

Operations Section Job Aid

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1000 Operations Section

All incidents begin with operations. The Operations Section Chief must be both tactically competent when responding to and possess a thorough understanding of the Incident Command System (ICS). For a quick explanation of how the Operations Section functions and organizes its work, please refer to the [Operations Section Organizational Guidance](#) tool.

Some of the primary responsibilities of the Operations Section Chief are:

- Manage tactical operations;
- Ensure tactical operations are conducted safely;
- Maintain close communications with the Incident Commander/Unified Command (IC/UC);
- Identify required tactical resources to accomplish response objectives;
- Identify staging areas;
- Assemble and disassemble strike teams and task forces; and
- Assist in the development of the Incident Action Plan (IAP).

1100 Function and Organization of the Operations Section

1101 Initial Response

The ICS 201 Operations Diagram provides the operational structure for the initial day's response and that structure remains in place until the IAP is approved, briefed and commences. The incident works under the ICS 201 in the *Reactive Phase* of the response and under the IAP in the *Proactive Phase*. The Operational Diagram for the next operations period will not be complete until after the Tactics Meeting occurs and not final until approved by Unified Command (UC) in its Planning meeting. Finally, the operations diagram is not displayed in the Incident Command Post (ICP) until the operational period commences.

1102 Initial ICS Organization

Until Operations is established as a separate Section, the IC has direct control of tactical resources. The IC will determine the need for a separate Operations Section at an incident or event. When the IC activates an Operations Section, he or she will assign an individual as the Operations Section Chief.

1103 Role of an Operations Section Chief

The Operations Section Chief will develop and manage the Operations Section to accomplish the incident objectives. The Operations Section Chief is normally selected from the organization with the most jurisdictional or functional responsibility for the

incident. The position of Operations Section Chief should be filled by the person with the greatest technical and tactical expertise in dealing with the problem at hand.

The Operations Section Chief roles are as follows:

- Operations Section Chief (along with Command and General Staff) develop and implement strategies and singularly develops and implements tactics.
- Responsible for developing and implementing strategies and tactics to carry out the Incident Objectives.
- Responsible to the IC/UC for the direct management of all incident-related operational activities.
- Organizes, assigns, and supervises all tactical field resources assigned to an incident, including air operations and those resources in a staging area.
- Has direct involvement in the preparation of the IAP.
- May have one or more Deputies assigned.
- The assignment of Deputies from other agencies may be advantageous in the case of multijurisdictional incidents.

The **Operations Section Chief's** workload consists of a combination of responsibilities both inside the ICP and in the field. Their day starts with the Operations Briefing at which time the Operations Section Chief discusses current response actions and accomplishments and the plan for the upcoming operating period. Once the operations brief is complete and after heading to the field to see how ICS work assignments are proceeding, the Operations Section Chief should begin to formulate what the next day's operational period work will entail.

When the Operations Section Chief returns to the ICP, they use the UCs objectives, the Work Analysis Matrix and Operation Planning Worksheet to prepare for the Pre-tactics and Tactics meetings. Once the Tactics Meeting is complete, the Operations Section Chief (or Deputy Operations Section Chief) returns to the field to speak to the division and group supervisors dealing with field issues to ensure the work is on track before returning to the ICP for the Planning Meeting.

The Operations Section Chief returns to the ICP to present the operations plan for the next operational period at the Planning Meeting. Depending on the complexity of the incident, an incident may be managed with a single Operations Section Chief, an Operations Section Chief and a Deputy working nights, or multiple Deputies working days and nights. In medium- to-large spills, the Operations Section Chief may use the Planning Operations Section Chief Deputy role to keep the IAP development process on track while they are in the field.

1104 Operations Section Technical Management

1104.1 Staging Areas

Staging areas are locations where incident personnel and equipment are assigned awaiting tactical assignment. All resources in the Staging Area are ready for deployment. Out-of-service resources are NOT located in the Staging Area.

Each Staging Area should have a direct line of communication with the Resource Unit and should utilize ICS-211P and 211E for resource tracking. Staging Area Managers should determine adequacy of staging areas, communications and other support aspects and request additional support using ICS-213RR as needed.

Staging Area names should account for the geographic location. For example, if it were located at Shilshole Marina, the name could be “Shilshole Marina Staging.”

After a Staging Area has been designated and named, a Staging Area Manager will be assigned. The Staging Area Manager will report to the Operations Section Chief or to the IC if the Operations Section Chief has not been designated.

In the event of a larger spill with multiple Staging Areas established, span of control may be managed by assigning a Staging Area Branch Director to oversee all of the Staging Area Managers.

