Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCM) Technical Assistance Center

ERCMExpress

THE NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (NIMS)

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is the United States' uniform system for managing domestic incidents and is suitable for schools to implement in the four phases of their crisis planning: 1) prevention-mitigation; 2) preparedness; 3) response; and 4) recovery. The NIMS is a comprehensive approach to crisis planning and is a framework for federal, state, local and private agencies to effectively and collaboratively manage incidents using a core set of concepts, principles, procedures, processes, terminology and standards. The NIMS structure mirrors the measures schools currently take to ensure student and staff safety and provides formalized support to schools' safety efforts. Through the NIMS, schools are better prepared to handle major incidents and work with first responders.

all emergency responders should follow to plan, coordinate and carry out responses to a variety of incidents. It allows schools and local agencies to jointly manage incidents, regardless of their causes, sizes, locations or complexities. Reflecting proven practices of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U.S. Fire Administration and a host of other federal agencies, the NIMS provides flexibility and support for integrated, collaborative action by government agencies and private entities—including schools—during a crisis. Local jurisdictions, including school districts that receive federal emergency preparedness funding, are required to comply with the NIMS.

The NIMS Integration Center

The DHS created the NIMS Integration Center (NIC) to: facilitate the development of national emergency management standards; provide strategic oversight for the effective execution of DHS principles and procedures; and fulfill annual implementation requirements through technical assistance. The NIC offers interagency tools for establishing community partnerships and adopting the NIMS to ensure first-responder services are delivered in a timely and effective manner. The NIC has five departments dedicated to implementing and integrating the NIMS: Resource Planning and Coordination; Training and Exercises; System Evaluation and Compliance; Standards Technology; and Research and Development.

The NIMS at a Glance

Established on March 1, 2004, by Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5), the management of domestic incidents, the NIMS specifies the standardized methods

NIMS Compliance for School Districts

As policy and technical issues develop and are clarified each fiscal year, the NIMS' requirements evolve. Since fiscal year 2005 (FY 05), community adoption of the NIMS has been a DHS priority.

School districts that received FY 06 federal emergency preparedness funds should:

- **Require completion of NIMS awareness courses.** Key school emergency personnel from school districts using federal preparedness funds are required to complete the following courses provided by FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI): National Incident Management System: An Introduction (IS-700); National Response Plan: An Introduction (IS-800); Introduction to the Incident Command System (IS-100); and

ICS for Single Resource and Initial Action Incidents (ICS-200). Course information is available at: http://www.training.fema.gov/emiweb/IS/ (accessed July 13, 2006).

- **Adopt NIMS principles and policies.** School districts and local government agencies should adopt the NIMS formally through orders or resolutions. In many cases, local government adoption of the NIMS might fulfill this requirement for school districts, as would the adoption of the NIMS through school boards. The NIC has developed sample language and templates for drafting orders or resolutions, which are accessible through the NIMS tools and templates link at: http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/nims_toolsandtemplates.shtm (accessed July 13, 2006).

- **Assess and establish a baseline for compliance with NIMS.** School districts should coordinate with community partners to: assess their overall alignment and compliance with the NIMS; identify requirements already met; establish a baseline for NIMS compliance; and determine action steps, such as developing a plan and timeline, to achieve and maintain all NIMS goals. The NIMS Capability Assessment Support Tool (NIMCAST) assists jurisdictions in establishing a baseline for compliance and evaluating incident

response and management capabilities. The NIMCAST is a Web-based, self-assessment system that corresponds to each NIMS requirement. It is available at: http://www.fema.gov/nimcast/index.jsp (accessed July 13, 2006).

- **Develop a time frame and strategy for full NIMS implementation.** Based on the NIMCAST assessment results, school districts should strategically plan, schedule and conduct all activities with their community partners. The activities must be aligned with each other and include implementation procedures.

- **Institutionalize the Incident Command System (ICS).** For details about the ICS, see the section on the NIMS' Command and Management component.

School districts using FY 06 federal emergency preparedness funds must implement these community adoption strategies as well as carry out new FY 06 NIMS compliance activities. For a matrix outlining the FY 06 NIMS requirements for local governments, including school districts, visit: http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/nims_tribal_local_compliance_activities.pdf (accessed July 13, 2006).

