

# Checklist FAQ

## What about Unified Command?

We used to believe Unified Command was a silver bullet for solving slow integration and response at Active Shooter Incidents. What we found is attempting to establish an immediate Unified Command actually slowed the response for a period of time, then things started happening. Unfortunately, the slow down was very consequential -- a 20-30 minute delay in hitting benchmarks.

What follows is an explanation of our position on Unified Command at Active Shooter Events. These comments will make some smile and leave others furious. We understand both reactions. We simply ask you read the entire article before judging.

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We are not NIMS/ICS "purists" that believe in rigid compliance above common sense. However, sometimes getting back to the basics and the original intent of NIMS/ICS components can actually be helpful. Most of our team was around when ICS was being introduced to the fire service, and we were all active duty when Unified Command was added as a component to ICS.

The need for Unified Command is driven by multiple entities with legal authority to be in charge of an incident (NIMS). The test for Unified Command is thinking strategically and speaking with one voice through an Operations Section Chief (NIMS).

When you analyze what is typically referred to as Unified Command at Active Shooter Events, you immediately see some problems in light of these definitions. Obviously, fire/EMS would be hard pressed to demonstrate a legal authority to be in charge of a murder-in-progress or a murder crime scene, but let's skip over that issue as it's not the main point.

What is called "Unified Command" at Active Shooter Events is typically a law enforcement IC and a fire/EMS IC who are (hopefully) standing next to and communicating with each other. Both are engaged in operational direction and control of their troops. The two IC's are thinking operationally, not strategically, and they are not speaking with one voice. What we've observed in practice is very little direct communication between the two IC's; they are just too busy directing their own troops. And that's a problem. The two IC's are not engaged in Unified Command. Though they may honestly believe they are a "Unified Command," they are in fact running two separate command structures and (again, hopefully) standing next to each other. There is not a name for this type of command structure, though our instructors commonly refer to it as "Command by Osmosis" for illustration purposes in training.

**There appear to be a number of contributing factors** as to why attempting to implement an immediate Unified Command slows down the response, but it is clear that the confusion of two separate commands operating as a faux Unified Command is a contributing factor. Other

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suspected contributing factors include time to attain situational awareness for each leader inserted in the middle of the ICS structure, communication overload, and a few others.

The Active Shooter Incident Management Checklist **DOES NOT EXCLUDE UNIFIED COMMAND**. The Checklist provides a mechanism for standing up -- from the first arriving law enforcement officer -- an appropriate organizational structure for immediate **INTEGRATED** response to an Active Shooter Event. Once that structure is in place and the response begins to stabilize, an orderly transition to Unified Command may be accomplished if so desired. The arriving Chief Officers can organize their Unified Command at the strategic level and then accomplish a smooth transition to Unified Command by assigning the current Incident Commander as the Operations Section Chief and assuming Command.

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