing position for newly certified SAR Managers. It is highly beneficial for the SAR Manager to have someone available to provide direct assistance in this role. True to ICS, the Deputy SAR Manager would be fully qualified to act as the SAR Manager, available to step in during breaks.

### Why Change?

Incompatibilities on the Organization Chart between SAR's version of ICS and that of the standard version as taught to the many other emergency response agencies is the primary reason for changing the Organization Chart.

Other reasons arise from problems that have emerged for various people in trying to implement ICS that have caused them to feel that ICS is "useless"; problems that arise because they are not actually using true ICS.

Another main reason for this change is to better reflect on the Organization Chart what has been happening in the field during SAR responses. It has been observed that a good SAR Manager will work very closely with the police officer (or representative of another authorized agency) in managing a SAR response. For example, the police have many resources that they can bring into play such as investigative capabilities, logistical resources and authority. This becomes a collaborative effort while acknowledging that the police retain full authority during the operation.

If this is how it is currently being done, and it works well, then it should be reflected as such on the Organization Chart.

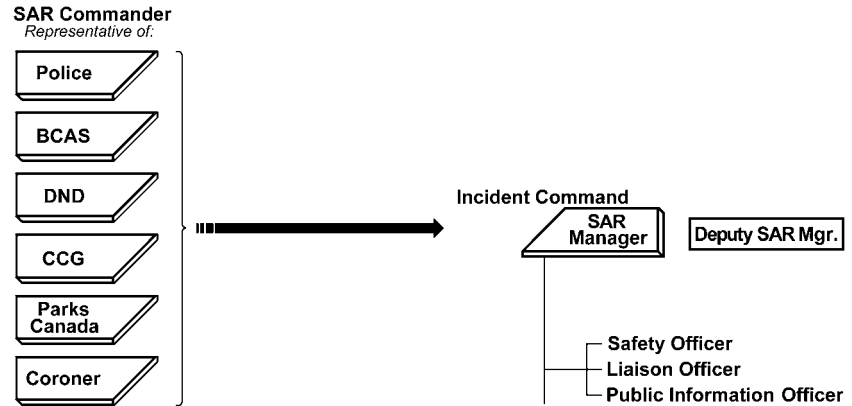
### Jurisdictional Agencies

The Provincial Emergency Program has authorized six organizations with the power to call-out search and rescue groups in British Columbia. They are:

- Police; lost persons on land and inland waters (RCMP and local police forces)
- BC Ambulance Service; rescue of known injury or medical evacuation
- Department of National Defence; assistance in air search and rescue
- Canadian Coast Guard; assistance in marine searches
- Parks Canada; lost and/or injured persons within national parks
- Coroner; recovery of human remains



Most of these organizations use ICS internally. By using the same organizational model with each of these agencies it becomes a standardized model for all SAR responses, and one which is easy for SAR groups to adapt during aid to a disaster response.



*The Unified Command model where different authorized agencies become interchangeable in the role of SAR Commander with the same ICS model used. Note that some organizations or situations may require SAR groups to be involved at the Strike Team or Task Force level on the organization chart.*

**What's Different**

Generally, the changes to the Organization Chart more closely reflect what has already been happening during SAR operations; the SAR Manager and the SAR Commander have collaborated in bringing their individual capabilities to the management of the SAR operation. There is no change to the authority, roles, responsibilities or the way things are done. The change is only on the Organization Chart.

In addition to making a cleaner, more intuitive Organization Chart, changing to Unified Command offers the following benefits.

**Benefits**

- By visually representing the SAR Manager as half of the Unified Command there is a more obvious reinforcement that SAR groups cannot self-deploy.
- With the SAR Commander visually represented as the other half of the Unified Command there may be greater emphasis for the SAR Commander to remain on-scene.
- Should the SAR Commander depart from the Incident Command Post or a shift change should occur within the jurisdictional agency midway through an operational period there will not be a void at the top of the organizational structure of the response. Incident Command will remain in place.



## UNIFIED COMMAND IN USE

### Unified Command for Disaster Response

- Such a Unified Command model is compatible with BCERMS, true ICS and other users of ICS.
- SAR Managers and groups will be better prepared to work within an ICS-organized response to a disaster.
- The Organization Chart is simplified.
- The version of ICS is the same as that used by the agencies authorized to call-out SAR groups.
- Better reflects on the Organization Chart how SAR operations are typically run, allowing SAR groups to more easily adopt ICS.

