

## **Incident Command System**

One of the many issues that emergency responders are dealing with post 9-11 is the fact that there is a tremendous need for training of emergency responders as well as a need for increased information sharing between responding agencies. A recent NY Times article dated July 7, 2002 highlighted the flaws in how emergency responders dealt with the Twin Towers catastrophe. As quoted in the article, "From the first moments to the last, however, their efforts were plagued by failures of communication, command and control."

After reading the article, one has to question how many firefighters and police officers could have been saved had there just been an incident management system in place to direct and control the activities of every responder. I am not taking away from the heroism that was displayed that day. But heroism alone is not enough. Any Fire Chief will tell you they would rather have live fire fighters than dead heroes.

These problems are not only found in the emergency services in New York. And they did not start on September 11th. The truth is that although emergency responders may be trained well in terms of tactics, their incident management training is lacking. Another problem is that agencies may have the training, but they do not actually practice it. To compound this problem we may have the training and actually practice it within our own agency, but when we have to have to respond with other agencies in a large event, the system breaks down, as we simply do not know how to play well together.

The Burlington County Office of Emergency Management is trying to address this problem by providing Incident Command System (ICS) Level 200 training to more emergency responders in Burlington County. We have chosen ICS 200 as this course provides twelve (12) hours of training that includes the opportunity for three (3) exercises to be completed during the course. During this training we go over such issues as span of control, the use of common terminology by all responders, crisis management style, planning and the need to establish relationships with other responding agencies before disasters strike.

We have targeted police officers as our first component of the training as they seem to be the one agency with the fewest number of personnel exposed to the ICS system. We have made our request to the Burlington County Police Chief's Association stating that our goal for this year is to get 200 officers trained throughout the county. To increase the effectiveness of the training and to help build relationships with communities we have asked that the training be given regionally. By this we mean that training should not be given just to police officers alone. The classes should be a mix of other emergency responders as well as government employees within their community. Think of all those you expect to see at the emergency scene.

So far we have done classes for Mansfield Township, Moorestown Township, Willingboro Township as well as the County Health Department. Additional classes are scheduled for Medford Lakes, Medford Township, Burlington Township and Cinnaminson Township.

Contact Mike Anderson at **609-265-7152** or Steve King at **609-265-7165** to schedule classes for your community.