(48 Things to better understand ICS)

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Cover picture – City of Edmonton Fire Department Booming Exercise, 2014  (Tox)
INTRODUCTION
Incident Commanders and ICS instructors need to know Management by Objectives better than anyone. An Incident Commander with a poor understanding of Management by Objectives will have an unfocussed, disorganized, inefficient, and possibly dangerous response. ICS instructors are the people teaching the next incident commander. We need to get this right.

This slide from near the beginning of the ICS Canada I-200 course is often overlooked or quickly skipped over by ICS instructors. It is so simple that people don’t recognize its significance: This is perhaps the single most important slide in all ICS courses put together. It summarizes what Incident Commander is trying (and must) do and it highlights everything an ICS instructor is required to get the students to understand.

Management by Objectives is the core of ICS. After teaching ICS 200, 300, and 400 courses, I still see people struggle with identifying the Objectives. Even more concerning, some students don’t understand this at all. This is understandable in the 200 course, but when you see it in ICS 300, it becomes frustrating and when students in ICS 400 don’t know how to create SMART objectives, it indicates a serious failing of the previous ICS instruction.

I have looked at studies on problems with creating Objectives and have watched Incident Commanders make Objectives during an incident, so the observations that follow are based entirely on the real-life experience with the challenges of writing SMART Objectives. These are suggestions and are not intended to be cast in stone, but like the ICS principles, flexibility doesn’t mean starting by throwing it all out! Take what points will help you the most.

With ICS at a site, when applying ICS in an EOC, when looking at day-to-day life, it all starts with the question “Do I have a problem?” If the answer is “Yes”, then PPOST/SMART Objectives will help make the problem disappear. When you understand that, then the solution to a problem becomes clearer. It all starts with “Is there a problem?”
PART 1: UNDERSTANDING PPOST AND SMART

QUICK REVIEW

PPOST stands for Priorities, Problems, Objectives, Strategies, and Tactics. The Objectives must be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Realistic, and Time Specific. Objectives are the things to be accomplished during an Operational Period. The “A” in SMART is sometimes called “Achievable” but I prefer “Action-Oriented” because achievable and realistic are two words describing essentially the same thing. If it isn’t achievable, it isn’t realistic. If it isn’t realistic, then it won’t be achievable. Also, “Action-Oriented” indicates a requirement to do something about a problem rather than passively watching it or even ignoring it.

The Incident Command System was specifically designed for the disaster characteristics found at the site or “within the tape”. Increasingly, ICS is being used at the Emergency Coordination Centre / Emergency Operations Centre (ECC/EOC) in support of the site and by other organizations (i.e. Salvation Army / Amateur Radio Emergency Service / Search and Rescue) and entities (Reception / Evacuation Centres). To me, problems of the response (ICS) or problems of support (ECC) are still problems.

Chief Brian Stauth, Incident Commander for the 2014 Medicine Hat flood, creates the objectives for the next Operational Period. The 2014 flood was potentially a Type 1 Incident. (Tox)
IDENTIFY THE PROBLEMS

1. ICS Management by Objectives deals with the problems of the incident. If you don’t know what the problem is, how can you fix it? Objectives are statements of the problems to be fixed.

2. Just like students doing the exercises jump down to the tactics and the resources without understanding the objective or the strategies, the Incident Command instructor or the Incident Commander must first be able to identify the problems. The problems may be so glaringly obvious or the appropriate strategy so ingrained that we fail to articulate the problem. “Set up a perimeter” seems simple enough for most incidents, but do you understand WHY that is a necessary strategy? If the problem is that people entering the perimeter area may be hurt, interfere with the response or interfere with a crime scene investigation, then you understand why the perimeter must be set – there is a problem. For example, in one training scenario based on an Australian cave rescue, the entrance to the incident (in an underground cave), is through a hut literally the size of an outhouse in the middle of an empty field. When even one police officer is having trouble entering the hut, let alone getting down the hole, do you really think a perimeter is necessary? Especially when the media, bystanders, family, and responding organizations are respectfully keeping their distance, is a security perimeter necessary during operations? If it isn’t a problem, you don’t need an Objective to deal with non-existent problems.

3. Although starting with the Priorities may help you identify what problems you have to deal with, you only have to deal with the problems. If there are no problems then priorities aren’t required.

4. Every problem MUST relate to one of the priorities. If you cannot show how it affects a priority, then it is not a problem. This may also clarify who has to deal with the problem.

Example: Would a sudden release of 34 billion gallons (130 billion liters) of water from a dam be an incident? Not always. A planned release of water on the Colorado River on March 17 of 2014 was meant to scour the riverbanks and restore wetlands as flooding used to do – a massive release of water is not always a problem. [http://www.alexandracousteau.org/colorado-river-pulse-flow-restoring-life-delta](http://www.alexandracousteau.org/colorado-river-pulse-flow-restoring-life-delta)

Example: A forest fire burning slowly in a remote region with no people or cabins is not a problem. Nobody is going to die, the fire isn’t spreading to any area of concern, there is no property threatened, and the environment is not threatened because fires are critical to a healthy ecosystem. If there are no problems, you don’t have to do anything about it.

Example: You are sitting around a legal, regulation back-yard fire pit, complete with a screen to catch embers. You would be more than a little annoyed if the fire department suddenly stormed into your yard and doused the fire stating “Fire is a threat to lives!”
5. The order of the priorities never changes. When the ICS materials state “Unified Commanders will agree on the priorities...” It is referring to the Objectives and agreeing which Objectives deal with the threats to life first, then stabilizing the incident, then property/environment. The order of the priorities never changes. The priorities tell you which problem you must deal with first. The priorities tell you the order in which to deal with your problems.

6. Economic issues are not a problem within the tape because economy is not one of the ICS priorities. But for the ECC outside the incident site, economy is a priority and economic impact is a problem.

7. Although not priorities of ICS, there are other “problems” that arise when using the 14 principles of ICS in the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC/EOC), a business environment, or for other organizations and events. As the principles of PPOST/SMART work for any problem, any other problems can be grouped under a fourth priority of “Economy/Other”.