Six Key Components of NIMS

NIMS features six integrated components that are the foundation of its systematic approach for responding to incidents. They are: 1) Command and Management; 2) Preparedness; 3) Resource Management; 4) Communications and Information Management; 5) Supporting Technologies; and 6) Ongoing Management and Maintenance.

SIX KEY COMPONENTS OF NIMS

Ongoing Management and Mainenance

Command and Management

Supporting Technologies

NIMS
Key Components

Preparedness

Communications and Information Management

Resource Management
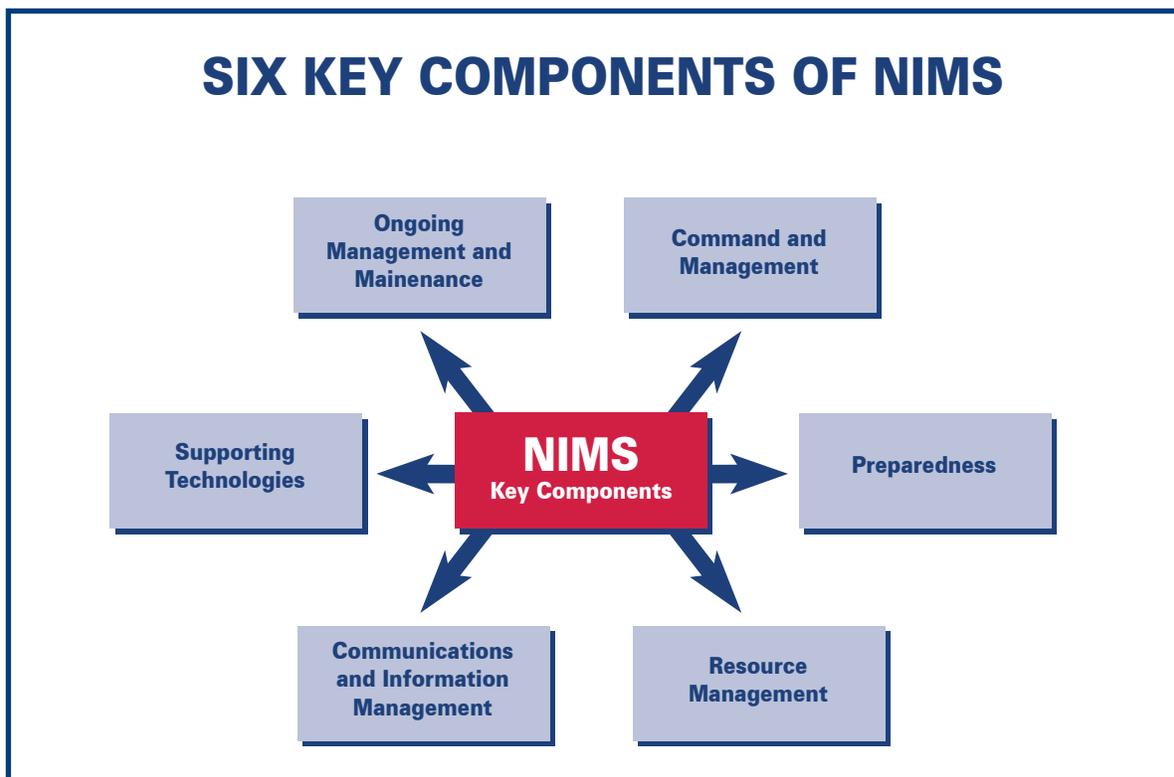
1. Command and Management

