

**Streetsboro Fire Department National Incident Management System
Implementation (NIMS)**

By: Diana Woolf
Lieutenant
Streetsboro Fire Department
9184 State Route 43
Streetsboro, Ohio 44241

An applied research project submitted to the Ohio Fire Executive Program

17 July, 2009

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that the following statements are true:

1. This paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

2. I have affirmed the use of proper spelling and grammar in this document by using the spell and grammar check functions of a word processing software program and correcting the errors as suggested by the program.

Signed: _____

Printed Name:

ABSTRACT

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 President George W. Bush set forth a new era in Homeland Security by enacting the Homeland Security Presidential Directive -5 (HSPD-5). This directive began the process to develop an all hazards approach to emergency response. The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is the approach that first responders need to understand and utilize to help organize large events or incidents in a more efficient manner. The Department of Homeland Security set forth standards that needed to be accomplished by the FY 2008 to receive federal grant funding. The Streetsboro Fire Department has not accomplished those standards. The linear research here will determine how compliant Ohio fire and law enforcement entities are, what problems are they having with the implementation process, what successes are they having, what can be done to help with the implementation process and what similarities do they have with implementation. Fire departments and law enforcement agencies located in the State of Ohio were evaluated through a series of surveys about their compliance efforts with HSPD-5. The focuses of the surveys were on completion of NIMS 100, 200, and 700. More specifically data was gathered on the completion of NIMS 300 and 400 by officers of lieutenant rank and higher. Half of the survey questions were dedicated to gathering data on why these departments are successful or unsuccessful in the completion of NIMS compliance objectives. Results of the research show 64% of the respondents stated that they are compliant up to the 2008 standards, and 14% were not. There were still others who were not sure of the 2008 standards. The research concludes that there is confusion with NIMS implementation among Ohio fire and law enforcement entities.

The results of the research will enable the Streetsboro Fire Department to compare themselves with other Ohio first responders. The information collected in this study will also be used in the development of an appropriate NIMS implementation plan, according to the training needs of the Streetsboro Fire Department. The research will benefit other emergency response entities enabling them to compare their NIMS compliance efforts to those across the State of Ohio and discover ideas for developing their own NIMS implementation program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT.....	2
ABSTRACT.....	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	5
INTRODUCTION.....	6
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	7
BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE.....	8
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
PROCEDURES.....	17
RESULTS.....	18
Limitations of the Study.....	18
DISCUSSION.....	25
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	35
REFERENCES:.....	37
APPENDIX A-FY 2008 NIMS Compliance Objectives.....	39
APPENDIX B-NIMS Implementation Survey.....	40
APPENDIX C- SFD NIMS Survey.....	41

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

According to the Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5 established on February 28, 2003 also known as HSPD-5, all emergency response entities are required to be educated in the National Incident Management System (NIMS). The problem this study will investigate is why the Streetsboro Fire Department is not compliant with NIMS as set forth by HSPD-5. Emergency response entities such as fire departments and law enforcement agencies began a regimen of coursework set forth by the Department of Homeland Security to comply with the requirements of HSPD-5. Since the inception of NIMS in 2003 many of these entities at the local level are not compliant with all of the requirements. Compliance with HSPD-5 is directly related to federal funding but is not policed. The Streetsboro Fire Department is one of those entities currently not compliant with the NIMS system.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and compare implementation weaknesses of fire and law enforcement agencies in relation to the City of Streetsboro Fire Department's own weaknesses with the implementation of NIMS and to develop strategies to meet compliance standards.

Research Questions

The research questions this study will investigate using a linear research method are the following:

1. How compliant with NIMS are Ohio fire and law enforcement agencies as of the year 2008?
2. What are the main issues that are keeping these emergency response groups from being completely compliant?
3. How does the Streetsboro Fire Department compare with other emergency response groups in NIMS compliance?
4. What are the "best practices" to implementing the NIMS program?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

On September 11, 2001 we lost 343 fire fighters, 60 police officers, eight private EMS personnel and 2774 civilians from the worst terrorist attack on American soil just at the World Trade Center site (Wikipedia 2008). More were lost in Arlington, Virginia at the Pentagon and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania with the crash of United Airlines Flight 93. In the aftermath of the mass destruction and chaos, President George W. Bush issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5). This directive created an order for the Department of Homeland Security to develop a system to provide direction for emergency response to incidents of national significance. It was clear that a new system must be established after the loss of 121 of the total firefighters on September 11, 2001 was due to an inability to access the communication system of the New York City Police Department (Sullivan, 2007). Newly appointed Department of Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge supervised the inception of the National Incident Management System, also known as NIMS.

