

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (IMS) FOR USE IN ONTARIO

Question #1: What is IMS?

Answer:

The Incident Management System (IMS) is a standardized, coordinated approach to managing incidents that provides functional interoperability at all levels of emergency management. Ontario is in the process of developing guidance for the implementation of an IMS for use in province. IMS, which is based on principles and concepts developed over the past 30 years, is consistent with industrial and international best practices.

Question #2: What are the main benefits of an IMS?

Answer: The use of the Incident Management System (IMS) during an incident will contribute to the protection of lives, property, the environment and the economy. IMS will:

- Provide an efficient, flexible and consistent structure to manage all incidents at all levels;
- Allow incidents to be managed in a cohesive manner by emergency response organizations, communities, provincial ministries, non-governmental organizations and the private sector; and
- Facilitate the response to incidents and cooperation between response organizations and jurisdictions, not only within Ontario, but also with other Canadian provinces and the United States.

Particularly for multi-agency coordination, operating under IMS guidelines will result in the adoption of common terminologies, and see all concerned operating in line with the management, command and control structure of IMS.

Within the province of Ontario, many emergency response organizations have begun implementing various aspects of the Incident Command System (ICS), while others use other approaches. This project aims to ensure a standard concept of operations across Ontario.

Question #3: What is the vision/ultimate objective for this IMS?

Answer: Through IMS, to develop a standardized provincial concept of operations that provides functional interoperability at all levels of emergency management within Ontario and affords requisite training materials and opportunities to all emergency management professionals and organizations in Ontario. It will also be a system that is flexible enough to handle coordinated emergency management within Ontario, as well as with the federal government of Canada, other provinces, and contiguous states, and during provincial, national, or international emergency response operations.

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Question #4: Don't we already have IMS?

Answer: Generally, a wide variety of organizations in Ontario have implemented or are implementing aspects of an incident management system. However, there is a variance of approaches within Ontario, as well as a lack of standardized tools to manage incidents. Also, while emergency response organizations function well in carrying out their own mandates, there is currently no single province-wide system to ensure effective coordination. Some organizations within Ontario refer to their system as the 'Incident Command System' (ICS). Also some jurisdictions (e.g., the United States) treat IMS and ICS as separate aspects of a common system. The proposed IMS for Ontario will treat ICS and IMS as interchangeable references to the same system.

Question #5: Why do this? And why now?

Answer:

There is a growing body of 'lessons learned' from previous emergencies. They recommend the adoption of a standardized incident management system (IMS) for application both within Ontario, as well as in cross-border incidents.

Within the province of Ontario, some emergency response organizations have begun implementing aspects of IMS. However, there is a variance of approaches within Ontario, as well as a lack of standardized tools to manage incidents. Also, while emergency response organizations function well in carrying out their own mandates, there is currently no single province-wide system to ensure effective coordination.

To take full advantage of the benefits of what an IMS is designed to provide – interoperability, and efficacy in time, cost, and relief, all Ontario emergency response organizations should adopt a standardized IMS. This project presents an opportunity to do that, utilizing the leadership and expertise that exists at many levels within the province.

Low public tolerance for failures in emergency management generally, and response specifically, would seem to provide an opportunity now to develop and implement across Ontario one common IMS. By so doing, cooperation and coordination will also be enhanced at many levels – internationally for relief operations; for cross-border emergencies especially with the USA; when provincial coordination is required whether for coordination with the federal government or for a provincial emergency; for inter-municipal assistance, coordination and response efforts; and most commonly, at incident sites where many services may be engaged in a coordinated effort.

Question #6: What is the feedback process?

Answer: Stakeholders will have the opportunity prior to implementation to review and provide feedback on the draft doctrine during a period of stakeholder consultation. During this period, the draft doctrine will be made available for posting on stakeholders' websites. There will also be opportunities during, and after the implementation period to provide further feedback on IMS.

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Question #7: Where do I go for training/answers?