Unified Command has true value whenever there is a response that involves multiple agencies often with overlapping jurisdictions.

Example #1, A train derailment resulted in the rupture of a natural gas pipeline which then started burning, the railway, gas company, local fire department and police would all be involved in the response. By having a representative of each responding agency pool together, to form a Unified Command, and amongst themselves designate one person to be the spokesperson or figurehead of that Unified Command team, they can respond more effectively. The response would then be better coordinated, make better use of resources, prioritise and address appropriate objectives and not waste time and resources on parallel efforts. This also resolves who is in charge of what and when.

In such a disaster, a SAR group could be called-out to provide coverage for roadblocks at the perimeter of the evacuation zone until additional police resources became available. On the organization chart for the command of the incident, such a SAR response would be at the Task Force level; Unified Command would consist of the agencies with jurisdiction which would not need to include SAR in this example.

Example #2, A flood is an emergency that might involve the local SAR group. Though the local fire department may have the primary functional responsibility, the SAR group may have the boats, water rescue gear, communications equipment and trained personnel to add to the response to make it effective. Representatives of the police and fire department may form a Unified Command to run the whole response while SAR forms the water rescue component. The



## Unified Command In Other SAR Responses

SAR Manager would appear on the Organization Chart as the Water Rescue Branch Director within the Operations Section. With this unified command and proper application of resources, parallel efforts are avoided, resources are used more effectively and there is just one coordinated emergency response to the disaster.

Example#3, BCAS receives a call of an injury and determines that SAR is required to evacuate the subject. BCAS makes the initial callout as they have the responsibility for the care and treatment of the subject. Unified Command allows the BC Ambulance Service to be active in the egress and extrication of the subject. By working together with the SAR Manager they are better informed of the progress of the operation, the needs of the subject and the hazards involved. Having the responsibility of the callout they need to have a role in its command.

Example#4, The second operational period has begun for a lost child in a National Park. The search has stepped up dramatically and several surrounding SAR groups have been called-in to assist. The park wardens have their own ground personnel as well as a trained and qualified SAR Manager. Due to the larger scale of the search, it is decided to have the Parks SAR Manager and the SAR Manager from the neighbouring SAR group form a Unified Command in order to better manage all of the resources involved. Parks staff continue to manage and utilize their own specialized resources to their best effect while a SAR Manager with familiarity of the local SAR groups, their communications, resources, etc. is part of the command structure so that SAR resources are also used to their best effect. A Unified Command ensures there is one effective, well managed response.

Example#5, an aircraft is reported overdue along the coast. A search is initiated by RCC using Coast Guard and military resources. Having identified a need to search the shoreline, the RCC contacts ECC and requests assistance from the local ground SAR group. In this example there is no need for Unified Command as the whole operation is run by the RCC. The ground SAR members are formed into Strike Teams, given their assignments and search while operating under the direction of the RCC.

## IMPLEMENTING UNIFIED COMMAND ON- TASK

Unified Command can work quite effectively. With a representative of each of the involved emergency response agencies represented the objectives can be approached with a coordinated effort. With ICS, Unified Command can be used to facilitate the needs of the particular situation. For most SAR operations it is easy to utilize Unified Command; the representative of the Jurisdictional agency assumes the SAR Commander role while working with the SAR Manager to form a team effort to command and control a SAR operation.

Obviously all parties involved must be familiar with their roles in the ICS organizational structure for ICS to work well. Unified Command works best when the organizations represented are familiar with the roles and responsibilities of the Unified Command structure. Advanced training in ICS helps practitioners understand and utilize ICS to its fullest. A basic, introductory level course alone is not enough; it is only designed to introduce the concepts of ICS. With training in ICS (as all emergency responders should have) the true value of ICS and the use of Unified Command can be realized. By meeting with representatives of local authorized agencies prior to a callout, it is possible to establish relationships that help Unified Command get up and running sooner.

On a task, the initial callout should establish the SAR Commander. The SAR Manager brings the functional abilities to the role for a wilderness search or rescue.

By working together in a Unified Command structure the ICS organization will be able to more easily suit the needs of the task, as well as benefit all the other levels of the ICS Organization. This will also benefit the subject.