

S-260: Interagency Incident Business Management

UNIT 1 – ETHICS & CONDUCT

This unit presents:

- Prohibited conduct and related consequences while on incident assignments
- The “dollar side” of conduct and ethics on an incident

In other words, we examine the financial impact of poor choices made by personnel on the overall cost of an incident.

Also, we’ll talk about the role of a position on the incident management team known as the human resource specialist (HRSP).

People participating in incidents come from various employment backgrounds, including:

- Federal agencies
- State or local agencies
- Fire departments
- Volunteers

They can be connected in a variety of ways, including as a contractor, cooperator, casual, or government employee. Regardless of employer or connection, all incident personnel have basic CIVIL RIGHTS. There is also a NO TOLERANCE policy for any sort of harassment or discrimination based on:

- Sex or sexual orientation
- Race
- Gender
- Age

An incident is not your normal, everyday workplace. Wildland fires and other types of all hazard incidents are unpredictable and dangerous! Conditions are typically stressful, and people are under extreme pressure.

And, there can be a very diverse mix of people with a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and values.

Put this all together and you have an environment where issues of conduct and ethics can—and probably will—come up.

We all have to make choices in life—even on incident assignments. Knowing the rules and expectations before you face situations will help you make the right choices.

In this topic, we took our first look at the financial impact of conduct and ethics on the management and cost of an incident. We introduced:

- Types of personnel at an incident
- Types of connections to an incident

- Incident civil rights
- Incident “no tolerance” policy
- Expectations and the incident environment

How you behave is your choice—but the consequences belong to you as well. You're expected to contribute to a harassment-free workplace and report any harassment or discrimination problems you experience or observe.

In this topic, we cover the types of conduct prohibited by personnel while on incident assignment as well as the consequences of choosing NOT to do—or act—accordingly.

As described in the Introduction topic in this module, civil rights are a fundamental principle of incident management. Yet another significant principle governing the “say” an incident management team has in what personnel do while on incident assignment is this:

ALL incident personnel are expected to be **READY, WILLING, and ABLE** to meet the work requirements of their incident assignment. And, this means at all times while on incident assignment—both on and off duty.

Incidents can become very much like a community. In fact, the base camps for very large incidents can sometimes be the second- or third-largest community in a county—by the time we get the camp all set up!

And just as in any small town, problems with people’s conduct and behavior can arise.

Unlike your normal workplace, on incident assignments the incident management team and also the incident agency have something to say about your behavior, even when you’re off duty.

Your **OFF-DUTY** conduct comes under incident management and agency control when it:

- Impairs—or may impair—your performance or the performance of others
- Results—or may result—in an accident or injury
- Results—or may result—in damage to property
- Disrupts—or may disrupt—incident routine
- Infringes—or may infringe—on the rights of others
- Jeopardizes—or may jeopardize—incident operations

Did you notice that all of these issues include the “—or may—” stipulation? Even the possibility of an occurrence gives the incident management team the authority to act to prevent it, even when on-assignment personnel are off duty.

On assignment, incident personnel at every level must meet some very basic expectations. They must:

- Consistently perform duties in a safe manner
- Be considerate of other people at all times—especially during sleep periods

In addition, supervisors have an important role to play in helping to manage conduct and behavior.

In general, ALL supervisory personnel are also responsible for:

- Monitoring the conduct and performance of personnel under their supervision
- Organizing and preparing supervisees for their incident assignments

In short, supervisors need to set the example at all times!

When you're on incident assignment, your workplace is typically very different from the one in the "real world," especially when it comes to who has a say in what you do!

Identify THREE correct statements about issues of conduct and behavior.

Policy permits you to consume beer at an incident as long as it is done off shift.
Incident management has a no tolerance policy for harassment and discrimination.
Incident management team members can reprimand off-duty incident personnel.
Prescription medications cannot be brought on site at an incident.
Closed camps prohibit incident personnel from leaving the premises.

