Guide to Explaining AIIMS
(the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System)

AIIMS: the essentials

- Australian incident management system, used for the command, control, and coordination of emergency and non-emergency incidents
- Provides a common management framework for organizations working in emergency management roles and/or responding to non-emergency situations
- Developed in the 1980s; introduced in the early 1990s
- Modelled on the U.S. National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS)

What is AIIMS?

The Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS) is a nationally recognized incident management structure. Though used primarily by fire, land management, and other emergency agencies, the system provides all organizations a common framework to manage any and all incidents (natural, industrial, or civil), be they emergencies or important non-emergency activities, like major sporting events, large cultural exhibitions, and big business conferences[i].

Fundamentally, AIIMS enables multiple agencies who are engaged in incident response or planning to seamlessly integrate their resources (personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications) and activities under a common framework. In practice since the early 1990s, the system is based on the following principles:

Management by objectives. The Incident Control function, in tandem with the Incident Management team as a whole (see appendix), will determine desired incident outcomes for the purpose of ensuring that all responders understand the direction taken during the response.

Functional management. AIIMS lays out four, broad functional areas: Control, Planning, Operations, and Logistics (more below). This organization structure is intended to give full representation to all vital management and information functions, though the composition of the Incident Management team varies depending on the incident in question.

Span of control. A key AIIMS attribute is scalability: for some incidents, a full-scale response will not be necessary, but for others, it will. In this sense, span of control refers to the number of groups or individuals that can be successfully supervised by one person.

Flexibility. AIIMS can be applied to all hazards and used by all agencies.

Unity of command. Responders must work to achieve one set of common objectives. Similarly, individuals should report to only one supervisor[ii].
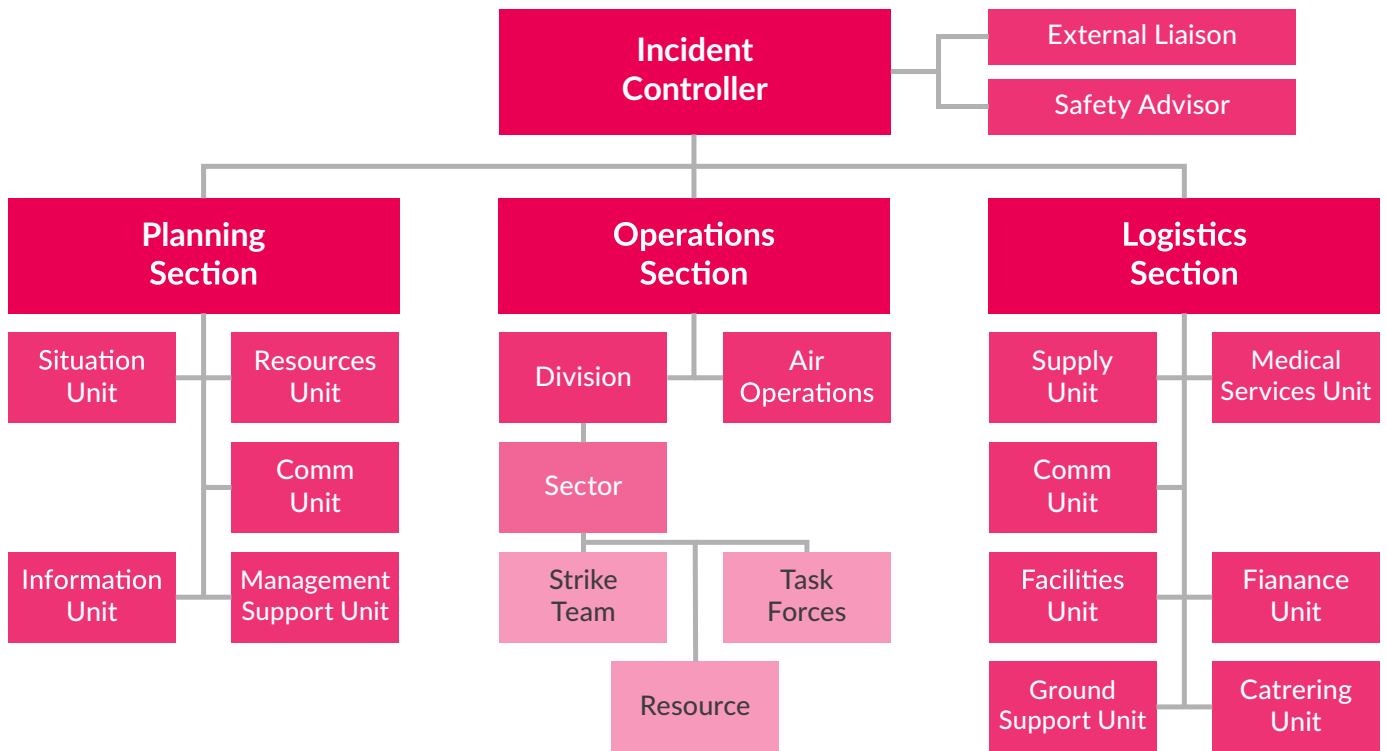
The four functional areas of AIIMS