8. The priorities can be used to identify problems you have missed. Some people identify the problems, then use the priorities to put them in order of the problems to deal with first (life/safety). Other people will use the priorities one-by-one to identify what problems may require Objectives (“what is the threat to life, what will stabilize the incident, what is the threat to property/environment?”). I use both methods to ensure I haven’t missed anything. First I list all the problems I can see, then I check the priorities one-by-one to ensure I haven’t missed any problems in my list, then I use the priorities to put the problems in order.

Example: Economic problems can be huge. The disruption of the Trans-Canada Highway and CP Rail main line due to the 2013 Southern Alberta floods was causing economic losses of approximately 3 million dollars an hour EACH. At 6 million dollars an hour, it is a problem for someone!

Example: The SARS epidemic did major damage to Toronto’s tourism industry. With 44 deaths in Canada (almost all in the Toronto region), the World Health Organization recommended not to travel to cities with outbreaks. The effect on tourism was devastating. The Toronto City Council recognized this as a “problem” (Economy) and came up with a solution, an Objective and a strategy. A free concert was held for 400-500,000 people to show that Toronto was safe for tourists. The Rolling Stones headlined. The concert was put together in one month. It worked.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molson_Canadian_Rocks_for_Toronto

Example: The Prime Minister of Canada wants to visit Slave Lake, High River, (insert name of disaster) or the Governor or President want to visit an incident. Does this cause a problem for the Incident Commander and ECC? If it is going to cause a problem, then come up with an Objective to “make the problem go away” so to speak. The Prime Minister’s/President’s visit is not going to save lives, stabilize the incident, protect property/environment. But the visit is absolutely necessary (consider George Bush not landing in Air Force One to talk to a single person affected by Hurricane Katrina). The political visits are a problem, but they must occur. They are an “Economy/Other” priority.

Example: Most recovery operations occur after the lives have been saved, the incident stabilized and any damage to property has already been done. But recovery efforts such as massive debris clean-up,
donations, mental health counselling, and restoring community pride are huge problems to confront and ICS can handle those issues under “Economy/Other”.

Rough Objectives from the 2014 Medicine Hat Floods. Note how each objective has a specific time for completion, independent of the Operational Period time. (Tox)
“SOLUTIONS” CREATE THE OBJECTIVE

9. Many people struggle to get from identifying the problem to writing the SMART objective. An additional step of “The Solution” might assist in guiding ICS students and instructors in crafting the SMART objective. The solution is to take the problem and “flip it over” to word the “solution”. There’s a fire; (flip) put the fire out. Flood water may flood the homes; (flip) stop the water from reaching the homes. There may be two solutions to a problem and one may be better than the other. There is a fire; (flip) put the fire out. If you can’t put the fire out, then the flip might be “remove the people”. Let’s try it with a tornado: There’s a tornado; (flip) stop the tornado. Impossible. There’s a tornado; (flip) remove people from the path of the tornado. Unlikely. There’s a tornado; (flip) get the people safe. Can we find a safe place for people? Yes, the basement.

Students may visualize the “solution” if you flip your hand while explaining “There’s a fire, (flip) put the fire out.”

10. “The Solution” tells you what your objective will sound like, but it is not an objective. It is not SMART. “The Solution” must be rephrased to meet the requirements of a SMART objective.

MAKE THE OBJECTIVE SMART

11. The Objective must be Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Time specific. Although the course says “achievable” for the A in SMART, achievable and realistic are the same thing; if it isn’t achievable, then it isn’t realistic and if it isn’t realistic, then it isn’t achievable. The two words cover the same concept. Use “realistic” and change the A to “action-oriented”.

12. The “action-oriented” requires you to do something about the problem, rather than just let it happen. Even the word “monitor” means you are actively watching even if you can’t do much more than monitor.

13. “Specific” refers to two things in the objective; the action verb AND the object of the verb. “Do something about this”. Extinguish this fire, evacuate these people, stop this gas release. “Stop the pollutant at the bridge” may make general sense to the response but there is a danger of
sloppy objectives. When there are four bridges, people may work at the bridge with no chance of success. “Stop this pollutant in this creek at this bridge” takes a couple of seconds longer to write out and save several days or weeks of response over the sloppy objective. As an instructor, you need to continually be forcing the students to say “this fire in this area”. Be specific.

14. The “Measurable” of SMART is measurable in three dimensions. As an instructor, you are looking for THREE measures to have a SMART objective. It must be this amount in this area in this time. You are looking at a specific amount to measure, a specific area defined and a specific time limit to achieve it.

15. When reviewing Objectives, you are looking for an area (such as x by y) and a specific amount (z). Then you add time. As an instructor or Incident Commander, these should be absolutes rather than generalizations. Exactly .5 km radius evacuation of ALL people in the area including responders in the next ___ minutes.

16. The amount, one of the three measures, is usually an absolute but does not have to be. Get ALL people out of this area by this time. Realistically, if people refuse to evacuate or you don’t have enough resources to knock on every door, the Incident Commander may have to say “85% of the people in this area by this time”. This is an acknowledgement that people may die or get sick so “all people” tends to be the default. As an incident commander, you may be forced to make an excruciating decision if you have run out of time and/or resources and make a number less than 100%.

17. We often rely on implied measures rather than specifying them. It seems too obvious to say “all” people or “this town” or “during this operational period”; until it goes wrong and see it in the after action report or inquiry as “failure to clearly communicate”.

“From this boundary (x) to this boundary (y) by this amount (z) in this amount of time.”

Example: In High River, the police and military were told “search the homes for people trapped...”. People trapped is a problem and people were trapped. So they started kicking in doors (strategy or tactics). But the objective was not SMART and so the teams searching the homes kicked in most the doors and searched almost every house in High River, including homes that never got any water in them. Once the search started, nobody told them where to end – they just kept on going until every home was done.
Example: The Acclaim Energy sour gas well incident had an evacuation of a defined area around the well site (let’s say .5 kilometers). The company evacuated all 125 people, but to the people in the area a .5 kilometer evacuation means nothing since nobody could tell if they were in the circle or not. Everyone inside the circle got a knock on the door, but people outside the circle didn’t know that and saw the people across the street evacuating (in the circle) and assumed they would have to evacuate as well. Nobody from the company was at the hotel to say “You are outside the circle so you don’t have to evacuate and you can go home”. The result? Over 650 people evacuated and the company had to pay thousands of extra dollars for people who didn’t need to evacuate. Stating “these people must evacuate from this area in this time” would have aided saying “Those people outside the area do not have to evacuate”.

