

**NIMS Research Paper**

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Understanding the crisis management in the United States demands of a course on the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Thus, the role of coordination in the implementation of the response plan cannot be underestimated when the country faces the critical incidents. In order to gain a comprehensive insight into this system, this paper dissects its application in two pivotal events: the hurricanes Katrina in 2005 and the terrorism attacks of 9/11, 2001. These 2 disasters, a natural and man-made, put my country's response mechanisms to the above testing, offering me a lot to learn from. The National Incident Management System works as a system to allow the management of disasters applying a structured method. It unite a range of local, state, and federal assets into an integrated response team and thus ensure a swift and tactical response. However, the system has its own advantages, and yet, the situation where the system lacks effectiveness has been questioned in the past crisis situations. Therefore, that two important events were NIMS response policy focus provides the opportunity to learn both strength and weakness aspects of it. The paper seeks to comprehensively asses the activities of NIMS in the stipulated occurrences. Studying these circumstances not only offers an opportunity to evaluate the national policy response on incident management but also provides a lens into the intricate handling of contrasting crises: artificial and natural, and This is the reason why, in this paper, NIMS is presented in a broad sense, and its implementation in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina is reviewed. If the exploration will turn out successful, there is a reason for hope as a better understanding of the subject will be rendered, therefore leading to advancement of crisis management in future.

### **National Response Policy – An Overview**

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is the overall architecture system started by the Department of Homeland Security for the purposes of managing domestic

incidents. The idea is to stress the capabilities of the team to communicate with one another, to operate together most efficiently, and to be flexible at any situation by combining local, state, and federal resources into one functional team.

### **Structural and Operational Aspects of NIMS**

NIMS is organized into six components: Command and Management, Supporting Technologies, Preparedness, Resource Management, Communications and Information Management, and Ongoing Management and Maintenance. These mechanisms are integrated to offer a holistic, proactive approach to help departments and agencies, NGOs, and the private sector operate in coordination to deal with all incidents regardless of size, location, or complexity, any time, anywhere (The Threat Intelligence Handbook, 2018). A successful instance of NIMS command structure in function was during the Colorado forest fires in 2012, and a unified command was effective between local fire departments, law enforcement agencies, state forest service and federal agencies. The distinct demarcation and assignment of roles made the process of response coordination and ultimately control of the fires a success.

### **Critique against NIMS**

While its area of influence reflects the principle of separation of power, NIMS has also received criticism. The system has been found to be unclear on the issue of the assignment of responsibilities and powers, which it particularly misses while defining the states and local authorities. This problem was evident in New Jersey, when Hurricane Sandy came on land in 2012. As there was no clarity on who was the responsible person to take some important emergency measures, there was confusion, which resulted in delayed aid distribution and the slow speed of recovery efforts (Heide, 2004). The factor commonly criticized is the intricacy of the NIMS system. The non-governmental sector finds the NIMS roll-out particularly problematic in small jurisdictions – surface areas lacking both people and

resources. The 2004 flood that occurred on July 4th at the Pocono Mountains and hit the rural Pennsylvania region highlighted this predicament. Although NIMS has been established, the local response agencies, which are not quite big and with little support, have been hardly able to respond to emergencies of such huge scale, proving that the protocols should be simplified according to the resources and preparedness level available to the local responders.

Also, the critique on the use of NIMS' general practise in different situations has been raised up especially in the consideration on specific incidents. For instance, after the Deepwater Horizon oil leak in 2010 the cause was traced to the incongruity between the land based incident management and an oil spill at sea. This showed the necessity for the built-in adjustment within the NIMS model to be made for particular nature of incidents. evertheless, some criticism arises in the face of this, and it serves as the main pillar of the United States' disaster management system (Effective Disaster Warnings, 2000). The emergency management responses to the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and the Kansas City Hyatt Regency hotel walkway failure in 1981 were the example of lack or absence of coordination which significantly affected the efficiency of emergency management (National Incident Management System, 2008). NIMS, due to a unification of different authorities, wants to strive to coordinate more strategically. However, to work on the improvements and evolution of NIMS, it is essential to understand what critics say about it and what their concerns are. Overcoming the difficulties in its use and adapting it to cover various types and scales of disaster serves as prerequisite to the further introduction of this structure which will become an essential part of any response to the critical incidents of a variety of natures.