AIIMS comprises four functional areas. Together, they make the organizational hierarchy depicted below:

1 Control involves management of all activities necessary for the resolution of an incident.

2 Planning involves the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information and the development of plans for the resolution of an incident.

3 Operations involves the tasking and application of resources to achieve resolution of an incident.

4 Logistics involves the acquisition and provision of human and physical resources, facilities, services, and materials to support the achievement of incident objectives.

Source: Managing information in the disaster coordination centre: lessons and opportunities

Fig 1. The four functional areas of AIIMS

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                          ┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
                          │     Incident     │────────│  External Liaison    │
                          │    Controller    │        ├──────────────────────┤
                          │                  │────────│    Safety Advisor     │
                          └──────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
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Incident Controller — External Liaison — Safety Advisor

Planning Section
Situation Unit	Resources Unit
	Comm Unit
Information Unit	Management Support Unit

Operations Section
Division	Air Operations
Sector	
Strike Team	Task Forces
	Resource

Logistics Section
Supply Unit	Medical Services Unit
Comm Unit	
Facilities Unit	Fianance Unit
Ground Support Unit	Catrering Unit

Source: Managing information in the disaster coordination centre: lessons and opportunities

Key terms and their meanings

AIIMS also uses popular incident response terminology, like control, command, and coordination. Here are the relevant definitions:

Control: The overall direction of emergency management activities in an emergency situation. Control relates to situations and operates horizontally across organizations.

Command: The internal direction of the members and resources of an organization's roles and tasks by agreement or in accordance with relevant legislation. Command operates vertically within an organization.

Coordination: Bringing together of organizations and other resources to support an emergency management response. It involves the systematic acquisition and application of resources in an emergency situation.

Source: The Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System: A Management System for any Emergency

How AIIMS can improve your response efforts

So why does AIIMS matter? And how can AIIMS bolster your agency's incident response efforts? For starters, organizations today face a growing number of ever-more complex incidents, operations which to be successful often involve cooperation and coordination with peer organizations.

Inter-agency, inter-service cooperation isn't simple though. In the case of disasters, multiple agencies-federal, state, and local public safety, law enforcement, emergency response, emergency medical and related personnel agencies, and authorities-are likely to respond all at once, often with overlapping jurisdictional boundaries[iii]. What's more, each of those responding agencies brings with it a unique set of competencies, experiences, systems, even terminology. Melding everything together, especially in the height of an emergency, is an operational nightmare that often impedes the effectiveness of the response.

AIIMS, on the other hand, is nationally-recognized throughout Australia and widely used-not just in fire management but in emergency services more broadly. From its inception, the system adopted many of the incident management principles first presented in the U.S. Incident Command System (ICS), from which AIIMS is largely derived, and developed them for the Australian context[iv].

In this regard, a key benefit of AIIMS is the fact that it enables supra-coordination, "the better formulation of emergency management arrangements at the State and National levels" (as depicted)[v].

As such, it provides the requisite standardization to support inter-service coordination, for virtually any kind of incident. Specifically, the system concretizes a number of arrangements, so you understand what your peer organizations are doing, and they know what you're doing as well.

AIIMS designates roles and responsibilities for personnel involved in incident response, as well as formalizes a cohesive chain of command, comprehensible to people in your organization as well as responders in other agencies. Clarifying roles from the planning phase onward, as AIIMS does, helps to promote a safer working environment during an incident.