 Regulations tightened in wake of blowout

August 18, 2005 EDMONTON - An emergency planning slip-up caused the unnecessary evacuation of people from homes near Edmonton's sour-gas well blowout last winter, a provincial inquiry says. More than 500 residents were unnecessarily forced from their homes because Acclaim Energy Trust failed to establish the danger zone around the site on the city's southwestern edge, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board reported Wednesday. The Edmonton Journal - Gordon Jaremko and Chuck Rusnell

Example: A 193 care pile-up on the I-94 in Michigan with multiple hazardous materials resulted in authorities requesting a 3 mile evacuation in all directions. Seems pretty clear to the responders, but look at the comments from the public on the news coverage:

- Little thing [Map] I quickly did... couldn't find an exact point for mile marker 90 so i just guessed....
- Zach, nice map. I think it's a bit more easterly-
- Is Climax having to evacuate? I think its just outside the 3 mile radius.
- People within a one mile radius are now being told to stay inside according to WWMT.
- @csgirl Climax is on the cusp of 3 miles. Anyone along MN Ave definitely is in the radius.
- @csgirl It's a close call, village center may be in it, south of there, may not be.
- @insanity Wonder how they would notify us if we are to evacuate? Or if we're just supposed to know to do it on our own. But we have the wonderful advantage now of not being able to get OUT to go anywhere. Since all we have available are back roads that haven't seen a plow yet and are drifted over - and we can't go north to get anywhere since 94 is there.

2 http://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2015/01/police_residents_near_fatal_i-.html#incart_river
MULTIPLE STRATEGIES

18. Strategies are how you will accomplish the Objective. If the Objective is “Remove all water from this tub in thirty minutes, then the strategies are “Pull the plug, bucket it out, siphon, shop-vac, TNT, add jello and hand-scoop out, drill a hole in the tub, tilt the house…”

19. Strategies are not time specific like the Objective is. Strategies are never time restricted. If evaporation will get all water out of this tub, then it is a strategy. The reason strategies are not time-specific is because more than one strategy can be used at the same time. Using a thimble to get all water out of the tub may not achieve the 30 minutes, but combining it with the shop-vac and a piece of paper towel (to remove the last beads of water) will achieve the objective. A piece of paper towel won’t empty the tub by itself, but with other strategies, it will get all water out of this tub in the 30 minute time period. Strategies are never time-restricted.

20. Strategies are not time restricted because if you fail to achieve the objective in the first operational period, the incident commander may have to change the operational period, the objective, the time or the strategies. The BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill was not stopped using the first strategy. Or the second, or the third. Multiple strategies were used as many operational periods went by. If Plan A doesn’t work, then use Plan B.

21. A good Incident Commander will always have a Plan A and a Plan B (two strategies) for each objective. A GREAT Incident Commander will have a Plan C and Plan D in their back pocket. When everyone else is panicking, the Incident Commander is calmly saying “Calm down, we will do it THIS way” and pull out another strategy. If the Incident Commander is calm, everyone else will be calm. The more strategies the IC has, the calmer they will be. Then it will not be if the objective can be met but when. It will be accomplished no matter what.

Example: The BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill used at least 10 major strategies, some costing hundreds of millions of dollars. There is a great summary of the multiple strategies used on the BBC website at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10317116. As well, as the simplest strategies were not successful and BP was starting to run out of ideas, the public was consulted to obtain suggestions for further strategies. Around 100 experts evaluated 43,000 suggestions offered to BP through social media and 470 were reviewed for further consideration. That is much more than just Plan B, C, D”….it’s up to plan Z, AA, AB, AC…!

3 http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/jul/12/bp-deepwater-horizon-oil-spill-crowdsourcing
**TACTICS ARE OPERATIONS**

22. Tactics are the “BITS AND PIECES” to achieve the objective using a strategy. For an Incident Commander, tactics can be summed up as “I don’t care!” How many rolls of police tape does it take to block a street? Does it matter if you put the tape at eye-level or at knee level? Does it matter if there is one strand of tape or two or twenty? Does it matter if it is police tape or fire tape? IDC! Tactics are always operations and the Incident Commander will leave it to the Operations Chief to work with those doing the job. All the Incident Commander is worried about it “Was the Objective met?”

**OBJECTIVE TIME / OPERATIONAL PERIOD TIME**

23. *Time* for the objective is *not* the Operational Period Time. These are two different spans of time. The reason this gets confused is because the time for each Objective is exactly the same as the operational period and/or the time for the Objectives are not listed (not SMART).

24. In some circumstances, the time of the objective will be exactly the same as the time of the Operational Period, especially during continuing operations going through multiple operational periods. Pumping the water out of High River was going to take weeks so “continue pumping the water” would have the same time limit as your daily operational period. What is important to understand is that just because the time on the objective coincides with the time of the operational period doesn’t mean it will always coincide. Every objective must have a specific time limit put on it independent of the Operational Period.

25. If the time on the Objective extends past one operational period, you should put a qualifier on it to indicate that. “Begin” pumping in High River, “Continue” pumping in High River, and “Complete” pumping in High River will show an objective that will take multiple operational periods.

26. “Continue” needs a specific measure for the operational period so we know that progress was made during that period.

27. As each objective will have its’ own time measure, the Incident Command must indicate if an objective must be done first, can be done concurrently, or is subsequent to another objective in the same operational period.

Example: To evacuate the entire building and call 911 for help may take an Operational Period of 30 minutes but that doesn’t mean you have 30 minutes to phone 911.
RESOURCES

28. An objective without adequate resources to get the job done is called a “wish”. “I wish we could do this”. For every single objective, you must assign adequate resources to get the job done. Incident Commanders must have or order sufficient resources to achieve the objective or it should be listed as “I wish we could do ________”.