### **The Fierce Fury: An Overview of Hurricane Katrina**

In late August 2005, the United States faced one of the deadliest natural calamities in its history: Hurricane Katrina While the Category 5 hurricane left the Gulf Coast in

depressing conditions, New Orleans in Louisiana was one of the hardest areas hit. Severe windblast and heavy flooding resulted in a huge human sufferings and massive infrastructure damage, which eventually led to the awful crisis of epic proportions that overwhelmed the people and the responders of all sorts alike.

### **The NIMS Response: Operation and Outcomes**

NIMS helped control the government's response to Hurricane Katrina. As the storm worsened, leading to apparent devastation that had become imminent, emergency departments and the operations of the National Incident Management System were activated. The answer to the response was a synergy of several agencies at local, state and federal levels anchored on the philosophy behind command and unified principles. Despite the fact of this, not all the results were equally successful. Attention was paid late in the right places and rescue activities were accompanied with logistics problems (National Incident Management System: Intelligence/Investigations Function Guidance, 2013). Namely, differences in responders at federal and state level caused confusion in evacuations. New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin chose the Superdome as the last refuge of which was until it broke down completely owing to the throng of people that flocked there. On the other hand, FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, was not ready to give the city buses to ferry the residents who were marooned after the hurricane wracked the coast. This lack of coordination in management made the people's needs, especially affected by the hurricane, to not be effectively met in a timely and compacted response.

### **Analyzing NIMS' Performance and Lessons Learned**

How to utilize the NIMS system during the making of Hurricane Katrina demonstrated its advantages and disadvantages. NIMS allowed different agencies to work together under a unified command structure, each having its own coordination; hence, a systematic way of addressing the disaster could be done. Despite the fact that the theoretical

concept had several aspects, the practical implementation was flawed in the most important instances. The chaos in evacuation management drew attention to the breakdown of communication in real-time between actors in different levels, mainly the federal and state governments involved (Kettl, 2006). This position brought the requirement of making proper communication flows between the agencies within the NIM into focus. Nonetheless, the deficiency in preparedness from FEMA (which plays a significant role with the response mechanism) offered more insight on the need for a more advanced readiness planning within the system.

Besides, resource mobilization became a problem from the beginning of the crisis to the very end. Insufficient supplies of bedrock essentials included food, water, and medical equipment. While this may be regarded as a clear indication of the inability to manage resources effectively. This inefficient management has proved the key notions such as the importance to be related to the incidence response plan and implementation of NIMS with the preemptiveness and effectiveness of logistical operations, which should be an integral part in the implementation of NIMS (The Threat Intelligence Handbook, 2018). Another crucial issue was the lack of predefined functions within different levels of command which was related to missed spots in seizure of efforts. This demands for recent specifications of duties and jurisdictions about the structure of the NIMS for the relevant authorities. The event served as a tool to emphasize the importance of giving adequate training and knowledge about the NIMS to all the prospective participants in disaster management, starting from the federal level to the local jurisdictions (The Threat Intelligence Handbook, 2018). This will give every level of the system an advantage of collecting and coordinating prompt, unified, and working responses. Looking into the disaster, some lessons can be devised and learned in order to become better in the greatness of NIMS. The practical application of this theoretical

frame can be used to realize the strengths and weaknesses of the NIMS in terms of its lack of functionality during the times of crisis.

### **The Devastating Attack: An Overview of the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks**

The unmatched act of terrorism was the attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City by the terrorist group Al Qaeda on September 11, 2001. This dramatic event reshaped the entire concept of man-made disasters, emphasizing the complexity of coordinated attacks and their widespread impacts.