So far in this topic, there has been a lot of explanation and illustration around the issues of conduct and behavior. Now it's time to reveal the consequences.

Violation of any of the rules of incident assignment conduct—both on and off duty—can result in:

- Removal from the incident
- Report of circumstances to the home or hiring unit
- Termination of casual employees
- Termination or suspension of a contractor employee or contract

Removal from Incident

Severe infractions can result in immediate removal from the incident location! The type of employee—government, casual, cooperator, or contractor—determines how (or if) the individual will be reimbursed for travel time and transportation.

Report of Circumstances

A report is sent to the offending individual's home or hiring unit. The home or hiring unit can choose to take additional disciplinary action according to its own policies.

Termination of Casuals

Casual employees—individuals specifically hired for that fire or incident—can be terminated on the spot! This means they receive no pay, from the time they are terminated and may be sent home at their own expense.

Contractor Termination or Suspension

Employees of a contractor can be terminated on the spot. The contractor handles the issues of pay for work already performed and expenses to get home according to its own policies.

A contract suspension is another possible and very serious consequence for contractors. A contract can be suspended for misconduct, or even terminated. And, if this happens right at the start of fire season, this could result in a huge loss of income

It is everyone's responsibility to try to stop harassment and discrimination. This is especially true, if part of your incident assignment is to supervise others.

If you observe harassment or discrimination—or if you feel that you are the target of harassment or discrimination—address the behavior with:

- The offender
- Your supervisor
- Your supervisor's supervisor
- The human resource specialist (HRSP)
- The incident commander (IC)

The Offender

If you feel comfortable doing so, your first step when you observe harassment or discrimination would be to address it directly with the offender. In some mild instances, the person could very well not realize the action or words are offensive.

For example, maybe what is just joking around in that person's world is really crude where you are from—or from the perspective of someone else within earshot. Sometimes simply mentioning the problem takes care of it.

Your Supervisor

If you cannot approach the offender or if you have tried to talk with the offender to no avail, your next step would be to report the situation to your supervisor. Perhaps the supervisor talking to the offender will make an impact.

Or, if the offender is under a different supervisor, perhaps the two supervisors can work together to resolve the problem.

Your Supervisor's Supervisor

If your supervisor is not available—or if your supervisor is the one engaging in the offensive behavior—then it is appropriate for you to skip to the next higher level in the chain of command and report the incident to your supervisor’s supervisor.

The HRSP

Many times, an HRSP can help address the problem. We look at the role and responsibilities of the HRSP in detail in the Role of the Human Resource Specialist topic later in this module.

The IC

The IC actually reports to the incident agency—the organizing unit responsible for the overall incident planning, logistics, and finance activities.

But, when it comes to what’s going on at any incident workplace, the IC is the top dog! Extreme cases of harassment or discrimination may at times need the involvement of the IC for resolution.

At some point, you may need to know where you can find guidance on conduct and behavior. This may serve as a refresher for you or to answer someone else’s question—especially if you work in a supervisory position.

The following resources will help answer some of your questions:

- Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide
- Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG)
- NWCG Standards for Interagency Incident Business Management (SIIBM)

The Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide has two sections of information relating to conduct and behavior:

- Inappropriate behavior
- Drugs and alcohol

Read through the sections to ensure you are able to answer basic questions including, what should you do if you observe inappropriate behavior? Focus on the following main points:

- Inform subordinates of their rights and responsibilities
- Provide support to the victim
- Develop corrective measures
- Report the incident to supervisor(s)
- Document the inappropriate behavior
- Report the incident to the individual’s home agency

The information relating to conduct and behavior in the Incident Response Pocket Guide—or IRPG—focuses more on appropriate behavior than inappropriate behavior.

Especially if you are a supervisor, the information in the IRPG can provide guidance and serve as a valuable on-the-job refresher in the areas of:

- Duty
- Respect

The only information specifically about conduct and behavior in the SIIBM, is a copy of the Incident Behavior form. Casual hires who are a single resource must sign a copy of this form before they can start work. The form has two versions—English and Spanish.