Within the NIMS framework, the Command and Management component creates three vital response systems: an ICS; multiagency coordination systems; and public information systems.
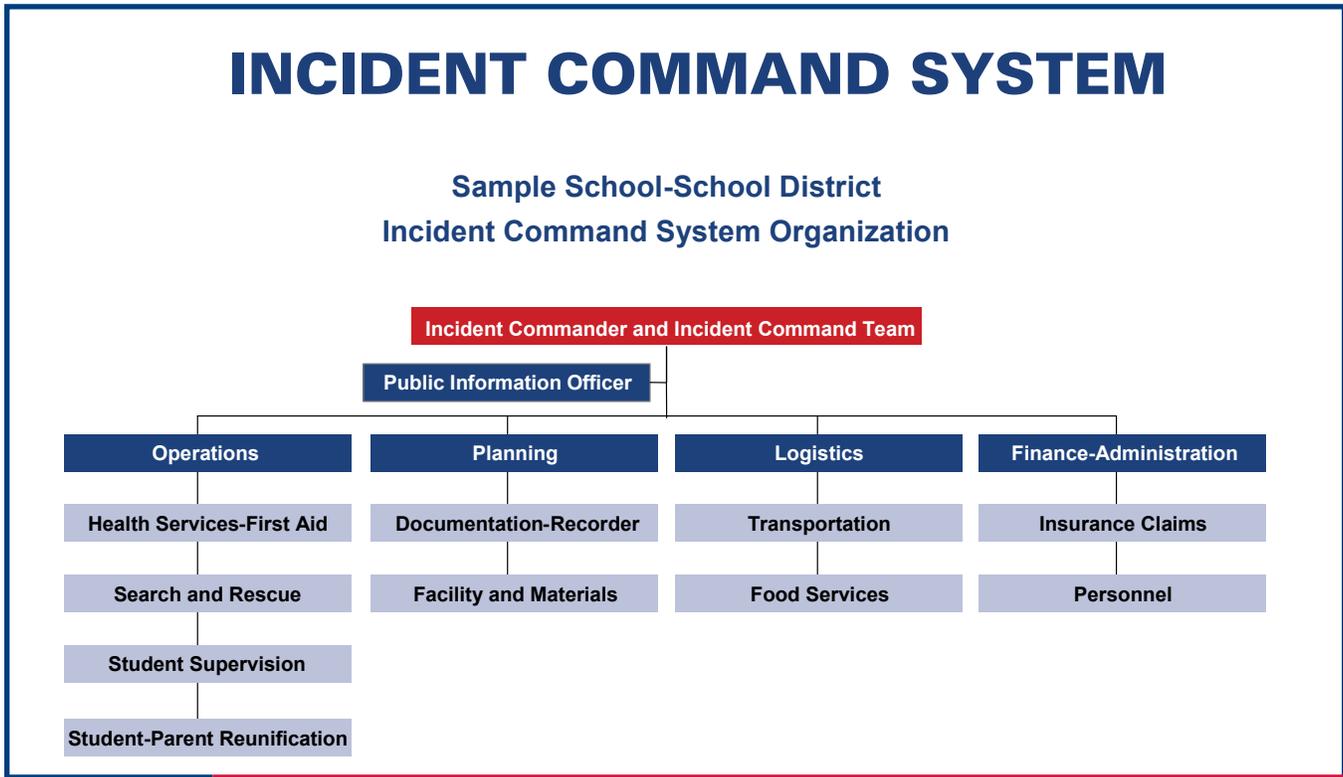
Incident Command System (ICS)
An ICS is the standard strategy for handling all school-related incidents, whether the school is the sole responder or community emergency responders also participate. The ICS: outlines how to address and manage emergencies; provides an operating structure; offers guiding concepts, principles and protocols; and establishes a command center, command team and an incident commander.

The ICS manages both short- and long-term operations for a broad range of emergencies, from small to complex incidents, both natural and man-made. The system activates roles and responsibilities based on the intensity and duration of an incident. For example, the facilities team is activated when the incident commander requires maps, blueprints or utility shut-off procedures. An ICS has five functions in all incidents that might occur on a school's campus: Command; Operations; Planning; Logistics; and Finance-Administration.

The graphic below outlines a sample ICS for a school- or district-based team. The chart indicates that one incident commander oversees all response activities. Reporting to the incident commander are teams that support the ICS.

- **Command.** This function is performed by the incident commander, who coordinates and manages all ICS functions. The person serving in this position may be replaced to correspond with different types of incidents,

INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

**Sample School-School District
Incident Command System Organization**

Incident Commander and Incident Command Team
Public Information Officer

Operations	Planning	Logistics	Finance-Administration
Health Services-First Aid	Documentation-Recorder	Transportation	Insurance Claims
Search and Rescue	Facility and Materials	Food Services	Personnel
Student Supervision			
Student-Parent Reunification			

and may be replaced *during* an incident depending on its level of severity and the level of activation. For example, since the majority of school-based incidents do not require police or fire department assistance, a school official may serve as the incident commander and lead a command team of school personnel. A bomb threat, however, would definitely involve the fire and police departments and would require the school's incident commander to transfer command to law enforcement. The commander's role and the transfer of command are determined in advance through the partnership agreements and memoranda of understanding that are fundamental to all effective emergency management plans.