29. An Incident Commander may have a “wish” (objective with no resources but it does not become part of the Incident Action Plan and it doesn’t get assigned to the Operations Chief until there are resources to get it started. Upon arrival of additional resources, the Incident Commander can turn wishes into stated SMART Objectives.

30. Resources are not “Fire, Police, EMS”. Resources are the best available resources you have available at the time. If you have no police to block the road, do you let the public go into the danger zone? No. You could use Search and Rescue, Public Works, Sheriffs, volunteers, or the Boy Scouts. The Objective is to prevent people from entering a dangerous area. Police are not the objective; they are the best available resource to achieve the objective. There are no fire/police/EMS in ICS.

31. The key is using the best available resources at the time. While fire/police/EMS are the typical resources, in disasters, they are not the only resource.

Example: After the Joplin tornado destroyed the town and much of the emergency response, roads were blocked by debris and smashed vehicles. While tow trucks would normally remove the vehicles, the number of vehicles overwhelmed the few working tow trucks. Front end loaders were working on the rescues. If the roads are blocked, how do you get emergency vehicles through when there are no tow trucks or front-end loaders? In Joplin, they got assistance from elephants.
A circus was in town. The Asian logging elephants at the circus were used to clear debris until more appropriate assistance could arrive. The box on the organization chart should not read “Tow Trucks” which is the best resource. It should read “Road clearing” and use the best available resource at the time; in this case circus elephants.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVzeZxcsQF8)

Patient Transport for the Aurora Theatre Batman Shooting July 20, 2012. A security camera screen grab from University of Colorado Hospital shows Aurora Police Department cars in the University of Colorado Hospital ambulance bay. Patients were taken from the seats of the police cars, and nurses and paramedics got them onto hospital beds and into the emergency department. One police officer made four trips before the first ambulances came on-scene. (Photo provided by University of Colorado Hospital)
OBJECTIVES AND ORGANIZATION CHART

32. For every problem, there is one objective, one person in charge, one box on the ICS chart under operations. As an instructor, this is the quickest way to see if people understand ICS or not. If the students have 5 objectives, then look for 5 boxes under operations. If they don’t match, there are only a few reasons:
   a. They don’t get ICS (most likely)
   b. They have divided an objective – Divisions will show up as multiple boxes but as soon as you seen the world “Division” you know they have divided the objective into parts.
   c. One group of resources is doing two objectives (i.e. Objective 1 is “Extricate patients” and objective 2 is “Triage, Treat and Transport” but there is only one crew to do both jobs so the box under Operations becomes “Extricate and TTT”).
   d. It is a complex incident with multiple sites. At that point, multiple Objectives at multiple sites messes up the “One Objective = One Box” system. However, these tend to be Type 1 or Type 2 incidents which should not be the norm for ICS 100 to 300 courses.

33. Numbering the objectives may assist an instructor in clarifying how the problem is turned into a SMART objective and the objective’s resources becomes a box under Operations. Resources can then be assigned to each objective. During exercises, it may be a little easier for students (and responders) when you say Objective 1 is “Establish a three block perimeter around this fire within 20 minutes” and then immediately list the resources assigned/ordered underneath it.

34. If problem 1 creates Objective #1 and is shown on the organization chart as box #1 with a set of resources on-scene or ordered as Resources #1, then it is clear that the problem has a solution and adequate resources have been assigned to accomplish the objective. For Division, the Objective might be labelled as #1 Perimeter, but the boxes on the chart would be #1a North Perimeter and #1b South Perimeter to indicate is it one objective but divided into two parts.
PART 2: FINE TUNING THE OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESPONSE

35. Every Incident Command instructor and Incident Commander needs to have a clear understanding of the difference between problems of the Incident and problems of the response to that incident.

The Objectives are statements of what needs to be done due to the effects of the incident. The Objectives are created to make the problems of the incident “go away”.

There are a second set of problems that may occur; problems not due to the incident but how we are responding to the incident. Assuming the wrong Incident Type, having to move the Incident Command Post, complaints about information sharing are not caused by the Incident but by the people doing the response.

Because PPOST is extremely effective at dealing with any problem, it can be used to successfully deal with problems of the response. However, problems of the response should not be listed as Objectives in the Incident Action Plan.

The vast majority of the problems with responding were already addressed 40 years ago with the creation of the Incident Command System. Every role on the chart was created specifically to deal with one or more problems always encountered on every incident. Every position on ICS chart has an implied objective already assigned.

For example, if getting information to the public is a problem, the Objective of the Information Officer is clearly implied and clearly stated in the job duties as “Provide accurate and timely response information to all responders, the public and the media.” If moving the command post is a problem, then the Facilities Unit Leader is already providing logistical and organizational support to all facilities.

36. Every position on the ICS chart has an implied objective. Understand that objectives of the response are not to be listed with the operational period objectives. Objectives of the response would be things like “inform the public”, “improve communications on site”, and “Ensure safety of the responders”. If these are a problem, then they must be addressed but not by writing an objective. Essentially they indicate you need to kick someone in the rear (including the incident commander). Every position in Incident Command implies there is a problem that the response must deal with and one person has been assigned an implicit objective to deal with that problem. “Improve information flow to the public” is not a problem of the incident itself, but indicates that your response is having a problem. There is already someone with that objective; the Information Officer. Therefore, give the Information Officer a kick or give them adequate resources to get the job done.
37. If it is already assigned to a member of the Incident Management Team, then it is not an objective. If you have to say “Ensure the Safety of the Responders” then you had better list “Ensure everyone gets food” and “Ensure all time sheets are submitted” because you are basically saying “Ensure the safety of the responders” then you have to tell everyone in ICS what job they have to do. If safety is being ignored by everyone, then every other less critical job is likely being ignored as well. You should not have to point out “do your job” for anyone, let alone the Incident Commander.

The safety officer does his job! Rod Houle (in the yellow) wins out over the acting Field Officer. (Tox)
“SAFETY OF RESPONDERS” IS NOT AN OBJECTIVE

I understand why people put “Ensure the safety of the responders” as their first objective.