The NIMS program was not well received at the state level. The states felt it was infringing on their constitutional rights to manage their own in the event of a terrorist attack. In an article on Government.com, senior subcommittee Democrat Bennie Thompson of Mississippi explained that he was concerned that the Department of Homeland Security was not providing extra funding to incorporate NIMS into their state emergency plans therefore, making the states choose between using funding to implement NIMS or purchase needed equipment. Slowly, with more revisions to meet the states concerns the NIMS program started to gain supporters. Eventually a handful of emergency response entities were educated enough to move forward with implementing

NIMS at the local levels. Again there was still just a sporadic interest in the program. The Department of Homeland Security decided to raise the stakes and make emergency response groups participate by requiring them to adhere to a federal mandate and attaching Homeland Security Grant funding to it. The Department of Homeland Security finalized their NIMS document on March 1, 2004 and by the end of the year they also produced the National Response Plan (NRP). These two programs have become the National Preparedness System (NPS) (Sullivan 2007). All emergency response entities will need to understand, prepare for and be proficient in the NIMS program to receive federal grant funding.

At first NIMS was initiated to help emergency response in the event of a terrorist attack. In August of 2005, Hurricane Katrina would test the National Response System in real time. As the American public watched the horrific destruction and desperation of our own citizens, it became quite clear the system had failed at some level. Although publicly the system looked to have failed entirely, there were responders who found it helpful. The Red Cross and FEMA seemed to have had the biggest communication issue in regards to assistance requests (Sullivan, 2007). After all of the final incident reports were evaluated there was an overall agreement that the NIMS system will work with consistency among all responding agencies (Sullivan 2007). Every responding agency must be able to work together under the same system no matter where or what type of incident may unfold in the future. This is the basis of NIMS as we know it today.

The Streetsboro Fire Department (SFD) not only needs to be compliant with the HSPD-5 but it must establish proficiency with the NIMS components. The City of Streetsboro has a population of approximately 16, 000 people. The fire department has a

yearly call volume of 1,900 calls with an increase of about 6% yearly. The city is very diverse with twenty five square miles consisting of residential communities, two industrial parkways and rural farming land. The city is located on the intersection of State Route 14 and State Route 43, with the Ohio Turnpike Interstate 80 crossing through the north end of the city. The SFD is responsible for 10 miles of the Ohio Turnpike, a hazardous cargo route where there is a high potential for hazardous material incidents in the jurisdiction. This diverse makeup of the city allows for major incident potential. A plastic processing plant, sewer treatment facility with large quantities of chlorine, refrigeration facility and many more hazardous industrial sites outlined by residential communities gives way to a great need for emergency planning and proficiency to better protect the citizens of Streetsboro.

NIMS will help guide the SFD in the event of a major incident. This system will also help develop plans for large planned events in the city such as the yearly Family Days celebration which attracts approximately 5,000 people during the three day event. Currently there is no emergency management preplan for this event or for the Lavender Festival, which in just the third year has attracted 3,000 people to the city over a weekend event period. The City of Streetsboro currently has no emergency operations plan for any planned or unexpected incident. The current attitude of the department is to fall back onto the Portage County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) and the county emergency operations plan and resources. This is of course not practical in the event of a county wide emergency. Resources may be limited and the Streetsboro Fire Department needs to be able to work into the EMA plan if others are requesting assistance at the same time. Understanding NIMS will help prepare the SFD to handle these events and

potential incidents in an organized fashion and to help the most people in the safest manner.

The SFD also has members that participate on the Portage County rescue teams such as the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) and Water Rescue teams. Members of these teams must be proficient in NIMS due to the possibility of being requested to a state level emergency and possibly on a federal level emergency. D. Moore, Lt., Dive Commander of the Portage County Water Rescue Team (personal communication, November 20, 2008) discusses that members of these teams need to understand how NIMS works so they can be swiftly and safely integrated into a large response. The Portage County Water Rescue Team (PCWRT) was activated to the severe flooding area of Lake County, Ohio in July of 2006. NIMS was being used to help organize the incident but the lack of understanding of the system caused issues in response, accountability and placement of specialized teams as discussed further in an interview with Lt. Dave Moore. The PCWRT was assigned to fire and EMS response for the City of Painesville, Ohio, where they were only prepared for water rescue operations. This situation also shows that there is a lack of understanding of NIMS in other fire departments, as well as the SFD.

Fire departments and law enforcement agencies are emergency response entities that need to understand NIMS to be able to work quickly and efficiently with each other in an emergency situation. These emergency response entities also need to be fully compliant with the NIMS mandate because their federal grant funding is directly related to compliance with the system. This study will show where these entities stand in regards to the NIMS compliance criteria. Since the inception of NIMS in 2005, what have these

entities accomplished? What are the problems they are experiencing with the concept? What can be done to bring about a more proactive attitude towards participation in the program? These questions will ultimately help identify the issues the SFD has in relation to other emergency response groups and provide an implementation plan based on an all encompassing best practices methodology. *The potential impact this study could have on the Streetsboro Fire Department is an evaluation of NIMS compliance efforts, the reasons for non compliance and avenues to help bring progress to be completely compliant.*

LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is still an evolving project. With every major incident positives and negatives are found with the system and it will be quite some time before every fire and law enforcement agency is proficient with the system. Therefore little research has been done in the area of NIMS implementation. This paper will be classified as linear research in the area of NIMS. After searching throughout FEMA, U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Forest Service databases, there has been no research in this area of study. There are several opinion statements throughout many magazines such as Fire Engineering, Fire Chief and Police Chief to name a few and all of these opinions have lead to the interest behind this study.