Answer: A 'Training Working Group' has been established to develop the important learning materials and program in order to help organizations understand and successfully implement IMS. Watch for more information on stakeholder organizations', and associations' web sites about upcoming IMS training sessions and registration instructions.

Question #8: What will be the effort and cost to implement IMS?

Answer: The implementation of IMS is expected to improve the coordination and cooperation between and among emergency management partners and stakeholders. Various mutual aid and service agreements exists across the province. IMS will realize a system for improved interoperability, thereby making coordination and cooperation during an emergency much more efficient and effective, and at the same time making emergency response more cost-effective.

Implementing IMS should significantly improve the way technology is used to support incident management. IMS should also positively influence the way new technology is developed. Developing and implementing IMS will provide stakeholders and partners an opportunity to integrate existing and new technologies, and to create a uniform platform for the purposes of making emergency management more effective, efficient, and more cost effective.

This project will nevertheless require the allocation of appropriate resources, particularly for those organizations that are newer to incident management systems. It will be a relatively unique system and as such will likely require targeted and appropriate training and communications efforts. Efforts should be made to continue to respect other priorities, and make use of existing resources to the best extent feasible. The province will assist communities and response organizations in the implementation of the IMS for Ontario.

Question #9: What is the cost NOT to do IMS?

Answer: Maintaining the status quo of current emergency management systems and concepts could be costly and inefficient. In the current situation, organizations implement emergency management and response concepts according to what best suits their respective organization. Some have adopted their own version of IMS or just one component, usually the 'incident command system'. As a result, there is no one common system, and emergency management and response systems remain uncoordinated. Costs result from duplication, overlap and a lack of coordination.

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Question #10: Who made/developed IMS for Ontario?

Answer: Government organizations and key stakeholders groups are actively involved in the development of the IMS for Ontario.

- Municipal governments:
 - City of Cornwall
 - City of Greater Sudbury
 - City of Ottawa
 - City of Toronto
 - City of Windsor
 - Durham Region
 - Region of Peel
 - The Township of Tarbutt & Tarbutt Additional
- Associations:
 - Association of Municipal Emergency Medical Services of Ontario (AMEMSO)
 - Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO)
 - Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)
 - Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP)
 - Ontario Association of Emergency Managers (OAEM)
 - Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC)
 - Ontario Hospital Association (OHA)
 - Ontario Municipal Administrators Association (OMAA)
 - Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA)
 - Ontario Public Works Association (OPWA)
- Private Sector:
 - TransCAER, Ontario Regional Office
- Non-governmental organizations:
 - St. John Ambulance
 - Canadian Red Cross
 - Salvation Army - Ontario Central Divisional Headquarters
- Federal government:
 - Department of National Defence (DND), Joint Task Force (Central) (JTFC)
 - Public Safety Canada (PS)

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- Provincial government:
 - Emergency Management Ontario (EMO) (Lead)
 - Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (MCSCS)
 - Ministry of Government Services (MGS)
 - Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC)
 - Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR)
 - Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM)
 - Ontario Provincial Police (OPP)

Question #11: Who will need to implement IMS?

Answer: Within Ontario, as with most jurisdictions, the emergency management environment is comprised of a diverse mix of emergency management organizations, each with its own mandate for several important aspects of the emergency management matrix. While they function exceptionally well carrying out their own mandate, no single service or organizations has the ability to conduct all aspects of emergency management. As the lessons learned from emergencies continue to indicate, there is an ever-pressing need for all organizations to be integrated into a standardized system of emergency management.

Question #12: How will the IMS be implemented across the province?

Answer: Once developed, IMS principles will be ingrained in all aspects of emergency management in Ontario. Each emergency responder organization will implement IMS as best suit their mandates.

To enhance implementation, training is being designed and developed with multi-organizational inputs. Opportunities will be presented for a wide cross-section of training opportunities initiated by the province, but expected to be supported by respective organizations.

A permanent steering committee and secretariat will be established through EMO to maintain and update IMS.