■ **Operations.** Operations roles and responsibilities focus on well-being and accountability. For example, the Health Services-First Aid, Search and Rescue, Student Supervision, and Student-Parent Reunification teams fall under the purview of Operations. Those assigned to Operations may: check outdoor areas for students and staff; maintain student and staff emergency contacts and medical and medications information; oversee emergency kits and supplies; keep cellular phones or two-way radios to ensure constant communication; and assist students and staff with special needs. The Operations team also oversees the parent-student reunification process to ensure student and staff accountability, including the management of the student-parent reunification center.

■ **Logistics.** The Logistics team secures and coordinates resources needed by students, staff and first responders during an incident, including food, shelter and other supplies. The team is responsible for acquiring any physical items that may be needed, such as back-up generators or buses. For example, the Logistics team may be responsible for ensuring that transportation is available to take students to the student-parent reunification center.

■ **Planning.** The Planning team ensures that the needs of all students, staff, visitors and parents are met by planning incident responses, assigning predesignated roles and responsibilities, and providing training to staff. The team also plans and conducts exercises, completes after-incident debriefings and after-action reports, and modifies the emergency plan as needed. A member of the Planning team is also generally responsible for documenting all practice exercises and real responses. For example, a school secretary may serve as the "recorder" on the Planning team and take detailed notes on specific events or the actions taken during an actual emergency.

■ **Finance-Administration.** The Finance-Administration team's responsibilities often depend on the severity and duration of an incident. Initial responsibilities include recording staff hours and expenses and supplying documentation after the disaster. Documentation is needed for insurance claims and requests for assistance to district, state or federal governments.

To integrate the NIMS Command and Management component into school emergency management efforts, schools and school districts should identify, in advance, essential teams, select incident commanders and provide ICS training for staff. Schools and school districts may also launch and manage incident command centers to:

- Involve incident commanders in all planning activities;

- Identify tasks to be performed during emergencies and issue assignments in advance;

- Designate and train school incident commanders (and two back-up commanders) to control the crisis until first responders arrive and command is transferred;

- Ensure that all faculty and staff know who their incident commander is before and during an emergency;

- Establish a clear chain of command to eliminate confusion during an emergency, and ensure that each person reports to only one individual;

- Create teams for each ICS function (The NIC recommends that, when possible, a team leader be responsible for directing only three to seven people. Generally, five to seven is optimal for teams; however, this may not be feasible for smaller schools, and they should plan accordingly.); and

- Provide easily recognizable identification (e.g., hats or vests) to each member of incident command teams so first responders can quickly identify team members during an emergency.

Multiagency Coordination Systems
When incidents cross disciplinary or jurisdictional boundaries or involve complex incident management scenarios, a multiagency response may be warranted. A multiagency coordination system uses common facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures and communications to: support incident management policies; facilitate logistics; inform resource allocation decisions; organize incident-related information; and manage interagency and intergovernmental issues and responses. For example, if a school received a bomb threat, the school's incident commander would activate the response plan, calling for fire and police department assistance. As responders arrived on the scene, the multiagency coordination system would be activated, usually at the county or city emergency operations center (EOC) to coordinate interagency support for the incident commander or the unified command, if the latter is established at the incident site.

Adopting standardized emergency management methods formalizes collaboration and fosters a high level of accountability while promoting efficiency. To ensure that school procedures and equipment complement those of community responders, school districts should work closely with community partners, including state, local, private and nonprofit entities, to:

- Ensure compatibility of communication devices;

- Designate, in advance, roles and responsibilities, including the chain of command;

- Integrate procedures from all response partners, including public health, mental health, and fire and law enforcement agencies; and

- Identify and use simple terminology.

Public Information System
An effective public information system establishes protocols for conveying timely and accurate information to the public during an incident and presents unified communication from multiple agencies.

During a multiagency response, a joint information center or central location for crisis communication should be quickly set up. The joint information center provides a site where a designated public information officer from each agency can meet to determine the content of planned communication and carry out media relations functions while avoiding on-the-scene interference with emergency response personnel and activities. The joint information center should have support staff representing each responding agency.