There has, however, been some research done in areas of study within NIMS such as leadership, communication, and final incident reports of major incidents that have occurred since Hurricane Katrina.

Henry Sullivan (2007) analyzes communication efforts of NIMS between the local, state and federal entities. His paper presented at the Midwest Political Science

Association Conference in March of 2007 describes NIMS as an effective communication model. The concept behind NIMS speaking with common terminology of incident command positions and their responsibilities enables emergency responders to understand the command structure upon arrival at any incident or event. For example, a water rescue team from Ohio will easily understand the command system at a flood in Indiana and will mold faster into the emergency response safely. Sullivan also recognizes the need for more sophisticated communication modes. The pressure from the public to provide more enhanced homeland security has also lead to a rise in expectations of greater communication to them in the event of an emergency.

Another area of study was Systems Engineering. Anderson, Compton and Mason (2004) describe lessons learned from the September 11th terrorist attack as a need for more training, respect for the chain of command, interoperable communications and better preparation of equipment and facilities to better manage an incident. These researchers feel that Systems Engineering can have a significant impact on overall management of incidents. Engineering tools and techniques can readily be applied to the NIMS applications.

Other response entities have stakes in their responsibilities towards emergency response. Herron (2008) states in Police Chief Magazine, the understanding of NIMS is required, but law enforcement needs to really focus on certification and credentialing. All responders will need to be credentialed to be part of an emergency response. For example, SWAT team members must be highly trained to deal with hostile situations. Members of SWAT teams must be able to prove they are trained to handle certain situations as requested by a jurisdiction. Through credentialing, when requesting a

SWAT team to an unknown jurisdiction the incident commander can be assured he has received a highly trained team and the team members can be assured they are not being requested for an incident outside of their capabilities. The same is true for the fire service. Wild land firefighters need to have a “Red Card” which certifies them as having the knowledge or training to fight wild land fires. Enabling structural firefighters to participate in wild land fire suppression may lead to injuries or death without the proper training. Law enforcement will have the task of credentialing skills and qualifications to better fit the response activities of all emergency responders not just law enforcement. As with all other emergency responders the law enforcement entities will have to understand the NIMS components to function adequately within an emergency situation.

Local Emergency Management Agencies have the largest responsibility to provide NIMS guidance to the first responders. They are under the direct guidance of the HSPD-5. Al Fluman, the Acting Director of the Incident Management Systems Integration Division, released the Five Year NIMS training plan on February 28, 2008. This document’s purpose is to initiate a State/Territory-wide credentialing system, to assure the significance of meeting the compliance criteria and give further direction regarding NIMS training. The 2008 NIMS compliance objectives state that as States and Territories needing twenty-six objectives, Tribal Nations need to meet twenty-five objectives and local governments need twenty-four objectives met (Appendix A). All three of these need the credentialing objective met to meet the end of 2008 objectives. Beginning in 2009 the States and Territories, Tribal Nations and local governments will need an additional twelve objectives as outlined in the training plan.

As with the communications and systems engineering, research has been conducted with regards to NIMS and Federalism. Lester and Krejci (2006) describe NIMS as a way of providing “Opportunistic Freedom”. This is defined as a chance for the federal government to expand its authority through the state government. The example they give would be in the case of any city infected with a pandemic disease or outbreak. In this case there would be a federal quarantine with military presence around any city infected. President Bush implemented this on the basis of the fears of the general populous. During the Hurricane Katrina disaster it was evident that federal authority needed to be expanded upon during the emergency response. Lester and Krejci both agree that in the event of large disasters or crisis, a shift of authority is needed to better manage emergencies. They go on to discuss whether shifting authority to the federal level is actually the best method. The decision making power may continue to stay at the federal level promoting a national government which would disrupt the basis of the Constitution. Lester and Krejci feel stronger leadership is needed in large crisis situations. Therefore they promote “Transformative Leadership” (Lester and Krejci 2006). Transformative Leadership is an ability to cede responsibility and decision making to authority of a higher level of government or to leadership more prepared or trained to handle the situation at hand. In other words, leave your ego at home. NIMS leads to an understanding of command and joint efforts, but leaves the definition of whom up to the incident locale or jurisdictions. This would require a need for Transformative Leadership and the ability to work together at the local or federal level and across the lines of power.

