# NIMS *Alert*

## More About 10-Codes and Plain English

WASHINGTON – In Washington, DC, if a police officer says 10-50, he or she is talking about a car accident. Across the line in Montgomery County, Maryland, 10-50 means an officer needs help. And that's the way it is across much of the country, 10-codes used in one jurisdiction are not the same as those used in another. That's why it is important that responders and incident managers use common terminology. There simply is no room for misunderstanding in an emergency situation.

The use of plain language in emergency response is matter of public safety, especially the safety of first responders and those affected by the incident. It is critical that all local responders, as well as those coming into the impacted area from other jurisdictions and other states as well as the federal government, know and utilize commonly established operational structures, terminology, policies and procedures. This is what NIMS and the Incident Command System (ICS) are all about - achieving interoperability across agencies, jurisdictions and disciplines.

The use of common terminology is about the ability of area commanders, state and local EOC personnel, federal operational coordinators, and responders to communicate clearly with each other and effectively coordinate response activities, no matter what the size, scope or complexity of the incident. The ability of responders from different jurisdictions and different disciplines to work together depends greatly on their ability to communicate with each other.

It is required that plain English be used for multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction and multi-discipline events, such as major disasters and exercises. Beginning in the fiscal year that starts on Oct. 1, 2006, federal preparedness grant funding is contingent on the use of plain English in incidents requiring assistance from responders from other agencies, jurisdictions and functional disciplines.

While the NIMS Integration Center doesn't require plain English for internal operations, we strongly encourage it. We believe it is important to practice everyday terminology and procedures that will need to be used in emergency incidents and disasters. NIMS implementation is a long-term effort and it's probably not possible to persuade everyone to change ingrained habits overnight. But we do hope that over time, everyone will understand the important of using common terminology, that is, plain English, every day.

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