Question #13: When will we see this implemented?

Answer:

IMS is a three-year initiative (2006 - 2009), with the following benchmarks:

- Project Management Structure established – Fall 2006
- Project Communications Plan developed – Spring 2007
- Project Communications Plan implemented – Spring 2007 and ongoing
- Training strategy developed - Spring 2007

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- Training strategy implemented - Spring 2007 and ongoing to 2009
- Doctrine/Guidelines approved – Winter 2007/2008
- Supporting materials developed - Winter 2007/2008, and ongoing; and
- IMS for Ontario implementation Spring 2008 - Spring 2009

Question #14: Will IMS be regulated?

Answer: The current plan for IMS does not involve regulated implementation. Generally, there is wide support for IMS across Ontario. In furtherance of EMO's responsibilities under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*, a full IMS implementation is envisioned under a comprehensive emergency management program. IMS is also a part of the following standards:

- Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Z1600 - Standard on Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs;
- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1561 - Standard on Emergency Services Incident Management System, and
- NFPA 1600 - Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs.

Question #15: What other options were considered?

Answer: Three options were considered, which are briefly described below. Option 3 is recommended as the preferred option.

Option 1: *Maintain the status quo of current emergency management systems and concepts*, in which organizations implement emergency management and response concepts according to what best suits their respective individual organization. While this would not require any significant additional resources, it would not provide for one common system of emergency management.

Option 2: *Adopt an IMS already in use in another jurisdiction*. While there are proven systems, they are idiosyncratic to the jurisdiction for which they were developed, and continue to be revised. For example, NIMS is specifically designed around American legislation and terminologies..

Option 3: *Develop and implement an Ontario-specific approach to IMS*. Ontario-specific guidance for the implementation and use of IMS ensures consideration for the province's unique structures and legislation. Because the Ontario IMS guidance is based on IMS principles in use elsewhere, Ontario responders will remain functionally interoperable with their counterparts in other jurisdictions, such as bordering American states.

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Question #16: *Isn't this a duplication of effort, when there are other models available?*

Answer: The systems used by external jurisdictions do not provide for Ontario's unique system of emergency legislation, jurisdictional relationships, nor emergency management concept.

Adopting wholesale one of these systems used by external jurisdictions would require that Ontario and another jurisdiction maintain a system whereby updates or policy/doctrine changes are communicated in a timely manner. This may be onerous, especially if the other jurisdiction does not view Ontario as an equal player or a priority for information exchange. At the end of the day, changes to an adopted, or a copied system may not be to Ontario's benefit and may have serious implications, such as requiring new legislative arrangements.

Ontario has chosen instead to issue guidelines for the implementation of IMS in the province, building on IMS principles used in other jurisdictions. This approach allows for flexibility, while also maintaining inter-jurisdictional consistency and functional interoperability. IMS as practised in Ontario will be generally consistent and inter-operable with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) being implemented in the USA and ICS as currently practised by the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre. Like NIMS, IMS in Ontario will treat crisis and consequence management as a single integrated action, and allow a more coordinated provincial and cross-border response utilizing the expertise and services of all relevant emergency response organizations.

Question #17: *Didn't this project start years ago and, if so, what has taken so long?*

Answer: In Ontario, the development of a revised approach to emergency management commenced following the Ice Storm of 1998. Those efforts led to significant improvements in emergency management, including:

- A new *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (EMCPA) was passed in 2006;
- Ontario's first emergency management regulation, Regulation 380/2004, was passed in 2004. By the end of 2005, all ministries and 99% of municipalities were in compliance with this regulation.
- Reorganizations in 2005 of the Office of the Commissioner of Emergency Management, and in 2006 of the Office of the Commissioner of Community Safety gave it a more central role as a single coordination authority for emergency management in Ontario.
- In 2005 a new Order in Council, 1492/2005, was made to update the list of ministries assigned responsibilities under the EMCPA.