An article published by the Harvard Law & Policy Review, Gaston (2008) discusses the significance of NIMS and federalism and the limitations for Homeland Security preparedness. The Bush administration redesigned legal norms to better enhance our defense on terrorist activity. One example was opening up boundaries on domestic intelligence and law enforcement capabilities. This allowed more authority for search and seizure of suspected terrorist threats previously controlled by the Fourth and Fifth amendments. Gaston agrees with Lester and Krejci that in the face of a large emergency incident the federal role of authority needs to be expanded.

The most recent incident of the Minnesota bridge collapse brings to the forefront the obvious need for NIMS to be enforced across all jurisdictional levels. As of FY 2008 many NIMS objectives should have already been met by emergency response entities. The U.S. Fire Administration (2008) critique of the bridge collapse made these three main points: there was a lack of initial unified command by police and fire departments, failure of rescuers to keep their own safety in mind and initial confusion as to which agency was the lead. There was obviously a misunderstanding of the NIMS standards initially at this incident. The question is why? If most of the responders to this incident are supposed to have been trained in NIMS according to the previous NIMS objectives, they should not have had a problem.

Funding for implementation of NIMS is also a problem. The Homeland Security Grant Program has suffered a setback with Congress and the Department of Homeland Security's decreasing efficiency with the allocation of grant funding as described by Samuel H. Clovis, Jr. in the Journal of Homeland Security Affairs (2006). Funding to the state or local level can be late in their fiscal year possibly into the next. This process can

overwhelm fiscal budget planning at these levels creating a negative view of the program. The grant application for Homeland Security Grants increased from 40 pages to 200 pages (Clovis, 2006).

All of these reviews define a need for strong leadership, direction, an understanding of NIMS and a single entity to assume responsibility at an incident or event. These ideas are the very basis of what needs to be accomplished by every emergency responder such as fire departments and law enforcement agencies who are usually the first to arrive on an emergency incident large or small.

PROCEDURES

Although the NIMS program is four years old, many local emergency entities still need to be trained. Emergency Management Agencies and hospitals continue to strive toward stronger emergency plans but how well do they understand how local first responders such as fire and law enforcement agencies fit into their plans using NIMS? Do all of these entities within our emergency response system understand how they will all work together? All of the research found has focused on NIMS and Federalism. While issues continue to be debated at the federal level, what can local emergency responders do on their part to help solve implementation issues? The fire departments and law enforcement agencies were evaluated through a series of surveys about their compliance with HSPD-5. The focus of the surveys was on completion of NIMS 100, 200, and 700. More specifically data was gathered on the completion of NIMS 300 and 400 by officers of lieutenant rank and higher. Half of the surveys were dedicated to gathering data on why these departments are successful or unsuccessful in the completion of NIMS compliance activities. The focus group for the surveys will be departments

similar in size and demographics of the communities as closely related to the City of Streetsboro. A second survey was given to the members of the SFD. This survey will gather data pertinent to the SFD's members own perceptions of NIMS. The second survey will also provide data to develop strategies for the best method to present the NIMS training to the department.

The researcher's goal was to find trends among fire departments and law enforcement agencies for the success or lack of success in NIMS implementation. The researcher also asked for best practices within each organization that has helped their implementation process and will then apply the concepts to help the City of Streetsboro become NIMS compliant.

RESULTS

The NIMS Implementation survey (Appendix B) was sent by email to 500 law enforcement agencies and 500 fire departments. The survey was completed by 60 law enforcement agencies for a return rate of 12%. The survey was returned by 103 fire departments for a return rate of 20%. Fifty-seven suburban fire departments made up 55.3% of the 103 departments surveyed; these departments are combination departments similar in size to the Streetsboro Fire Department (SFD). Suburban law enforcement agencies comparable in size to the City of Streetsboro's police department were similar with 53.3% or 32 out of the 60 completed. These numbers provided significant results to compare to the SFD. Unfortunately due to limitations with current email lists, some departments were not contacted because of invalid email addresses. All of the survey emails included a statement which asked the respondents to complete the survey once for

their department. This helped to eliminate duplication, but the possibility still existed if different members of the department received the email and responded to the survey.

Research Question number one asked, “How compliant with NIMS are Ohio fire and law enforcement agencies as of the year 2008?” There were eleven questions on the survey that collectively described the status of the respondents to this question. The first question gathered data regarding the completion of NIMS training following the Department of Homeland Security’s 2008 standards. The results of the question shows 64% of the respondents stated that they are compliant up to the 2008 standards, and only 14% were not. However 21.9% of respondents were not sure of the 2008 standards. Several other questions on the survey asked respondents to describe to what level their members were trained. The questions helped gather data referring to the completion of NIMS 100, 200, 700 by all members of the department and more specifically NIMS 300 and 400 by department officers or supervisors. Fire departments claimed 90.3% of their members were trained in the basic levels of NIMS 100, 200 and 700. Law enforcement agencies were lower with 76.7% of their members completing the basic NIMS levels. The completion rates of NIMS 300 were 72.8% for fire entities and 73.3% for law enforcement. NIMS 400 had lower completion rates of 53.4% and 58.3% respectively (Table 1).