National Level
Emergency Coordination Arrangement

State Level
Emergency Coordination Arrangement

Agency Specific
Maintains statewide overview of all jurisdictional activities

AIIMS
Framework to facilitate seemless multiple agency interoperability of action directed to common objectives

Training and Exercise

Industry Protocols — Agreed procedures and arrangements relating to specific functions' activites relevant to a specific industry

Agency SO & SOP — Agency specific detailed procedures defining the routine operational arrangements, authorities, and limitations necessary to facilitate organisational objectives

Joint Agency MOU — Two or more agencies that routinely work together establish agreements regarding common approach to SO and SOPs

These three generic suites of procedures are developed prior to incidents, consistent with AIIMS, and underpin the interoperability of AIIMS.

Moreover, the organizational structure AIIMS lays out is flexible and scalable, which makes it extremely adaptable to most incident types, complexities, sizes, and environments-remember even non-operational personnel are accounted for. In sum, AIIMS provides the following organizational benefits:

Defines organizational functions, communication flows, roles, and responsibilities

Takes a risk management approach

Enables standardization of technology

Facilitates comprehensive planning

Promotes effective resource management

Furnishes a competency-based approach to filling positions[vi]

Adaptability, scalability, and widespread adoption contribute to operational efficiency

The future of AIIMS?

A final point: AIIMS goes a long way toward improving the efficiency of your incident response. It's a scalable, flexible system that's been widely adopted not just in emergency management but in wider industry; see, for instance, the increasing popularity of AIIMS in the oil and gas industry as a framework for dealing with incident response.

That being said, the incident management structure alone won't fix everything. To be successful in your response efforts, you need to layer AIIMS onto other incident response best practices: flow of accurate information, identification, allocation, and deployment of the best-possible human, physical, and fiscal resources and systems, and lastly a commitment to accurate recording and reporting.

Appendix: The Incident Management team

AIIMS establishes a full Incident Management team (IMT). Here are the roles and responsibilities of the key Incident Management team members:

Title	Role	Responsibilities
Incident Controller	• Overall responsibility for the management of all activities and personnel deployed to resolve the incident • Establishment of systems and procedures for the safety, health, and welfare of all response personnel and members of the public who may be involved in an incident • Issuing of warnings and incident information to the public and affected stakeholders • Management of the relationship with agencies and people affected, or likely to be affected, by the incident	• Take charge and exercise leadership, including the establishment of the incident management structure • Set objectives for the incident response, considering the safety of the community as a priority • Develop and approve plans and strategies to control the incident • Implement the IAP (Incident Action Plan) and monitor its progress • Provide information and warnings to communities so that they can make informed decisions • Establish effective liaison and cooperation with all relevant agencies, affected communities, and others external to the IMT • Obtain and maintain human and physical resources required for the resolution of the incident • Apply a risk management approach, and establish systems and procedure for the safety and welfare of all response personnel • Ensure appropriate financial delegations are in place and that these delegations are made known to the appropriate response personnel • Ensure relief and recovery considerations are addressed • Ensure collaboration between response and recovery agencies

Title	Role	Responsibilities
Planning Officer	• Evaluation and analysis of intelligence on the current and forecast situation • Preparation of options analysis and development of incident objectives and strategies • Undertake risk assessments • Preparation and distribution of the IAP, monitor and review the IAP implementation • Develop a Communications Plan for the incident (as part of the IAP) and other plans as required • Collection and maintenance of information on resources allocated • Provision of management support services	• Obtain a briefing from the Incident Controller or the position that you report to • Establish the Planning Section, appropriate to the size and complexity of the incident • Appoint unit coordinators as required and delegate tasks • Manage the personnel within the Planning Section • Adjust the structure of the Planning Section throughout the incident • Provide a safe working environment for personnel within the Planning Section • Establish and maintain a log of activities and decisions for the Planning Section • Communicate Section performance to the Incident Controller or the position you report to • Prepare shift handover and brief the incoming Planning Officer • Manage the continuity of Planning activities across shift changes Checklist • Obtain intelligence from the Intelligence Unit/Section to support the development of the IAP • Consider sources of local knowledge and information relevant to the incident; communicate with the Community Liaison Unit, if established, to facilitate obtaining of local knowledge • Identify new and emerging risks for the incident and address these in the IAP • Monitor effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies • Provide strategic advice to the IMT based on information received • Undertake options analysis involving alternate incident objectives and strategies and identify the risks and likely outcomes associated with each • As part of options analysis, make recommendations on incident objectives and strategies, including justifications for discussion by the IMT and approval by the Incident Controller • Schedule and conduct meetings for the IMT and the Planning Section • Prepare the IAP for the next operations period and any longer-term planning required • Disseminate the IAP throughout the incident management structure • Develop changeover and demobilization plans and manage their implementation • Develop and review the Communications Plan and its implementation • Develop and maintain an effective register of all resources, required, en route, allocated to, and released from the incident • Regularly communicate progress of strategies and the IAP to the Incident Controller • Provide management support services (radio, telephone, computer operators, support in information transfer within the IMT and administrative support) • Collect, collate, and store incident records • Maintain a personal log of activities and decisions made • Conduct handover briefing