Depending on the nature of the incident, the joint information center might be located on or near a school campus. During incidents that occur beyond school grounds, the joint information center should be situated at a separate location predetermined by the local emergency plan. Schools should have a plan for both scenarios.

To seamlessly integrate a public information system into the NIMS Command and Management function, school districts should:

- Identify a public information officer to be the primary liaison for communicating with the public during an emergency;

- Disseminate all pertinent information through the designated public information officer; and

- Create their own information centers to execute predetermined processes and procedures for communication during and after a crisis.

2. Preparedness

The NIMS Preparedness component spans the prevention-mitigation and planning stages of emergency management. Using information from the prevention-mitigation phase, the preparedness component addresses standards in three categories: planning, training and conducting functional exercises. These standards guide schools when addressing preparedness issues such as personnel qualification and certification, equipment acquisition and certification, and publication management.

Planning
Planning and preparedness are vital for keeping schools safe during an emergency; schools must create protocols and procedures for responding to all hazards. NIMS planning activities are similar to the measures schools already take to ensure student and staff safety at all times. Aligning these school activities with community emergency plans and NIMS regulations by addressing issues such as communications, equipment and training, will generate policies and procedures that complement those of local first responders.

To integrate planning into NIMS preparedness, school districts should:

- **Establish the NIMS baseline.** School districts can chart their progress toward full NIMS implementation by establishing a baseline against FY 06 implementation requirements. The NIMCAST can facilitate this process and is available at: www.fema.gov/nimcast/index. jsp (accessed July 13, 2006).

- **Coordinate funding.** School districts are encouraged to work with local first responders and community partners to coordinate all federal emergency preparedness funding. A list of federal preparedness grant programs reported to the NIC is available at: http://www.fema. gov/pdf/nims/federal_prep_grant_prog.pdf (accessed July 13, 2006).

- **Participate in and promote intrastate and interagency mutual aid agreements.** School districts should consider collaborating with their state education agencies to create mutual aid agreements among partners. Schools can access information and resource on how to enhance mutual aid at: http://www.fema.gov/ emergency/nims/mutual_aid.shtm (accessed July 13, 2006).

- **Revise standard operating procedures (SOPs) to reflect NIMS regulations**. Schools and school districts should work with community partners to update and revise all SOPs, ensuring that all aspects of the NIMS—policies and principles, planning, training, response, exercises, equipment, evaluation and corrective actions—are incorporated.

Training

Schools choose training topics based on prevention and preparedness efforts, prioritized threats and identified issues derived from assessments. Schools should develop training programs with community responders to capitalize on responders' expertise and ensure consistent learning. Training needs can be addressed when crafting the memoranda of agreement between agencies.

In addition to general staff training and courses required for NIMS compliance (IS-100, IS-200, IS-700 and IS-800) school emergency leadership personnel could consider taking additional online training courses provided by FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI), such as Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools Train-the-Trainer (IS-362). Course information is available at: http://www.training.fema.gov/emiweb/IS/ (accessed July 13, 2006).

Functional Exercises

Functional emergency exercises such as drills and tabletop activities reinforce concepts presented in training and provide opportunities for practice. When performed in conjunction with community responders, school-based functional exercises and drills also support the collaboration and highlight plan areas that need to be changed or refined. These exercises should incorporate the NIMS and an ICS. FEMA offers guidance on conducting exercises at: http://ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/exercises.htm (accessed July 13, 2006).

To integrate functional exercises into NIMS preparedness, schools and school districts should create a multiagency, all-hazard exercise program based on the NIMS and:

- **Conduct exercises.** School personnel can conduct tabletop exercises and functional drills to practice and assess preparedness.

- **Involve responders.** Tabletop exercises or drills should be done in collaboration with community partners from multiple disciplines and, if possible, multiple jurisdictions.

- **Incorporate corrective actions.** After completing tabletop exercises or drills, lessons learned and corrective actions should be identified and addressed in updating response plans and procedures.