Compliance Support Tool. This self assessment tool helps fire and law enforcement agencies with fulfilling their NIMS compliance objectives. NIMSCAST is the manner in which emergency response entities will report their NIMS compliance activities.

NIMSCAST is pertinent to NIMS compliance and collectively 32.9% of respondents stated they do not know what it is and another 17.4% stated they never used it. In conclusion 50.3% of respondents are not NIMS compliant with NIMSCAST.

Two other questions asked to the survey respondents evaluated personal feelings about fire and law enforcement disciplines regarding their progression towards NIMS compliance. Both disciplines felt the fire service is progressing faster than other disciplines and law enforcement is meeting minimum standards or behind. Table 2 shows the survey results more clearly.

Table 2 Personal Feelings of Progression of Compliance

Responses	Fire	L.E.
# of Responses	103	60
Ahead of other disciplines	48.5%	1.7%
Meeting minimum standards	24.3%	46.7%
Slow progression	24.3%	35.0%
Behind other disciplines	2.9%	16.7%

Note. Respondent's personal feelings of fire and law enforcement entities regarding their discipline's progression of NIMS compliance. L.E. = law enforcement.

Research Question number two asks, "What are the issues that are keeping these emergency response groups from full compliance?" The survey conducted included eight

questions referring to this question. The questions included personal feelings of the NIMS process and specific department data. Nearly one-third (34.3%) of the emergency response entities surveyed feel NIMS is difficult to implement. In general 71.7% of the respondents felt NIMS training is just something they had to do and 16.7% of them stated they had negative feelings toward it. Interestingly, 68.3% of these emergency response entities felt federal grant funding should not be dependent on NIMS compliance. Thirty five percent of the respondents felt the federal government does not enforce NIMS compliance regulations and 48.3% are not sure if they do.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has the leading role in NIMS implementation, so communication to local agencies is crucial to the success of the system. The survey concluded that only 56.2% of the agencies that responded receive specific NIMS updates from FEMA. These updates are crucial to helping agencies understand the NIMS implementation process.

Budgets are always a concern in fire and law enforcement agencies. The survey concluded that 88.8% of the respondents did not include NIMS implementation costs into their budget. The other 11.2% figured the costs of implementation in with the training budget. Finally, Table 3 shows what respondents felt prevented or slowed progression of their departments from completing NIMS compliance.

The question of whether respondents felt NIMS was a useful management tool also showed a positive outlook for NIMS compliance. The survey showed that 73.3% of the SFD members as compared to only 53.9% of other Ohio suburban departments thought it was a useful tool.

The SFD conducts NIMS training primarily online. When comparing how other suburban fire and law enforcement agencies conduct training, the SFD had 86.7% of their members utilize online methods of NIMS training as compared to only 50.9% of other agencies. The SFD respondents surveyed showed 66.7% utilized a shared answer key whereas only 13.5% of other suburban agencies surveyed used one.

The SFD respondents were very similar in their views of whether the federal grant funding should be dependent on NIMS compliance. The SFD was 60% not in favor of compliance being dependent on grant funding just as 61.4% of the other suburban survey respondents were also not in favor.

Research Question four asks what the best practices are to implementing a NIMS program. Although the survey did not specifically ask what methods or ideas departments used to complete NIMS compliance activities there were several that helped to distinguish what might lead to a “best practice” or plan. Only 2.8% of total respondents from the survey stated they have a specific NIMS compliance officer. The survey concluded 70.8% of the Fire Chiefs were designated as being in charge of NIMS training for their department.

Respondents were asked if they received NIMS updates from FEMA, only 56.2% of departments receive the updates. Another question asked if respondents’ departments

figured NIMS training costs into their budget. Only 11.2% of respondents stated they figured NIMS training in the budget.

Respondents were asked how often they use NIMS. The majority of respondents (47%) stated they used NIMS on large scale events, with 12% responding to never using NIMS. Survey respondents also concluded that 71.3% felt NIMS was just something they have to do.

When asked what method of NIMS training SFD respondents used, 86.7% of them utilized the NIMS online training. The same respondents (80%) stated they thought NIMS training should be taught in a classroom setting.

DISCUSSION

The research presented focuses on identifying salient characteristics of NIMS implementation that will need further examination in future studies. However, this study has provided much insight on the process of NIMS implementation and the factors that may hinder or slow the progression of the NIMS program, not only in the Streetsboro Fire Department (SFD) but also across the State of Ohio.

Since the inception of the Department of Homeland Security, forward progress has been made towards a process to help protect our nation and save more lives during an event of national significance. This same process has made its way down to the local levels of emergency responders and any new program will continue to strengthen and evolve through many growing pains. Much of the literature presented focused on areas of NIMS but did not discuss any thoughts on how well the program is being received by those who have to use it.

Research Question 1: How compliant with NIMS are Ohio fire and law enforcement agencies as of the year 2008?