The Staging Area Branch is responsible for supervising the Staging Area Managers (STAMs) as well as coordinating their activities including assigning STAMs and receiving, maintaining, checking-in/out, storing, and distributing resources. The Staging Area Branch will generally remain in the Incident Command Post and supervise the STAMs from there.

1104.2 Divisions

ICS Divisions are established **to divide an incident into geographical areas of operation**. The benefits of a **Divisional Organization** allow resources a clearly assigned location and can be found easily on a chart or map.

The person in charge of each Division is designated as a **Supervisor**. Divisions are determined by the needs of the incident. The most common way to identify Divisions is by using alphabet characters (A, B, C, etc.). Other identifiers may be used as long as the assigned responders know Division identifiers.

Northwest Regional Contingency Plan (NWRCP) best management practice naming conventions for divisions:

- Name the incident/source location Division A.

- Mainland divisions are named with a single alpha character B to Z a three-letter regional identifier City or County. For example, SKG-B for Skagit County.
- Island divisions are named with double alpha characters BB to ZZ proceeded by a 3-letter island code. For example, the convention would be SJI – BB for San Juan Island.

Riverbank Divisions are marked on the right descending bank or the left descending bank. Riverbank Divisions typically should not cross rivers. For example, B-L or B-R looking to the mouth of the river. For larger spills the name may be proceeded by a regional identifier.

Divisions are land-based operations with a boundary against a shoreline where coastal spills are concerned. Divisions are not boundaries/breaks on the water; these boundaries/breaks are referred to as Branches. Determining the length of a Division along a shoreline involves several factors.

Consider the following when determining how to set Division boundaries:

- Span of control issues when dealing with both personnel and equipment resources
- Access issues and constraints, both on land and on water
- The degree of shoreline oiling. Heavy oiling would call for shorter segments while minimal oiling may allow the use of larger divisions
- Natural breaks such as a bridge or geological feature.
- Predominate shoreline types
- Jurisdictional boundaries such as a city, county or state line
- Consultation with the Environmental Unit to ensure that Divisions encompass rather than bisect Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Technique (SCAT) segments or Geographic Response Plans (GRP).
 - For example, the shoreline operational divisions are organized and named according to County boundaries. Within county domains, division boundaries are guided by logical features such as coastal physical characteristics and land ownership/management, shoreline cleanup logistical considerations and manageable working size. Logistics, access and manageability are driving considerations, particularly as it relates to types of cleanup operations required and problems likely to be present.
 - In Area Contingency Plan areas having more than one county, Shoreline Operational Divisions may utilize a single alpha character (A to Z). Shoreline Operational Divisions are labeled from north to south in each county. For example, the northern-most Operational Division in King County is "K-A." In large bays (i.e., Elliott), the labeling will continue in a clockwise direction to accommodate changing coastline angles. Divisions can be subdivided, if necessary, by Operations to account for unforeseen work assignment effort.

Operations should have in mind how to expand Divisions beyond the next operational period; however, Divisions should be created, named and populated based on the next day's operational needs. Creating Divisions in areas that are not yet impacted may not allow for the flexibility needed in subsequent operational periods.

In the early hours of a spill, responders will implement the GRP priority tables. This prioritized list of strategies may call for implementation of protection booming outside the impacted area. The Operations Section may not initially need to create Divisions for all areas where GRPs are activated. Initially the GRP priority table deployments are best handled functionally, with a protection group or taskforce early in the spill before the actual extent of the oiling is determined via aerial observations. After the boom is deployed (and if a geographic division has been identified for the area) the GRP strategy may then be maintained as a resource assigned to the division where the strategy is located.

If a spill occurs at a facility that has pre-designated Divisions for their area of potential impact, those Divisions should be utilized. Pre-identifying Divisions based on the considerations listed above is a *Best Practice* under the NWRCP.

1104.3 Groups

Groups are used to describe **Functional** areas of operation. The person in charge of each Group is designated as a **Supervisor**.

The kind of Group established is determined by the needs of an incident. Groups are labeled according to the job that they are assigned (i.e., Sampling Group, Disposal Group, Protection Group, etc.). Groups will work wherever their assigned task is needed and are not limited geographically.

The benefits of a **Functional Organization** allow movement of resources without boundaries.

In general, coastal zone spills start with a heavy emphasis on the Functional Organization (on-water recovery, shore-side protection, shore-side recovery) and as time goes forward, the organization morphs into a Geographic Organization driven by SCAT and beach clean-up, while inland spills in narrow waterways may begin and end predominately as Geographic Organizations.