Title	Role	Responsibilities
Intelligence Officer	• Collection of information on the current and forecast incident situation • Analyzing and processing that information into timely, accurate, and relevant intelligence • Organizing and displaying that intelligence in the form of a Common Operating Picture • Disseminating intelligence products, particularly to the Planning Section • Share intelligence products with others beyond the Incident Management Team • Focusing activities so that critical intelligence needs are met, and a common operating picture is shared to support decision-making, planning, and monitoring of the response	• Obtain a briefing from the Incident Controller or the position that you report to • Establish the Intelligence Section appropriate to the size and complexity of the incident • Appoint unit coordinators as required and delegate tasks • Manage the personnel within the Intelligence Section • Adjust the structure of the Intelligence Section throughout the incident • Provide a safe working environment for personnel within the Intelligence Section • Establish and maintain a log of activities and decisions for the Intelligence Section • Communicate Section performance to the Incident Controller or the position you report to • Prepare shift handover and brief incoming Intelligence Officer • Manage the continuity of Intelligence activities across shift changes
Public Information Officer	• Dissemination of information, advice, and safety messages to the public • Provision of timely and relevant information, including safety messages to those who may be impacted by the incident • Ensure that the Incident Controller is involved in the development and approval of media releases • Ensure that the Incident Controller is kept up-to-date regarding media conferences and media releases	• Obtain a briefing from the Incident Controller • Establish the Public Information Section appropriate to the size and complexity of the incident • Appoint unit coordinators as required and delegate tasks • Manage the personnel within the Public Information Section • Adjust the structure of the Public Information Section throughout the incident • Obtaining information on the current and projected incident situation from the Planning or Intelligence Section when established • Maintain ongoing communication with the Planning/Intelligence Section regarding accuracy of information released to the public • Disseminating incident information to the public and affected communities • Liaise with affected communities • Liaise and coordination with other agencies and media personnel to endure one consistent picture is provided to the public and affected communities • Provide a safe working environment for personnel within the Public Information Section • Establish and maintain a log of activities and decisions for the Public Information Section • Communicate Section performance to the Incident Controller or the position you report to • Prepare shift handover and brief incoming Public Information Officer • Manage the continuity of Public Information activities across shift changes checklist • Prepare safety messages and other media releases for the Incident Controller's approval • Assess the level of media interest in the incident and response • Establish a media center (within or close to the ICC) with appropriate equipment and personnel to assist so that the level of media interest can be effectively dealt with • Notify other agencies' media officers of the media center location and contact information • Prepare a schedule for media briefings and distribute accordingly • Determine which supporting agencies media representatives should be present at media conferences • Coordination of the media and information being released about the response