The results of the survey show that although a significant amount of fire and law enforcement entities were NIMS compliant, there were still almost 22% of the departments surveyed unaware of the 2008 NIMS compliance standards. The final expected result of the NIMS program is for emergency responders to collaborate on an emergency incident or planned event. How will these responders be able to work well together if they are not all trained to the same standards? Incident commanders need to be trained to the NIMS 300 and 400 levels. The data showed from the sample group surveyed that training for NIMS 300 and 400 are not readily available and are not completed by a significant amount of departments. If incident commanders are not trained as expected by the end of FY 2008 how can the NIMS program continue to evolve? It seems as though the responsible party for implementing NIMS is progressing forward without worrying if emergency responders are keeping up with training. The NIMS program can only be successful if the emergency responders understand the program. This study shows over half of the departments surveyed did not feel the NIMS online courses prepared departments to NIMS adequately. The study also showed there was a possibility of approximately 35% of the departments utilized a shared answer key to complete the NIMS online training, which also shows why nearly 75% of the departments surveyed felt NIMS training was just something they had to do. Only one department out of 171 felt there was a positive attitude about NIMS among their members. The same attitude was also portrayed in the separate survey given to the SFD. A focus on better understanding of the NIMS program needs to be introduced statewide

for the system to work collectively. This is potentially a serious problem if departments are asked to respond to a major incident and they do not fully understand the NIMS components to successfully integrate into the emergency response activities.

NIMSCAST is also an important component to the NIMS program. Unfortunately according to the study 32.9% of the survey respondents did not know what NIMSCAST was. The possibility exists that of up to half of the departments surveyed are not compliant with NIMSCAST. This is very interesting to compare to the results of only 64% of the departments in this study say they are fully NIMS compliant to the FY 2008 standards. Does this result mean it is possible that only 14% of the departments surveyed are really fully compliant? In an attempt to help first responders comply with the NIMS standards, NIMSCAST is obviously poorly understood. It is unfortunate because it is a useful tool to implement the NIMS requirements.

FEMA provides NIMS updates to the emergency responder community. These updates must be requested by the entity and only come in an email form. The study revealed that 56.2% of the departments surveyed received these updates, but what do the other 43.8% of the departments do? It is critical for better communication from FEMA regarding NIMS updates. This responsibility also falls directly on the emergency responders to seek out NIMS updates and to be proactive with the NIMS implementation process. Communication cannot be successfully accomplished one way. Overwhelmingly the departments agreed that the responsibility of NIMS implementation within their department rests with the Chief of the department.

The answer to the research question still may not be realistically answered. The plethora of variables that have come forth through this study have shown, that without

better communication to the first responders, it may be impossible to verify who is really fully compliant. Many may think they are compliant, but may not know all the avenues to full NIMS compliance. Although federal grant funding is dependent on NIMS compliance, 61% of the departments surveyed thought that it shouldn't, and only 4.2% of the survey respondents actually think full compliance is enforced by FEMA. Full enforcement of this authority by FEMA may cross constitutional boundaries as described by Lester and Krejci as "Opportunistic Freedom", an opportunity to expand federal authority through the state government (2006).

Through examination of the analysis presented the researcher would strongly recommend establishing a NIMS compliance officer for each individual department. The individual needs to hold some authority within the department and must have a willingness to understand the NIMS program. This individual needs to be proactive in seeking out NIMS guidance from FEMA or their local EMA. A strong communication pattern to the members of the department needs to be implemented to gain full confidence of the program during the inception phase. As shown by the study, a classroom training program would be conducive to the members of the department. Training budgets need to address costs of initial NIMS training to make this a successful program. I believe the study has shown that the NIMS program will only be successful with a better understanding of the process. Currently the federal grant program is dependent on NIMS compliance and therefore fire and law enforcement agencies need to be proactive initiating the communication cycle to FEMA.

Research Question 2: What are the main issues that are keeping these emergency response groups from being completely compliant?

Some of the same discussion from Research Question one can be included in answering Research Question two. Communication issues as discussed previously are a major problem. Understanding the NIMS implementation process is critical. According to the study nearly one-third of the survey respondents felt NIMS was difficult to implement. A large majority of the respondents had a lack of access to NIMS 300 and 400 classes. These classes are currently not available online. FEMA needs to provide more accessibility to these classes. Taken together, the classes are approximately 4 ½ days long. As mentioned previously budgetary constraints make it difficult to achieve compliance with this NIMS objective. According to the survey results 88.8% of the respondents did not include the costs of NIMS implementation into their budgets. It was however very positive that 29.2% of the respondents did not feel anything prevented them from progression. This of course is only if they fully understood the NIMS process and are actually compliant.