1104.4 Divisions and Groups

Divisions and Groups can be used together on an incident. Divisions and Groups are at an equal level in the organization. One does not supervise the other. When a Group is working within a Division on a special assignment, Division and Group Supervisors must closely coordinate their activities.

1104.5 Establishing Branches

If the number of Divisions or Groups exceeds the span of control, it may be necessary to establish another level of organization within the Operations Section called **Branches**. The person in charge of each Branch is designated as a **Director**. Deputies may also be used at the Branch level.

- Branches may be used to serve several purposes and may be functional or geographic in nature.
- Branches may be established for specialized or critical operations where strategies, tactics, and resources differ from oil spill response operations. For example; Damage Control, Salvage, Source Control, or Wildlife Branch.
- In general, Branches are established when the number of Divisions or Groups exceeds the recommended span of control of one supervisor to three to seven subordinates for the Operations Section Chief.
- Branches are identified by Roman numerals, geographic location, or functional name.
- A Branch Director manages Branches. Branch Directors may have a Deputy. In multi-agency incidents, the use of Deputy Branch Directors from assisting agencies can be of great benefit to ensure and enhance interagency coordination.
- Some incidents may require the use of aviation resources to provide tactical or logistical support.
 - On smaller incidents, aviation resources will be limited in number and will report directly to the IC or to the Operations Section Chief.
 - On larger incidents, it may be desirable to activate a separate Air Operations organization to coordinate the use of aviation resources. The Air Operations organization will then be established at the Branch level, reporting directly to the Operations Section Chief.
 - The Air Operations Branch Director can establish two functional groups. The Air Tactical Group coordinates all airborne activity. The Air Support Group provides all incident ground-based support to aviation resources.

1104.6 Branches, Other Factors

While span of control is a common reason to establish Branches, additional considerations may also indicate the need to use these Branches, including:

- **Multidiscipline Incidents.** Some incidents have multiple disciplines involved. Examples may include Source Control Branch, On-Water Recovery Branch, Near-Shore Branch, Damage Control, Salvage, Wildlife Branch, or Recovery Branch, etc.
- **Multijurisdictional Incidents.** In some incidents, it may be better to organize the incident around jurisdictional lines. In these situations, Branches may be set up to reflect jurisdictional boundaries.
- **Very Large Incidents.** Very large incidents may organize using Geographic or

Functional Branches or both.

1104.7 Operations Section: Expanding and Contracting

The organization within the Operations Section reflects the objectives established by the IC. The Operations organization usually develops from the bottom up and may include:

Task Forces: Task Forces are comprised of a combination of mixed resources with common communications operating under the direct supervision of a Task Force Leader. Task Forces can be versatile combinations of resources and their use is encouraged. The combining of resources into Task Forces allows for several resource elements to be managed under one individual's supervision, thus lessening the span of control of the Division/Group Supervisor.

Task Forces are recommended as the initial tactical units to establish in operations. As additional resources and tactics are identified, Task Forces should be moved into Groups and Divisions as needed to maintain span-of-control.

Commonly used "Task Force" numbering conventions

- 1 – 19: Recovery Group
- 20 – 39: Protection Group
- 40 – 59: Shoreline Recovery Group
- 60+: Differentiate per the needs of the response

Strike Teams: Strike Teams are a set number of resources of the same kind and type with common communications operating under the direct supervision of a Strike Team Leader. Strike Teams are highly effective management units. The foreknowledge that all elements have the same capability and how many will be applied allows for better planning, ordering, utilization and management.

Hot Shot Teams have been defined as teams that have tools such as personnel, boom, and vessels and are assigned to the staging site. They are available but not engaged until the operating period commences and can be called upon by Division and Group supervisors for unforeseen operations. Their Function is to respond to and mitigate issues identified by On-Scene Coordinator (OSC), Division/Group Supervisors and SCAT in real time. Hot Shot Teams are organized as Functional Units so that they are not limited by geographic boundaries.

Single Resources: May be individuals, a piece of equipment and its personnel complement, or a crew or team of individuals with an identified supervisor. The IC or Operations Section Chief at an incident may work initially with only a few single resources or staff members. The Operations Section usually develops from the bottom up. The organization will expand to include needed levels of supervision as more and more resources are deployed.

At some point, the Operations Section and the rest of the ICS organization will contract. The decision to contract will be based on the achievement of tactical objectives. Demobilization planning begins upon activation of the first personnel and continues until the ICS organization ceases operation.