### **The NIMS Response: Steps and Outcomes**

In response, the National Incident Management System (NIMS) was activated. The key component of NIMS's functioning during this event was the immediate necessity of an efficient intra-agency coordination. The severity and scale of the incident necessitated the collaboration between the local First Responders and the state and federal emergency services. This unitary command allowed for better cooperation and coordination between the different responding agencies, such as the New York City police and fire departments, the Red Cross and FEMA (Heide, 2004). Moreover, disaster preparedness networks were harnessed. In the disaster aftermath, medical personnel, search and rescue teams, as well as disaster relief organizations, worked together to save survivors and provide aid. However, some aspects of the response indicated the weakness of the system. For example, the collapse of the Twin Towers brought about widespread communication issues. The speed with which information can be shared is critical to an effective response to emergencies; however, failures in the communication systems hindered the operations of responders and their safety.

### **Dissecting NIMS's Performance and Lessons Learned**

The 9/11 attacks were a stress-test for NIMS, illuminating both its robust aspects and areas that needed improvement. One glaring issue that became evident was interoperability among responding agencies. While the NIMS system itself encourages inter-agency

collaboration, practical implementation revealed gaps. This was particularly apparent in communication systems – on 9/11, responding agencies used incompatible systems, which obstructed vital cross-agency communications and coordination (Effective Disaster Warnings, 2000). . In addition to that, the hurdles of financing, facilities and logistics also became more evident during the organization. The search and rescue action in the beginning caused less concern for provision of other basic services at the same time securing the disaster scene. This brought a situation of no control and no supervision of the outlet and what went on, impairing the overall response process. For instance, most of the recovered workers lacked essential training or requisite protective clothing which resulted in increased respiratory protection causing health issues in the long term. In the same context, the accident once again highlighted the weakness in NIMS in terms of a well-developed recovery plan.

Though the system appropriately handled the immediate relief operations and rescue activities, it had an issue with the transitioning to reconstruction and long-term strategy. Between institutions and residential settings after their discharge for the long-term treatment, however, was also a challenge. To sum up, the 9/11 was used to show up the deficiencies. NIMS model that has been already established, especially, in the areas of communication, resource allocation, and disaster of ecological nature of long-term recovery planning. Nevertheless, we had a mine of information though the lesson that took place here. The man-made catastrophes that have played the most important role in the U.S. history, contributed as striking examples. An analysis of the NIMS response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks effectively illustrates the potential of the created learning opportunities to overcome current shortfalls in the framework, designing certain modifications to be applied to the framework in the future contingencies.

### **Recommendations**



Making use of the lessons learned from the survivors of Hurricane Katrina and 9/11 for our analysis of terrorist activities, the National Incident Management System or NIMS can be updated to the following suggestions. First of all, NIMS would foster deeds within departments to improve inter-agency communication protocols. The communication hiccups that were recurred during the incidents stress the fact that there should be there have to be seamless and compatible communication systems that connect all participating agencies. Technological means can also be applied to enhance the sharing of live information, in this way, the speed and efficiency of the responses can also be improved. An efficient and strong protocol on management of resources should be established second. This will include revamped planning and allocation logistics that assures supplies will be reaching the disaster area at the right and timely state.

The third important issue is the distinct definition of the boundaries and roles of the agencies involved in NIMS crisis management which should be perpetuated, allowing exclusion if any operational overlaps and gaps. The final point is that there is the necessity of tuning and building of the recovery plans systematically for both the short-term and the long-term phases of the disaster management. This area of improvement, if carried out successfully, could greatly help the NIMS to undergo the most critical phase of post-disaster period with ease. Accordingly, strengthening the existing NIMS structure by remedying the identified shortages can result in more certain response to future disasters. These improvements are potential in qualitatively amplifying the response these systems can provide to critical incidents, thus enhancing national security and resilience.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, a critical analysis of NIMS that has been conducted through the examination of two prominent critical incidents in past such as natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina and man-made 9/11 terrorist attacks, has offered important lessons. These incidents

showed the significant need of an availing a good incident-response policy at the national level. What can be learned from these happenings represent the steps to be taken where the system is required to do a touch-up. Integrating and involving communication, allocating resources, giving priority to recovery processes, and dedicating time and resources to training are vital factors which will lead to a great improvement of the effectiveness of NIMS. The continuous adaptations of NIMS facilitate a dynamic and reacting model that is capable of overcoming different critical incidents and in this way it offers protection to the communities and enhancing their resiliency in times of crises.



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