Good intentions, however, are not good ICS. Putting “Ensure the safety of the responders” is ineffective at best. It also indicates taking shortcuts or ignoring the actual safety issues involved. There are at least five ways that are much, much more effective and concrete. As well, putting “Ensure safety of the responders” indicates a lack of understanding of priorities, SMART objectives, the responsibility of the Incident Commander for safety, and good, detailed, by-the-book ICS.

At the end of every roll call on the TV series Hill Street Blues, Sgt. Phil Esterhaus would say “Hey, let’s be careful out there....” For the rest of the show, officers would be attacked, shot, run into burning buildings, jump in front of cars, etc. Just saying “Be Safe!” has absolutely no effect on the safety of the response. It may make you feel good by saying it, but it does nothing for the safety of the responders. We need to be much more efficient at providing for the safety of the responders than “wishing them well”. Any emergency responder going out on a shift should realize “Be safe!” does nothing to improve safety. We need to do much, much better than a nice statement of hope.

Secondly, emergency scenes are inherently risky. The only way to guarantee the safety of responders is to not have them respond. Every firefighter going to a burning building, every police officer going to a domestic dispute, and every paramedic at a traffic accident on the highway knows “Hey, let’s be CAREFUL out there” doesn’t stop a wall from collapsing, an attack from someone, or a driver losing control of a car. Unless we stop responding to emergencies, there will be a risk to the responders that will not be mitigated by simply saying “Be careful!”

There are at least five better ways that the Incident Response can improve the safety of the responders. Before you read the notes below, if you were an Incident Commander, can you name at least five ways which would be more effective than “be safe” at ensuring the safety of the responders? If you can’t list five, you need to do a better job of “ensuring the safety of the responders” yourself. List them down, and then read on!

38. “Ensure the Safety of the Responders” is not an Objective! I understand perfectly why it is listed as the first objective, but it signifies lazy ICS / a red flag indicating danger to the responders. The safety of the responders is a priority, not an objective. It is the order in which things are done. Secondly, it indicates failure to understand objectives of the incident and objectives of the response. Finally, it is a clear indication of a failure of the entire incident response. Here’s why:

a. Safety of the Responders is the ultimate responsibility of the Incident Commander. By trying to put it on the IAP as an objective, the Incident Commander is trying to avoid responsibility if things go wrong. While you think you are saying “Be safe!”, you are

4 If you want recent examples of well trained, well-equipped, experienced first responders getting hurt, go to http://www.tkolb.net/tra_sch/FireTruckCrashes/TruckCrash.html and click on the most recent month. In every case you could claim “Ensure the safety of the Responders” could be “Don’t respond and you won’t get hurt!”
actually saying “Hey all responders! I’m doing a lousy job of safety! Welcome to my incident and good luck!” Anyone who thinks stating “Ensure Safety of the Responders” is going to make the slightest difference needs to get out of command.

b. If safety is that much of an issue that you have to state “Ensure Safety of the Responders”, then either you need to appoint a Safety Officer or you need to give your Safety Officer a kick in the rear. “Ensure the Safety of the Responders” is specifically the response objective of the Safety Officer and their very reason for existing in ICS.

c. “Ensure the Safety of the Responders” indicates that the IC and the Safety Officer and the Operations Chief and the Planning Chief have failed to do a 215A safety analysis and mitigation. The very reason for the form is to ensure the safety of the responders. Given the choice between a proper safety analysis and simply writing down “Ensure Safety of the Responders”, I will go with the proper safety analysis every time.

d. “Ensure Safety of the Responders” says nothing. There are at least 5 better ways of getting that message through to every responder. These include:

i. The Safety Message form 208 – this gives specific information on what dangers exist and what responders must be aware of.

ii. The ICS Organizational Assignment List 204 – this has a specific space for information on the dangers that exist and what responders must be aware of in their area of operations. Much more specific.

iii. The ICS Objectives form 202 has a specific general safety message which is expected to provide clearer detail on the safety issues for the response rather than a vague sentence.

iv. The Operational Period briefing where the safety officer gives a safety message more specific than a vague “keep safe out there....”. This also gives the chance to provide safety messaging about THIS operational period that might be different from any other operational period.

v. The crew briefing for every task force and strike team leader to brief their crew on their specific objective in their specific area of operations for this operational period. This will be more important to any responder than a vague “Keep safe” pseudo-objective.

As I said at the beginning, I understand why people feel compelled to put “Ensure the Safety of the Responders” as their first statement. What Incident Commanders should do is put in a statement that is not an objective, or a priority and is completely clear about the expectations of the response and gives every responder the ability to make their own best decision at the time:

“**You do not have to do anything you believe to be or appears unsafe**”

That statement would better convey the intent of “ensure the safety of the responders” and make it clear to everyone that this is coming right from the Incident Commander and is supported all the way down the chain of command.

If you have a better phrase, I would love to hear it. Just don’t tell me it’s an objective!
For those wanting to take a further look at this, take a look at these two links:

**Wildfire Safety – The Big Lie**
http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.ca/2016/06/the-big-lie.html


**Author: Mark Smith, Mission-Centered Solutions - Honor the Fallen Essay - The Big Lie**
“Nearly 19 firefighters a year are dying because they are operating, even after mitigation, in an inherently high risk environment.” Read this before you attempt to list “Ensure the Safety of all Responders” as an Objective. The second link is from “Two More Chains” 2016 Fall Edition where they discuss the issue in greater detail. It’s about time we had this discussion.
“DETERMINE THE SCOPE” COULD BE AN OBJECTIVE

39. “Determine the Scope of the Incident” could be an objective. It is an objective that is often overlooked, given inadequate resources, is waited on to become clear. Everyone knows “Communications will fail” in disasters. Because of it, we have a Communications Unit and an Information Officer and Formal/Informal Communications and multiple briefings (transfer of command, Operational Period, Crew Briefings). But even before communications failures, the most common disaster characteristic is “The Scope was not known”.

Disasters are wider spread and Type 2 and Type 1 incidents are much more complex than the human brain can comprehend. You are Incident Commander for Hurricane Katrina. What do you see? What can you see from your command post? The impact area was the size of Great Britain.