3. Resource Management

Resource management involves: establishing systems and protocols for tracking resources; activating these systems prior to or during an incident; dispatching resources; and deactivating resources after incidents. By standardizing procedures with partner agencies, the NIMS ensures that resources move quickly and efficiently to support incident managers and emergency responders. NIMS-oriented resource management will enable schools to share and access community resources before, during and after a crisis. To ensure school compliance with the NIMS, schools should:

- **Use resource typing.** Emergency response agencies and school districts should perform an inventory of community assets to identify, locate, request, order and track outside resources quickly and effectively and facilitate the allocation of these resources as they are requested by various schools or jurisdictions. This is known as "resource typing," and it promotes mutual aid. This formalized activity is designed to enhance emergency readiness and response at all levels of government in a community. The resource typing system is a comprehensive and integrated system that provides jurisdictions the flexibility to augment response resources during an incident. Schools can review the DHS resource typing standards and resource typing definitions at: http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/mutual_aid.shtm (accessed July 13, 2006).

- **Use national guidance.** Schools should use a national guidance protocol for resource acquisition. Schools are encouraged to work with their community partners to select items that meet the national standards for equipment, communication and data interoperability. This collaboration will ensure compatibility and facilitate integration when sharing resources. The DHS offers guidance through its SAFECOM Program available at: http://www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFECOM (accessed July 13, 2006).

4. Communications and Information Management

The NIMS prescribes standardized communication and information management strategies for both incident and information management, giving responders from all agencies, including school districts, common operating terminology and processes for more effective, consistent and timely decisions.

To ensure school compliance with the NIMS, schools should use common language. Incident response commands should be communicated uniformly and understood easily by school district staff, first responders and all other community partners. School district staff should use vocabulary and terminology that match that of their community partners. Clear communication standards, including encouraging the use of plain English, should be developed and used across the district.

5. Supporting Technologies

Supporting technologies, such as voice and data communication and information and display systems, provide essential capabilities for implementing and refining responses under the NIMS. By focusing on interoperability and compatibility of school equipment (e.g., handheld radios and automated external defibrillators) with equipment used by first responders, school districts can improve their capacity to respond more effectively and at lower costs.

To ensure school compliance with the NIMS, schools should follow national emergency management guidelines. By adhering to relevant national standards, school districts can meet the equipment, communication and data accessibility and interoperability objectives addressed in acquisition programs such as SAFECOM. SAFECOM provides guidance and assistance for purchasing equipment and fulfilling NIMS compliance while allowing for connectivity with other agencies.

6. Ongoing Management and Maintenance

School districts should review their compliance status annually to ensure that they are adequately prepared for emergencies. For example, just as school emergency supplies need to be monitored and replenished, so should continued compatibility with community partners' equipment be evaluated. Additionally, the DHS provides annual NIMS directives and updates that school districts should support, and the NIC provides ongoing technical assistance and guidance on all NIMS updates.

RESOURCES

Emergency Management Institute (EMI)

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Emergency Management Institute (EMI) provides training based on the four phases of emergency management—prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery—to equip first responders, government officials, private and public sector personnel, and school administrators and staff to reduce the impact of a crisis.

More information is available at: http://www.training.fema.gov/EMIweb/ (accessed July 13, 2006).

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5: Management of Domestic Incidents

In 2003, President Bush signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5) on the management of domestic incidents. The purpose of the directive is to "enhance the ability of the United States to manage domestic incidents by establishing a single, comprehensive national incident management system."

More information is available at: http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=4331 (accessed July 13, 2006).

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Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8: National Preparedness

The DHS Office of Domestic Preparedness offers information regarding Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 (HSPD-8) on national preparedness. The directive requires a "national domestic all-hazards preparedness goal" to guide: federal departments and agencies; state, local and tribal officials; the private sector; nongovernmental organizations; and the public in determining how to most effectively and efficiently strengthen their emergency preparedness capabilities.

More information is available at: http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/assessments/hspd8.htm (accessed July 13, 2006).

SAFECOM Program

The SAFECOM Program, offered through the Science and Technology Directorate's Office for Interoperability and Compatibility at DHS, is a communications program that provides research, development, testing, evaluation, guidance and assistance for local, tribal, state and federal public safety agencies and has resources for fulfilling NIMS implementation regulations.

The program is available at: http://www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFECOM (accessed July 13, 2006).

Tribal Government and Local Jurisdiction Compliance Activities

Prepared by the NIC, this document includes the NIMS Implementation Matrix for Tribal and Local Jurisdictions. The matrix provides details for each FY 06 compliance activity with resources and related future activities.

The document is available at: http://www.fema.gov/pdf/nims/nims_tribal_local_compliance_activities.pdf (accessed July 13, 2006).