

The Auxiliary's Role in Coast Guard Emergency Management

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(26 January 2021) The U.S. Coast Guard Office of Emergency Management & Disaster Response (OEM) excels in crisis leadership, planning, organizing, and training to respond to incidents during crises. Their efforts focus on domestic national response while also supporting the development of response management systems in the international community. The office is organized under the current National Response Framework (NRF) while building upon the established National Response System—the Federal system for emergency response and coordination of oil and chemical discharges into U.S. waterways and the environment. Today, the Coast Guard's OEM maintains policy and capabilities to respond to all types of hazards.

What is Emergency Management

To the United States Government, emergency management is a function that coordinates and integrates all activities necessary to build, sustain, and improve the capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, or mitigate against threatened or actual natural disasters, acts of terrorism, or other man-made disasters.

Federal Authority

The USCG's role in dealing with emergencies is outlined in Section 753 of 6 the U.S. Code under Federal Preparedness. This section requires all Federal departments and agencies to be prepared to respond to a natural disaster, act of terrorism, or other man-made disaster. Cumulatively, to the Federal government, these types of disasters fall under the rubric of "all-hazards."

National Organization

The Coast Guard maintains several national Incident Management Teams (IMT) which are made up of highly trained readily deployable manpower which can assist with management experience of various incidents. An IMT will usually deploy within their specific Area of Responsibility (AOR), but also are deployable anywhere in the United States, and sometimes are sent internationally.

Coast Guard IMT teams are organized using the National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) which operates through the Incident Command System (ICS). The organizational elements of the ICS are the position titles and responsibilities that describe the key positions in this standardized response management system. For example, an IMT will normally have an Incident Commander, with standardized support positions that include a Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, Liaison Officer (to outside agencies), and other officers such as Planning, Finance, Communications, Investigations, etc.

Coastguardsmen who are part of an IMT will have met certain required competencies, based on prudent screening of an individual's experience, judgment, maturity, and satisfactory completion of mandatory training and personnel qualification standard (PQS) requirements. Once assigned to an IMT, they will help that team maintain readiness requirements.

Leadership

The active-duty USCG's OEM command comes under the Assistant Commandant for Response Policy. This office has a mission area which includes law enforcement, counterterrorism and defense operations, search and rescue, contingency exercises, and incident management and preparedness. It is under this latter mission area that the Office of Incident Management and Preparedness is organized. Their role is to lead the development of incident management and preparedness doctrine, policy, and guidelines for all Coast Guard missions.

The Auxiliary's command falls under the Incident Management and Preparedness Directorate (aka "Q") which coordinates the development of policies and procedures to provide qualified Auxiliary members for USCG preparedness and incident management related activities. They implement guidelines for the incident command system, support contingency Coast Guard planning efforts, and coordinate guidelines for the Incident Management Auxiliary Coordinating Cell (IMACC). This group aids with Auxiliary accountability, resource tracking, identifying Auxiliary members with desired skills or qualification, ordering equipment and personnel, as well as, preparing daily reports for the supported District. IMACC members are trained in the Incident Command System, have awareness of Auxiliary response capabilities, and can integrate into District-level Area Command or other incident management structure, as necessary.

The IMACC assists with preparedness activities including response to real-world events and exercises. The objective of this Directorate is to strengthen Auxiliary relevance to local Coast Guard units, with a goal of enhancing the Auxiliary's relevance to the Coast Guard by providing another avenue of support. Each IMACC would organize as required and serve their respective District Director of Auxiliary (DIRAUX).

Auxiliary's Role in Incident Management Support

When properly trained and/or qualified, Auxiliarists are authorized to serve within a Sector (regional) IMT. Auxiliary members can provide incident management, logistic, and operational support during major incidents, natural disasters, or large-scale planned events.

The Auxiliary afloat platforms can conduct patrols, provide assistance with safety zones, assist with SAR. The Auxiliary also has communications trailers with qualified communications specialists to assist with providing radio coverage in disaster areas. For operations ashore, Auxiliary members can assist with pollution investigations, or serve as Watchstanders, communications specialists, and Marine Transportation System Recovery Unit (MTSRU) specialists. Further, the Auxiliary has qualified aviators with properly equipped aviation resources for overflights, shoreline assessment of damage and storm impacts, and transportation of personnel or equipment, etc. Some AUX AIR facilities are also equipped with high resolution cameras specific for post-storm or other damage assessment.

Auxiliarists serve as a force multiplier by providing trained and qualified personnel. An Auxiliarist may serve as Coast Guard representatives or liaison officers at a local emergency operations center, or provide logistic support for incident response operations. The IMACC was used during the response to Hurricane Harvey in 2017. It coordinated the deployment of Auxiliarists with the proper qualifications and training to support the District's operations, under command of the DIRAUX. Auxiliarists who had come from several states, filled critical ICS positions in Geographic Information System (GIS), and other support roles such as administration and finance within the unified command. In all, Auxiliarists provided more than 10,000 hours toward the Department of Homeland Security's overall recovery operations.

The Future Role of the Auxiliarist in Emergency Management

The latest long-term strategic planning goals and priorities of the Auxiliary's Incident Management and Preparedness Directorate (2018-2024) includes developing an Auxiliary-specific incident command training program (ICS-300), with designated ICS instructors to deliver FEMA-approved training. Such Coast Guard training will be specialized in preparing the Auxiliary to meet USCG ICS position-specific roles. Strengthening the USGC's posture on emergency management, a newly revised guide was issued in October 2020, (COMDTINST M3010.24A) entitled "U.S. Coast Guard Emergency Management Manual," of which Volume IV (Incident Management and Crisis Response) has information on the Auxiliary's requisite training and role as part of the overall Coast Guard Forces emergency management response.

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