The key is to have the appropriate response, not the fastest response. The most effective response does not include “Send me everything you’ve got”. I’ve got 20 boy scouts on bicycles that I’ve just sent you. Do you really want them? No? Too late, they’ve been dispatched and have no communications to get them back.

There is a Situation Unit which does an outstanding job of summarizing the current situation. The situation unit even has Field Observers to gather information as the situation changes. But at the start of the incident, the most common problem is “We didn’t know what we were getting into.” If the problem is you don’t know, then the solution is to find out. Deploy resources to determine the scope, area, impacts, and safety issues of this incident” would be a reasonable objective to assist in the first operational period. Once determined, the scope can then be given to the situation unit to maintain and update as the situation changes. But right at the start, it needs to be an objective of the incident, it needs a SMART objective, a person in charge and adequate resources to get it done. Objectives to deal with “Scope not Known” would be things like “Identify the exact number of animals escaped and animals remaining” or “Determine the increased hazard and safety issues from the mix of chemicals”.

Examples: Hurricane Katrina’s impact area was the size of Great Britain. Where was the worst hit area? Not shown on TV! Slave Lake has the town on fire. How much of the town? What emergency services remain and which ones have been lost? The 1987 Edmonton/Strathcona tornado had over 30 hazardous materials incidents – many were major incidents. With only one or two hazardous materials teams, which one is the worst? In San Francisco and Los Angeles, the fire department may drive by a child with obvious fractures lying on the street. Why? With earthquakes, that child may be the least of the problems. Every district is required to do a survey of their area, determine the area requiring the immediate help, and radioing it in – passing the child by is necessary to determine the scope. Helping the child may result in 15 children losing their lives in the school collapse a mile away.
EVERY OBJECTIVE BECOMES A BOX

40. If every objective has a box under Operations, then there should be clarity from the Instructor, the IAP and the entire response. If we have four objectives 1/2/3/4 then they show up on the IAP as 1/2/3/4, they show up under Operations on the organization chart LABELED as 1/2/3/4 and you order resources SPECIFICALLY for 1/2/3/4 to make sure they are accomplished rather than being a wish.

41. Don’t worry (too much) about the organization of each objective under Operations. Leave that to the person in charge of that box and the Operations Chief/Planning Chief. As an Incident Commander (or ICS trainer), it really doesn’t matter if it is a Single Resource or 5 Branches to accomplish that objective as long as the Objective will be completed in the operational period. Yes, the structure is important, but leave the structure to those delegated to work out the details. As long as the span of control and unity of command is met, then it is not the Incident Commander’s primary concern.

42. As objectives are completed, you can remove that box from the organization chart. Other objectives may be added in. For extreme clarity for everyone involved, give each new objective a new number. This will ensure clarity on each day’s objectives as well as the total objectives (problems) identified for the duration of the response. For example, Day 1 would have Objectives 1)2)3)4), Day 2 might have Objectives 1)2)4)5), day 3 would then have Objectives 2)5)6)7) and Day 19 could finish with Objectives 2)5)24)32). Objective 2 might be a continuing objective of “Enforce a security perimeter” and Objective 32 might be “Final site review for safety issues before turning site over to property owner/insurance investigators.”

Objective 1 “Rescue/Evacuate all residents within .5 km of the train derailment would have been completed during the first Operational Period and would not be necessary for any successive periods.

Objective 2 will have begun in the first Operational Period, but would continue until near the end and would last for the duration of each Operational Period.

Objective 7 has a “drop dead” time while Objective 9 is limited by hours of daylight rather than the Operational period.

Objective 14 is intended to be completed by the end of this Operational Period.
ORGANIZATION WITHIN THE BOX

43. There is no “Fire Branch/Police Branch/EMS branch” in ICS. That indicates you are trying to force ICS to match your day-to-day operations. What was the objective? If the objective is to create a perimeter around High River to prevent people going into an unsafe area, the objective is “Enforce a perimeter to prevent all non-responders from going into the Town of High River”. At the start it was RCMP, but then it was military, later it was Alberta Sheriffs, and later still it was security guards. It wasn’t just an RCMP function. In disasters, you will have police fighting fires, volunteers doing rescues, and elephants clearing roads because the emergency services are equally affected, do not have adequate resources, or haven’t arrived on scene yet. If it is Fire/Police/EMS, then it is an emergency and a Type 4 or Type 5 Incident. Tell us what to do (the objective) not who is doing it (the resource) because in disasters, the fire department has ceased to function or is taking any help they can get.

44. You do not need Branches when you only have a single resource to do the objective or a Strike Team/Task Force. If you only have one police officer, it is not “The Perimeter Branch” let alone the “Police Branch”. “Police Branch” or “Fire Branch” indicates you are more comfortable with a normal Type 4 or Type 5 response. Yes, the best resource will be assigned to “fire suppression” but if there are no fire fighters or not enough, you will use the best available resources.

45. If you are doing Divisions, consider labelling the Objectives as 1a/1b/1c for the three divisions.

46. You can have phantom divisions planned out. If the wind may shift, you can plan on divisions 1a/1b/1c to move over and become divisions 1m/1n/1o or 1x/1y/1z depending if the wind shifts from the north or from the south.

Fire suppression – not just the fire department. March 2014 Bernardo Fire - San Diego Police Officer Matt Koerber uses a garden hose save a home during large spring wildfires. (www.utsandiego.com)
LAST COMMENTS

47. During the massive 2013 floods in Southern Alberta, Tom Sampson, EOC Director for the City of Calgary, was adamant that update reports on Objectives would include specific percentages of completion rather than generalizations of progress. “Coming along” or “A little behind” were not acceptable; “75% complete” or “Only 25% done” were demanded for every objective for every progress report. Using percentages quickly caught on and clarified the progress for all parties/objectives.

