

THE ANATOMY OF A MISSION

How a Mission is Started

Report of a Missing Person

When a family or friends determine that a family member is missing or overdue from an outing and have reason to believe that the person is in need of help, they contact the nearest law enforcement agency and report the incident to the dispatcher. They become the “Reporting Party”.

Assessment by a Mission Initiator

In most cases, the Communications Specialist (Dispatcher) contacts the New Mexico State Police Dispatch Center in the District Office. A State Police Officer, trained in assessing potential SAR situations, is assigned. He/she is known as the “Mission Initiator.” The MI travels to the scene and interviews the Reporting Party. The MI determines if there is enough information to warrant a Search and Rescue mission.

Initiating a Mission

The MI will contact the State Police District HQ and obtain a “Mission Number”, and the wheels are put in motion. The best part of the SAR Plan is that it does not take an act of Congress to get a mission going.

Enter the Incident Command Staff

After a Mission Number is assigned, the Dispatch Center will call an on-duty Field Coordinator (listed on a duty roster) to take charge and run the mission as an Incident Commander. The IC is in charge of the operation from that point on.

Call-Out for Search Teams

The IC calls individuals to make up the “Command Staff” and notifies SAR Teams to supply the appropriate personnel who deploy to the field searching for the missing subject. The IC will appoint an In-Town Base to contact other teams and individuals placing them on standby for possible assistance.

Setting up an Incident Base

The Incident Commander travels to the scene, makes contact with the MI, and is briefed. The IC then interviews the Reporting Party and sets up the Incident Base. As assistance starts arriving on the scene, the IC starts assigning jobs and tasks. Communications and Logistics take a high priority. A Safety Officer is appointed to monitor safety issues. An information Officer is appointed to keep family and friends informed as well as handle the media. A person is assigned to the Staging Area, and a Check-In Sheet is posted so a record is kept of everyone who has arrived and departed the scene.

A Mission Overhead Team

An “Overhead Team” needs to be in place. The Operations Section Chief has the responsibility of running the teams in the field. The Logistics Section Chief makes sure that resources are on their way and sets up the Communications Net. The Plans Section Chief formulates an operational plan based on a total assessment of what is happening and what might happen.

The Benefit of the Incident Command System

The Incident Command System was developed in the 1970's by the Federal Government in response to a need for an on-the-scene disaster management system, particularly when multiple agencies are involved. The Oklahoma City bombing incident was run by ICS. Various Governors of New Mexico have mandated that all emergencies (Haz-Mat spills, prison riots, and Search and Rescues) shall be handled under ICS. ICS is a managerial tool.

If the Incident goes longer than 8 hours, the people arriving to relieve the previous shift will most likely be from out of the area, and many may have not worked with one another before. One of the reasons ICS is successful is that it is designed just for this type of occurrence. You can take a room full of people trained in ICS and put them to work on an incident. If all of them put into practice what they have learned, then they will run the incident just like a well-oiled machine.

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