

Procedural Reference 1: How To Develop Incident Objectives

Management by objective is a key characteristic of NIMS and one that MEMA follows. As such, incident objectives serve as the focal point for all coordination, support and recovery activities in the SEOC. They represent the Policy Group's intent for the incident. Writing clear objectives can be challenging, but using the following rules and frameworks can help to develop effective Incident Action Plans. Always remember: Objectives define **WHAT** we do. Strategies define **HOW** we do it.

Incident Objectives are Based on Incident Priorities

Incident priorities define the senior leadership perspective on overarching requirements and reflect core capabilities from the National Preparedness Goal. Incident objectives stem from these priorities and provide the basis for operational guidance, strategies, tactics, and work assignments.

	Source of Guidance	Answers...				Documented in IAP
		Who	What	Where	When	
Incident Priorities	Governor, Regional Administrator	Policy Group	Yes	No	No	No
Incident Objectives	Priorities, Situation, Resources	Policy Group	Yes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Yes (ICS 202)
Tasks / Assignments	Incident Objectives	Ops Section	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (ICS 204)

FEMA, Incident Action Planning Guide, 2015, Responsibility and Documentation Matrix

Incident Objectives and Smart Criteria

Incident objectives are concise statements of what needs to be done or attained; they are not descriptions of specific tasks.

- May include details on where and when; they do not indicate how or why.
- Should not address normal, inherent incident management activities, e.g., "Initiate incident action planning," or "Gain situational awareness."

- Are established for every operational period but they do not need to be accomplished in that single operational period; they frequently carry over from one period to the next.
- Are the exclusive responsibility of the Policy Group and are generally developed with input from the command staff and general staff.
- Are general during the initial operational periods of an incident and become more specific, in terms of where and by when, as awareness of the situation improves.
- Must be measurable to make it possible to determine when a given objective has been accomplished, achieved, or attained.
- Are specifically intended to guide incident operations and are not the appropriate place to highlight the concerns of specific constituencies.

Before finalizing any objective, validate it against the SMART acronym. This ensures the objective provides enough detail for the Operations Section to build a plan.

- **Specific:** State exactly what the incident personnel must accomplish.
- **Measurable:** Include a metric or clear end state to prove completion.
- **Action Oriented:** Start the sentence with an active verb.
- **Realistic:** Match the objective to the available resources and capabilities.
- **Time Bound:** Specify a deadline or the specific operational period for completion.

Objectives vs. Strategies vs. Tactics

It can be easy to confuse objective development with other levels of planning. Use this hierarchy to maintain clear lines of authority.

Level	Responsibility	Focus	Example
Objective	Policy Group	The "What"	Restore power to impacted hospitals by 1800 hours.
Strategy	Operations Section Chief	The "Method"	Provide portable generators to Somerset County EMA to bypass the damaged grid.
Tactics	Division/Group Supervisor	The "Action"	Deploy Strike Team A with two 500kW generators.

FEMA, Incident Action Planning Guide, 2015, Responsibility and Documentation Matrix

The Planning P: When To Write Objectives

Objectives change as the incident evolves. Objectives are developed or updated during specific phases of the SEOC Operational Rhythm (The Planning P).

1. **Initial Response:** The SEOC Manager sets basic objectives to stabilize life safety.
2. **Objectives Meeting:** The command staff meets to formalize objectives for the next operational period. The Operations Section Chief then uses the objectives to create the "how" (strategies and tactics, as necessary).
3. **Planning Meeting:** The team verifies objectives remain attainable.

Objectives Drafting Rules

- Incident objectives must remain concise. Follow these stylistic constraints:
- **Avoid Adverbs:** Delete modifiers like "safely" or "promptly." The operational context implies speed and competence. Rely on powerful verbs instead of modifiers to deliver clear messages and eliminate document clutter.
- **Avoid Soft Verbs:** Do not use "support," "ensure," or "monitor." These verbs lack measurable outcomes.
- **Focus on Outcomes:** Describe the result you want, not the process to get there.

Use These Verbs	Avoid These Verbs	Avoid These Modifiers
Augment, Implement, Dispose	Assess, Continue, Coordinate	Quickly, Safely, Completely
Determine, Complete, Provide	Monitor, Work with, Support	Prompt, Accessible, Thorough
Finalize, Devise, Deliver	Ensure, Reinforce	Reliable, Compassionate
Carry out, Pre-stage, Execute	Assist, Facilitate, Participate	Effectively, Efficiently, Successfully
Develop, Conduct, Establish	Address, Handle, Oversee	Adequately, Appropriately, Fully

Table: Word Selection Guide

The "So What?" Test

Test every objective by asking "So what?"

- **Weak Objective:** "Monitor river levels." (So what? Monitoring is a task, not an outcome).
- **Strong Objective:** "Establish a river level warning system for counties to trigger evacuation orders." (This provides a clear purpose and outcome).

ICS Form 202 Technical Requirements

- Display only incident objectives. Do not include priorities, strategies, or other extraneous information.
- Assign individual tracking numbers to incident objectives serially from the beginning of the incident to its conclusion.
- Do not renumber incident objectives. Each objective retains its original tracking number until the objective is accomplished or achieved at which point the objective and its tracking number are retired.
- Once an incident objective has been retired, do not include it on the ICS Form 202.
- If an objective is modified but retains its original intent, assign its tracking number a new sub-letter and retire the original objective. For example, if objective 2 is modified, its tracking number becomes 2a, and objective 2 is retired.
- If an incident objective is modified in a way that changes its original intent, retire the original objective and assign revised objective a new tracking number.
- Prioritize incident objectives based on urgency, operational period requirements, and guidance from the Policy Group.
 - List the incident objectives on the ICS Form 202 in order of their priority, regardless of their tracking number. The first objective listed is the highest priority. The last listed objective is the lowest priority.
 - Let incident priorities guide the prioritization of objectives. "While objectives must be based on requirements," the Incident Management and Support Keystone states, "the status in which they must be addressed is guided by priorities."

Examples Of Incident Objectives

The following table provides examples of good objectives using SMART principles. This list is not exhaustive and only meant to illustrate the rules above.

Example Incident Objectives	
1.	Identify and stage five swift water rescue teams and three aviation assets by 0800 hours on October 15.
2.	Extract 50 stranded patients from the Central Maine Medical Center flood zone by 1200 hours on October 16.
3.	Evacuate 500 residents from the Route 1 coastal inundation zone by 1600 hours on Thursday.
4.	Establish overnight sheltering for 300 displaced individuals at the Cross Insurance Arena by 1900 hours on October 15.
5.	Open three commodity distribution sites in the mid-coast area by 0700 hours on Friday.
6.	Deliver 500 cases of water to isolated communities in the Carrabassett Valley by 1400 hours on October 16.
7.	Open five State Disaster Recovery Centers by October 20 and two additional centers by October 25.
8.	Clear debris from Interstate 95 between Augusta and Bangor to open two lanes for emergency traffic by 0600 hours on Friday.
9.	Publish debris sorting guidelines for municipal public works directors by 1000 hours on Thursday.
10.	Complete food safety inspections at 50 commercial distribution centers in the impacted region by 1700 hours on Friday.
11.	Deploy 20 crisis counselors to the three state managed shelters by 1200 hours on Tuesday.
12.	Deliver 50 residential generators to the Somerset County staging area for shelter in place operations by 1700 hours on Friday.
13.	Complete search operations in the Kennebec River basin by 1800 hours on Friday.

Table: Examples of Good Incident Objectives

This page is intentionally blank.