Recommendations for this research question include finding a better avenue for training such as sending the NIMS compliance officer to a NIMS Instructor course after the completion of NIMS 100, 200, 700, 300 and 400 courses. Having accessibility to an instructor decreases the costs of training by sending members on overtime to an outside course. Although it is not recommended, classes can be completed on duty if the budget requires doing so. Another consideration to control costs could be to utilize your department instructor and hold a class for several departments to attend. The chances are as concluded by the survey; neighboring departments are having a hard time finding

NIMS 300 and 400 classes in the vicinity. Neighboring departments could split the costs of sending a member to become a NIMS instructor. A small percentage of departments stated a lack of computer access prevented them from achieving NIMS compliance. The only recommendation for those departments would be to access their local library, where training could be scheduled for use of their computers at one time. Seeking guidance from your local EMA Director could be very helpful depending on how proactive they are towards the implementation of NIMS within your county. EMA agencies should provide access to NIMS 300/400 classes free of charge.

Research Question 3: How does the Streetsboro Fire Department compare with other emergency response groups in NIMS compliance?

The Streetsboro Fire Department (SFD) survey results were more positive towards NIMS implementation than expected. These unexpected results may have been due to the fact that only 15 of 38 members responded to the survey. It was initially thought that more members would be negative towards the NIMS process and this could still be true considering all members were given an opportunity to respond to a “NIMS Survey”, although only 15 responded. It may have been only those members that find NIMS positive or useful took the time to respond. This unfortunately is a research limitation. Fifty-three percent of the members who did respond felt NIMS training was positive as compared to only 11.1% of the combined results of suburban fire and law enforcement agencies. This shows there is a positive attitude in the department and should make accepting and participation in the training more productive. This is crucial to successful understanding and utilization of the NIMS concepts on a day to day basis.

The percentage of members who felt NIMS was a useful management tool was also well above the combined suburban fire and law enforcement agencies.

Originally the SFD conducted NIMS training primarily online. The survey showed 86.7% of the SFD survey respondents completed NIMS 100, 200 and 700 online compared to 50.9% of other agencies. This is important because, of the SFD respondents, 66.7% of them stated they used a shared answer key whereas only 13.5% of the other suburban agencies shared one. The question arises; that of those SFD members, who responded and utilized a shared answer key, do they understand the concepts and as stated previously, how many of them responded to feeling NIMS was a useful tool? It is possible they do not understand the concepts and therefore just feel NIMS is useful or they possibly do understand the concepts even though they used a shared answer key. The study is inconclusive to determining whether the SFD members who responded actually understand the NIMS program. This holds true for the 13.5% of other suburban agencies that shared answer keys. This is a major flaw in the NIMS implementation program. Making the certification process so easily attainable is unattractive to the true success of the NIMS program.

Although 40% of the SFD respondents felt NIMS was something they had to do, only 6.7% felt negatively about NIMS. This is a step in the right direction towards successful understanding of NIMS throughout the department. Compared to the other suburban departments, 14% responded negatively to NIMS. The SFD agreed almost equally that grant funding should not be dependent on NIMS compliance.

Recommendations for this research question include seeking out and enlisting supporters of NIMS within the department. Grouping supporters within training classes

of members who feel neutral or negative about NIMS will ultimately send a positive image of NIMS. The more positive the attitude of NIMS within a department will help members understand the concepts of NIMS. This will lead to more successful use of NIMS during emergency incidents or planned events.

Research Question 4: What are the “best practices” to implementing the NIMS program?

Many of the recommendations to the first three research questions can be utilized to answer what the best practices to implementing a NIMS program. The most important information from the study showed that of the SFD members that responded to the survey completed NIMS 100, 200 and 700 online. Eighty percent of them felt the NIMS training should have been taught in a classroom setting. In the future SFD members should be trained in a classroom setting. As stated previously the SFD members surveyed thought NIMS training should be done in the classroom setting and should lead to a better understanding of the concepts and a more positive appreciation for the NIMS program. It will also provide an opportunity for SFD members to discuss their concerns about the program and ask any questions about the material presented. Utilizing online training does not allow members to be interactive in their training or to have questions answered. Most of the SFD members have completed their NIMS 100, 200 and 700 training and it will be beneficial to have an annual or biannual overview of the NIMS concepts. This will also allow additional NIMS updates to be discussed and understood. The elimination of a shared answer key in classroom training would help reinforce the importance of understanding the NIMS concepts. This can be done by the instructor monitoring the testing portion of the training.

It is recommended that NIMS concepts and NIMS forms to be utilized on all incidents that require an operational period of 12 hours or more. This would include entering NIMS into future standard operating procedures. All planned events would need to include NIMS into their emergency operation plans. The more members utilize the NIMS concepts, the better they will be able to collaborate on a large scale incident within or outside of their jurisdictions. The failure to utilize the NIMS components was readily apparent as described by the U.S. Fire Administration's Technical Report Series on the Minnesota bridge collapse. As discussed in the report, many of the responders were trained in NIMS, but the concepts were not applied during the time of the collapse response. A unified command was not established, which ultimately caused a chain effect of problems with resource allocation, operational objectives and safety (2007).