48. The organization chart is not ICS. ICS is the Objectives. The organization chart falls out of the Objectives set by the Incident Commander in response to the problems. Anyone who shows you an organization chart does not understand ICS. Show me your SMART Objectives
USE OF ICS IN AN EOC

I am a great believer of using the 14 principles in the EOC exactly as taught for the site. I would make one change; the person leading the EOC should not be called “The Incident Commander”. They should be called the EOC Director or EOC Manager. This is to avoid confusion with the poor soul leading out at the site and any reference to “The Incident Commander” should be the person actually dealing with the emergency. Most other changes are either unnecessary or superficial. Most other changes to ICS to make it apply to the EOC are an indication that ICS is not understood and/or the organization is trying to make ICS look like their day-to-day way of doing business.

Does ICS really work in an EOC? The only time an EOC is stood up is if there are problems with the response or anticipated problems. If the response is working well, then you never need the EOC. Because one of the key successes of ICS was the ability to deal with problems, then if there is a problem that requires an EOC, then ICS will effectively deal with that problem.

The big debate over Operations (EOC) versus Coordination or Support Centre (ECC) is a waste of time to my mind. Some of the time it is simply support and sometimes it is actually running the show, such as a jurisdiction-wide incident. I have observed various organizations fighting over command at a site and the EOC sitting back and doing nothing for hours or days because “We only support the site”.

The EOC role is rarely “just support”. Problems it deals with include continuity of government, continuity of operations, providing emergency services to unaffected portions of the community, road closures and diversions, public warnings, legal declarations, care of evacuees, recovery efforts, and information gathering and dissemination. The issue of command may be key, especially when there is confusion or conflict, multiple incidents, or scarcity of resources. Sitting back and letting the incident commanders fight is ineffective for everyone.

The reason first responders say “The EOC simply supports the site” is that too often the EOC is sticking its’ nose where it doesn’t belong. The simplest way to deal with it is to tell them to sit back and wait until they are called. If you use the idea that ICS deals with “Problems”, then the question is not whether the EOC is support or operations, but “Whose problem is it?” If it is inside the tape, it is the Incident Commander’s problem. If it is outside the tape or a problem with command, then the EOC will deal with it. The two need to be working together and clarifying who deals with what part of the problem.

For example, an evacuation is ordered for all residents (about 15,000 residents). Whose problem is it?

- Incident Command “Evacuate all residents from the Town of High River in two hours”.
- EOC “Receive up to 15,000 evacuees and provide basic care (food, clothing, accommodation, pets, personal assistance)”
- Province “Provide financial, program, and volunteer assistance to the town Emergency Social Services program”
Warning the public may vary by target audience, target message and strategy. For a hazardous materials incident the site and EOC need to be working closely together.

- Incident Command “Evacuate all residents within 500 metres of the derailment.”
- EOC “Notify all residents within 2 kilometers to shelter-in-place until otherwise directed”
- Province “Provide emergency assistance with the warning system as requested by the town.”

By clarifying what the problem is and who should be dealing with it, you may find either a gap or an overlap. For example, the site may be evacuating the site and the EOC is setting up a reception/evacuation centre, but who is responsible for getting the evacuees from the site to the reception centre? The site might leave the evacuees standing in the cold outside the tape or the EOC may send buses right into the emergency zone because both parties are making assumptions or they aren’t talking to one another. There are actually three problems to deal with:

1) Getting people out of the evacuation area safely.
2) Having a reception centre to accommodate the evacuees.
3) Transporting the evacuees from the site to the reception centre.

If people can’t get to the reception centre, it is a problem. I don’t care if the site says “Give us the buses and we’ll do it” or the EOC says “Get them to the emergency scene tape and we’ll take them from that point” as long as the problem is identified and it is agreed on whom will have the objective.

Many issues have inside the tape/outside the tape components from pets (retrieve pets/care of pets) to transportation issues (block roads/open detours) to response issues (mutual aid for inside the tape/emergency service continuity outside the tape) or even command (conflict of command inside the tape/command issues when multiple incidents in a community).

If it is a problem, let’s deal with it. If it is inside the tape, let the IC handle it, if it is clearly outside the tape, let the EOC/ECC deal with it, and if there is a question, let’s talk!

ICS works in an EOC. Some of the most effective responses I have seen are when both the site and the EOC/ECC have been doing SMART Objectives and are communicating those Objectives to each other on a regular basis.
GREAT 202

In 2014, the Town of High River was anticipating the possibility of another June flood. The 2013 June floods were the worst disaster in Alberta history and the third costliest disaster in the world in 2013. For 2014, no warnings had yet been issued but heavy rains were predicted.

With a possible flood event on the horizon, an Incident Command response was initiated. But most of the tasks were “monitoring” and only or two people required. Even an ICS form 201 was unnecessary with very limited objectives and resources required for the awareness phase. A 201 wasn’t required because there was no map, no resources ordered, all resources were on scene and each Objective was essentially a one-person job.

Rather than doing an ICS form 201, the Town of High River simply used the ICS 202 Incident Objectives to give the Objectives and the assigned person. Carly Benson, Planning Chief, realized a 202 was the only form that was needed.

**Objective(s):**
1. Monitor weather for High River over the next 24 hours and provide an update Town employees and Council.
   Assigned to: Albert and Carly
2. Provide forecast information to local contractors working near the river in the next two hours.
   Assigned to: Jason
3. Determine the need for public warning/notification to High River residents by 1200 (June 13).
   Assigned to: Albert

I think this is a simple and elegant demonstration of understanding ICS. The response follows the needs of the incident, not the other way around. PPOST and SMART were used and the organization chart wasn’t even necessary because the ICS form 202 said it all.

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6 Carly Benson (Planning) and Albert Flootman (IC) were in High River for the 2013 Southern Alberta floods, the epicenter of one of the biggest disasters in Canadian history and definitely a Type 1 incident. If anyone understands the need for effective ICS, they do!
# Incident Objectives

## ICS Form 202

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Incident Name:</th>
<th>High Rainfall Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Operational Period:</td>
<td>Date from: June 12, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time from: 1500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Objective(s):
1. Monitor weather for High River over the next 24 hours and provide an update Town employees and Council. Assigned to: Albert and Carly
2. Provide forecast information to local contractors working near the river in the next two hours. Assigned to: Jason
3. Determine the need for public warning/notification to High River residents by 1200 (June 13). Assigned to: Albert

### 4. Operational Period Command Emphasis:
Monitor weather conditions. Be prepared to respond to localized flooding if conditions change.