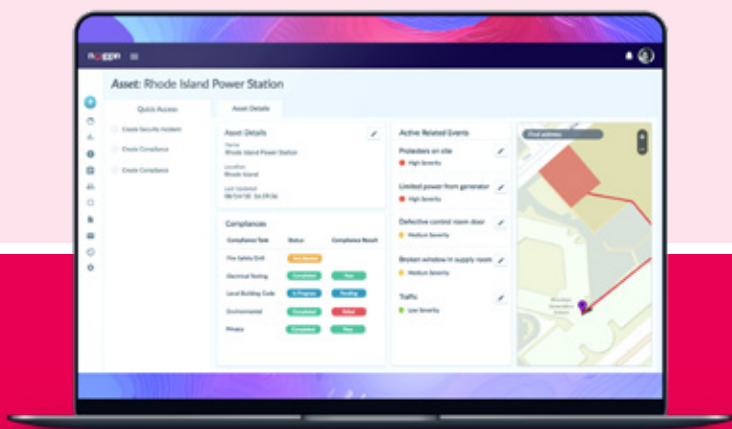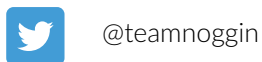| Title	Role	Responsibilities
Operations Officer	• Managing, supporting, and providing advice and direction to the Division or Sector Commanders or Functional Unit Coordinators • Undertaking strategic planning • Briefing the Incident Controller and IMT • Maintaining effective communications within the Operations Section and with other sections • Issues resolution • Implementation of strategies to resolve the incident • Management of all activities that are undertaken directly (in the field) to resolve the incident • Management of all resources (people and equipment) assigned to the Operations Section	• Obtain a briefing from the Incident Controller or the position that you report to • Establish the Operations Section appropriate to the size and complexity of the incident • Appoint unit coordinators as required and delegate tasks • Manage the personnel within the Operations Section • Adjust the structure of the Operations Section throughout the incident • Provide a safe working environment for personnel within the Operations Section • Establish and maintain a log of activities and decisions for the Operations Section • Communicate Section performance to the Incident Controller or the position you report to • Prepare shift handover and brief incoming Operations Officer • Manage the continuity of activities across shift changes
Logistics Officer	• Providing support for control of the incident through the organization and provision of human and physical resources, facilities, services, and materials • Providing support and control for the demobilization of equipment and services	• Obtain a briefing from the Incident Controller or the position that you report to • Establish the Logistics Section appropriate to the size and complexity of the incident • Appoint unit coordinators as required and delegate tasks • Manage the personnel within the Logistics Section • Adjust the structure of the Logistics Section throughout the incident • Provide a safe working environment for personnel within the Logistics Section • Establish and maintain a log of activities and decisions for the Logistics Section • Communicate Section performance to the incident • Manage the continuity of Logistics activities across shift changes
Finance Officer	• Accounting for expenditure during the incident • Managing insurance and compensation issues during the incident • Collection and recording of cost data • Cost estimation and recovery for the incident	• Obtain a briefing from the Incident Controller or the position that you report to • Establish the Finance Section appropriate to the size and complexity of the incident • Appoint Unit coordinators as required and delegate tasks • Manage the personnel within the Finance Section • Adjust the structure of the Finance Section throughout the incident • Provide a safe working environment for personnel within the Finance Section • Establish and maintain a log of activities and decisions for the Finance Section • Communicate Section performance to the Incident Controller or the position you report to • Prepare shift handover and brief incoming Finance Officer • Manage the continuity of Finance activities across shift changes

Source: Queensland Coastal Contingency Action Plan, Department of Transport and Main Roads

Citations

i.   *Australian Fire Authority Council: AIIMS-4 Principles Online Course. Available at https://www.afac.com.au/docs/default-source/poster-archive/afac-placeholder---copy-(7).pdf.*

ii.   *Department of Transport and Main Roads: Queensland Coastal Contingency Action Plan: 2017. Available at https://www.msq.qld.gov.au/-/media/MSQInternet/MSQFiles/Home/Environment/Contingency-plans/qccap.pdf?la=en.*

iii. *Teams might also include hazardous materials responders, urban search and rescue assets, community emergency response teams, anti-terrorism units, special weapons and tactics teams, bomb squads, emergency management officials, municipal agencies, in addition to diverse and sundry private organizations. James Carafano, Preparing Responders to Respond: The Challenges to Emergency Preparedness in the 21st Century: The Heritage Foundation. Available at https://www.heritage.org/homeland-security/report/preparing-responders-respond-the-challenges-emergency-preparedness-the.*

iv.   *Australian Fire Authority Council: The Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System: A Management System for any Emergency. Available at https://training.fema.gov/hiedu/docs/cem/comparative%20em%20-%20session%2021%20-%20handout%2021-1%20aiims%20manual.pdf*

v.   *Ibid.*

vi.   *Ibid.*

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