Despite the above improvements, there is a growing body of 'lessons learned' from emergencies across the province, in other provinces, or in international jurisdictions that recommend the use of a standardized incident management system (IMS). These lessons reinforce the need for Ontario to aggressively continue to develop, adapt, and improve upon its emergency management system. A robust and standardized incident management system (IMS) that is applicable to all levels of government and response,

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and for coordination between governments and the private sector/NGOs/NFPs is a key aspect of Ontario's ongoing development of comprehensive emergency management programs.

Question #18: What is the difference between IMS and ICS?

Answer: In some jurisdictions outside of Ontario, ICS is considered a component of a broader "IMS". In Ontario, a wide variety of organizations have implemented or are implementing aspects of an IMS, which in some cases is called the 'Incident Command System' (ICS), while others refer to theirs as IMS. This is a potentially confusing situation.

As stated in the report of the SARS Commission, Ontario needs a common IMS system. The development of a standardized incident management system for Ontario recognizes that previous efforts have been made to implement an ICS/IMS in various forms. While these efforts have brought improvements, such improvements have remained organization-specific (e.g., the forest fire services, fire fighting services, health services, and police services).

Therefore, it is anticipated that an outcome of this project will be a clarification and streamlining of the two terms, whereby Ontario will use one name - IMS.

Question #19: What does this mean for Ontarians? Does this make Ontario safer and how?

Answer: The implementation of IMS in the province will make Ontarians safer by establishing a standardized approach to incident management for all responders, communities and other stakeholders across the province. Some other benefits of IMS include the effective and efficient use of time, cost, and relief. An outcome of the development of a standardized IMS is that it is intended to improve occupational health and safety (per the Occupational Health and Safety Act) as it relates to the duties of both employers and employees.

Externally, many jurisdictions have adopted an IMS, and this is certainly the case for the contiguous states of the USA, with whom Ontario out of necessity must coordinate emergency response efforts. Ontario will have a similar approach to incident management and emergency response as other jurisdictions in North America. Developing and implementing a standardized IMS across Ontario will enhance cooperation and coordination at many levels. These include: cross-border emergencies; when provincial coordination is required; for inter-municipal/community assistance, coordination and response efforts; and at incident sites where services are engaged in a coordinated effort.

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Question #20: Who is spearheading this initiative?

Answer: Emergency Management Ontario (EMO), being the coordinator of emergency management in the province, is well placed to spearhead the development and introduction of IMS. This responsibility also extends to ensuring coordination between the province and the federal government, and by extension other provinces, and contiguous states of the USA.

The *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* states that “*The Lieutenant Governor in Council shall appoint a Chief, Emergency Management Ontario who, ..., shall be responsible for monitoring, co-ordinating and assisting in the development and implementation of emergency management programs*” for municipalities and ministries, “*and for ensuring that those programs are co-ordinated in so far as possible with emergency management programs and emergency plans of the Government of Canada and its agencies*”.

EMO will strive to maintain a multi-service and multi-sector orientation to incorporate the inputs of ministries, municipalities, and emergency management organizations, and associations across the province.

Question #21: What do I do now? How do I implement IMS?

Answer: The ‘IMS for Ontario’ project is expected to involve all emergency management, and all emergency response organizations across Ontario at the provincial, municipal, NGO/NFP, and private sector levels.

In conjunction with an overall communications strategy, EMO and Steering Committee members will be working to provide information sessions during upcoming conferences and other events. In addition, other communications vehicles (e.g. internet) will also be used to ensure you receive the most current information available as this initiative continues to move forward.

Watch for more information from your association/organization’s Steering Committee representative about the dates/times for meetings in your area. You are encouraged to attend to find out more about this important initiative which, through the work of the multi-disciplinary Steering Committee is actively progressing towards its deliverable – a standardized approach to IMS in Ontario.

If you have any further information needs in the interim, please contact your organization’s representative on the IMS Steering Committee, or the Secretariat for the IMS Project through Ray Lazarus, EMO at Ray.Lazarus@ontario.ca