## General Situational Awareness

**Weather:**
- 30 – 40 mm of rainfall expected for the Highwood basin starting Thursday night and ending early Saturday morning.
- The bulk of the rain is expected in the Oldman basin.
- Localized downpours are possible.
- Showers with risk of a thunderstorm. Amount 15 to 25 mm. Wind becoming north 20 km/h gusting to 40 near noon then light in the evening. High 12 degrees Celsius. Low 6 degrees Celsius.

**Long Range Forecast:**
- Another system coming in on Sunday night with slightly higher rainfall amounts, not yet confirmed

### 5. Site Safety Plan Required?
- Yes [ ]
- No [x]

**Approved Site Safety Plan(s) Located at:**

### 6. Incident Action Plan (IAP) (the items checked below are included in this IAP):

- [x] ICS 202
- [ ] ICS 206
- [ ] ICS 203
- [ ] ICS 207
- [ ] ICS 204
- [ ] ICS 208
- [ ] ICS 205
- [ ] Map/Chart
- [x] Other Attachments
- [x] Weather forecast

### 7. Prepared by:
- Name: Cary Benson
- Position/Title: Planning Section Chief
- Signature: [Signature]

### 8. Approved by Incident Commander:
- Name: Albert Floatman
- Date/Time: 1555
- Signature: [Signature]

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Revised 6/12/2014
TO SUMMARIZE

- ICS Management by Objective solves “problems”. If you can’t identify the problem then you won’t have a clear response.
- You need to recognize the problems are only a problem if it is a threat to one of the priorities.
- Objectives must be action-oriented, realistic and must have all three measures every time “This amount from this specific area in this amount of time”.
- Each objective shows up as a box under operations. In complex incidents or when Divisions are used, this may not strictly be true. But for training purposes, this may help solidify the connection between the Objective and the box under Operations.
- Objectives of the response (safety, information, communications, etc.) are not objectives of the incident and do not show up on the Incident Action Plan.
- An objective without resources is called a wish.
- There is always a Plan B. And C and D. An Incident Command will have and can use multiple strategies
- The resources are never “fire, police, EMS”. The resources are what you have at the time. If there are no police, you still have to do the objective.
- ICS is not the organization chart. The organization chart comes out of the objectives and is the absolute last step in the entire process. Anyone who starts with the organization chart doesn’t understand the process or ICS.
THE MOST IMPORTANT ICS SLIDE

If you completely understand this slide, you will have a much greater understanding of the success of the ICS as a whole system. PPOST creates the SMART objectives and how the strategies, resources and structure fall out of the objectives. The organization chart is the last part of creating the response. Any organization that begins with the organization chart probably doesn’t understand ICS.
TIPS AND TECHNIQUES SERIES
There are currently five papers available in the Tips and Techniques series. These papers are personal observations and suggestions and do not reflect any organization or agency. They were written for the Alberta instructors using ICS Canada materials; they reflect Alberta legislation, organizations and experiences and were not expected, when written, to be used outside of that jurisdiction. They are for information only and may not apply or may not apply well, in any other jurisdiction. They are available for download through www.icscanada under the instructors’ tab, or can be downloaded from www.icstraining.ca.

Part 1 INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING ICS
This provides some general observations for new instructors about the history of ICS, 16 observations about understanding and teaching ICS, a little bit on classroom techniques and thoughts on disaster characteristics. An introduction to give you a little more when going into the classroom.

Part 2 UNDERSTANDING PPOST AND SMART
I believe this to be one of the most important discussion pieces. I don’t expect you to agree with everything I say, but this explores PPOST and SMART and delves into the details of both. If the principles of ICS make up the vehicle for successfully dealing with disasters and emergencies, then Objectives are the engine to get the vehicle going. If you want to teach ICS, you need to understand Objectives and how to write them.

Part 3 ICS 200 EXERCISES
The concept, details, and background to the bathtub, the pennies, the Form 200 are all provided here. This allows you to be “one step ahead of the students” if you use any of the examples. This will be less useful in the U.S. classrooms because it covers the exercises in the ICS Canada 200 course, which are different from the exercises used in the United States and most online courses. It is worth taking a gander through, however. As an instructor, working through and understanding the Canadian exercises is good practice and may give additional insight as to how the system might apply.
Part 4 ADULT EDUCATION

Al Fraser, Emergency Manager with the City of Edmonton, provides information on Adult Education and Tom Cox talks about some of the classroom management skills and instructor best practices. For those without a lot of experience in the classroom, this will give some basic tips to help you get your feet on the ground and your head focused on the classroom and the needs of the students. This is not a be-all, end-all for ICS instruction, but it will provide a bit more perspective from someone who has watched hundreds of instructors take their first steps.

Part 5 BEST RESEARCH AND READING

Teaching Incident Command is such a specific and almost obscure discipline that it is hard to find some of the good research to further understand the topic or provide examples to your students. I have compiled a list of some of the best information I have found on the internet, along with the links, to help instructors delve deeper into the system, to get a sense of its origins, and to better understand its strengths and weaknesses. It too, me thousands of hours to find these – I hope you can use the time to read and digest the articles rather than waste time looking through the web for this.

Part 6 ADVANCED ICS INSTRUCTION (300 AND 400)

RESTRICTED  This is the handout for the two day “Advanced ICS Instructors Workshop”. Information is provided to instructors a better understanding of teaching the ICS 300 and 400 courses, covers Unified Command in more depth, simplifies Divisions/Groups for students, illustrates the teaching of every ICS form, provides the framework for understanding and teaching Complex Incidents, Incident Complexes, Two Section Responses, Advance and Recovery planning, Area Command, Multi-Agency Coordination, Emergency Operations Centres, and Type 0 Incidents. Not available for distribution.
Tom Cox, Acting Field Officer in High River during the Provincial State of Emergency in June, 2013. High River was the epicenter of the costliest flood in Canada to date. Tom is an ICS Canada instructor trainer with experience in seven Type 1 or potential Type 1 incidents. He has taught over 250 Instructors in Canada.