Although this study may portray negative results towards NIMS and the implementation efforts of fire and law enforcement agencies across the State of Ohio, the intentions were to make readers aware of the problems with implementation and to open up further research in the area of NIMS. There are many areas of NIMS implementation that are not readily understood. FEMA needs to address some of the concerns of fire and law enforcement at the local levels as they are the first to respond to any incident. If they do not have the clear understanding of the concepts from the start of the response, it will only make the situation more complicated. Changes to NIMS must begin with the local fire and law enforcement agencies. If more first responders make a stronger effort towards utilizing NIMS, more concerns will be heard at the federal level. This is the beginning of the communication process through which NIMS is based and will help develop the program further to make all of our communities safer.

Change will begin in the SFD beginning with the new understanding of the department's attitudes about NIMS, both positive and negative. The study also confirmed that the SFD is no different than most of the other suburban fire departments in the state and the researcher also has a better understanding of SFD training needs and indicates further development towards a NIMS implementation program. In return, an increased positive outlook regarding NIMS may occur, which will spread throughout the county and ensure easier responses to large incidents or planned events in Streetsboro and the surrounding communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Question 1: How compliant with NIMS are Ohio fire and law enforcement agencies as of the year 2008?

1. Establish a NIMS Compliance Officer - This person must hold some authority within the department.
2. Classroom training is more effective to learning the concepts than online training.
3. Training budgets need to recognize and include NIMS implementation.
4. Fire departments and law enforcement agencies must communicate their concerns with implementation with FEMA.

Research Question 2: What are the main issues that are keeping these emergency response groups from being completely compliant?

1. Send NIMS Compliance Officer to NIMS Instructor course through state Emergency Management Agency.
2. Utilize NIMS Compliance Officer to hold classes for several departments.
3. Neighboring departments could share costs of instruction.
4. Departments with a lack of computer access could work with local libraries to utilize computers.
5. Seek out guidance from local Emergency Management Agency directors.

Research Question 3: How does the Streetsboro Fire Department compare with other emergency response groups in NIMS compliance?

1. Enlist supporters of NIMS within the department.
2. Group supporters within training classes.
3. Positive atmosphere within in the class will help members understand concepts.
4. Creative teaching methods are crucial to gaining support and interest.
5. Multiple departments and emergency service entities within a class create a learning environment that is most conducive to learning to work together in an emergency situation.

Research Question 4: What are the “best practices” to implementing the NIMS program?

1. Classroom setting for instruction is best suited for members within the SFD.
2. Annual or biannual training review of NIMS concepts to be included in training plan. NIMS updates can be reviewed at this time.
3. Elimination of a shared answer key with classroom training and testing.
4. Include NIMS in standard operating procedures.
5. Training with NIMS concepts on all planned events and requiring NIMS within the emergency operation plans of the events.
6. Utilize NIMS forms on all incidents with operational periods of more than twelve hours.

REFERENCES

Anderson, A.I., Compton, D., & Mason, T. (2004). Managing in a Dangerous World-The National Incident Management System. *Engineering Management Journal*, 16, 3-9.

Clovis, Samuel H., Jr. (2006). Federalism, Homeland Security and National Preparedness: A Case Study in the Development of Public Policy. *Homeland Security Affairs*, Vol. II, No.3, 1-10.

Fiorill, Joe., (2004, September). Emergency Responders rap federal incident management system [Electronic version]. *Government Executive*. Retrieved November 18, 2008 from http://www.govexec.com/story_page_pf.cfm?articleid=29606

Gaston, E.L. (2007). Taking the Gloves off of Homeland Security: Rethinking the Federalism Framework for Responding to Domestic Emergencies. *Harvard Law & Policy Review*, 520-532.

Herron, Shawn M., (2008, May). The National Incident Management System. [Electronic version]. *The Police Chief*. Retrieved May 31, 2008 from www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=print_display&article_id=444&issue_id=112004.html

Krejci, D., & Lester, W., (2006). The National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Federalism. 78th Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association. (pp.2-12). New Orleans, Louisiana.

Sullivan, Henry. (2007). Assessing the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Midwest Political Science Association Conference Submittal. (pp.3-8).

U. S. Department of Homeland Security. (2008, February 25). Five-Year NIMS Training Plan. Retrieved June 2, 2008 from www.fema.gov/emergency/nims.html

U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2008, February 25). FY 2008 NIMS Compliance Objectives and Metrics for Local Governments. Retrieved June 2, 2008 from www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=3192.

U.S. Fire Administration/Technical Report Series. (2007). I-35 W Bridge Collapse and Response. Retrieved June 5, 2008, from www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/tr_166pdf.html

Wikipedia. (n.d.) September 11, 2001 attacks. Retrieved June 7, 2008 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September11,2001attacks.html>

Appendix A

FY 2008 NIMS Compliance Objectives

Appendix B
NIMS Implementation Survey

Appendix C
SFD NIMS Survey