- The information on the form is almost identical to the sections in the Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide relating to conduct and behavior:
- Inappropriate behavior
- Drugs and alcohol

Locate the Incident Behavior form in your SIIBM at the end of Chapter 10, in the exhibits.

The incident command system (ICS) provides a chain of command to help manage situations when a problem surfaces involving the conduct or behavior of incident personnel.

Place the following individuals in the order to whom you would report observations of harassment or discrimination—starting with the first contact at the top of the order.

The offender

Your supervisor

Your supervisor's supervisor

The human resource specialist (HRSP)

The incident commander (IC)

In this topic, you had the opportunity to listen in and observe the conduct and behavior of a variety of incident personnel and situations.

The topic covered in detail:

- Expectations of all incident personnel
- Common conduct issues
- Off-duty conduct and behavior
- Supervisor responsibilities relating to conduct
- Consequences of misconduct
- Steps to report harassment and discrimination

In addition, you are now aware of resources available when you need to look for guidance on conduct and behavior in the future.

In this topic, we examine the impact of ethical conduct on the overall cost of an incident, including:

- How Executive Order 12674 affects government employees
- Ethical responsibilities while on incident assignment

What is ethics? Here's a basic definition:

Eth-ics ('e-thiks), n. 1. The discipline dealing with what is good and bad and moral duty and obligation. 2. The principles of conduct governing an individual or a group

Ethics in everyday terms boils down to, "will this pass the red face test?"

There is a government document in place called Executive Order 12674 serving as a guide to ethical behavior for all government officers and employees.

Executive Order 12674 in part says, you shall:

- Put forth honest effort in the performance of your duties
- Make no unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind obligating the government
- Disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities
- Use government-owned or leased vehicles, equipment, and property for official purposes only

In our world of incident business management, the order applies to casuals and federal government employees, but cooperators like state government employees are held to similar state statutes.

When you go on incident assignment, you have some very specific responsibilities relating to ethics as well.

And again, most of the requirements are in place because they affect the bottom line of how much the incident costs the government—and taxpayers.

The ethical decisions all incident personnel have to make on a daily basis affect the bottom line cost of an incident.

Identify **THREE** correct statements about incident personnel related to ethics and incident business management.

May use rental cars for personal use while off duty

May return equipment and supplies only at the end of their incident assignments

Must adhere to pay entitlement regulations and guidelines in the SIIBM

Must all strive to help meet the incident's property performance threshold

May never make commitments on behalf of the government without authorization

In this topic, you discovered the impact of ethics on the overall cost of an incident. The topic included:

- How Executive Order 12674 affects government employees
- Ethical responsibilities while on incident assignment

Keep in mind that upward reporting is **ALWAYS** important. Report accidents, property damage,

and instances of waste, fraud, or abuse immediately to a supervisor.

Finally, at the end of the day, can you still pass the red face test?

An incident management team is led by an incident commander (IC) and other command and general staff positions. The size of the incident dictates the size or complexity of the team. Large incidents—Type 1 and Type 2—can involve all of the positions, including another known as a human resource specialist (HRSP).

HRSPs normally either report directly to the IC or to the planning section chief. HRSPs also normally work at base camp. However, sometimes responsibilities require them to tour incident operations and other facilities.

Human resource specialists are the main point of contact for incident personnel to discuss issues relating to civil rights, conduct, and ethics.

Since human resource specialists are members of the incident management team and also the “go-to person” for incident personnel to discuss issues and concerns—the HRSPs can serve as a “go between” in many situations as well.

The main responsibilities of the HRSPs are to:

- Function within and work closely with the incident management team
- Establish and maintain effective work relationships with the incident agency, other agency representatives, and liaisons
- Provide a point of contact for incident personnel to discuss civil rights and other human resource concerns
- Receive reports of inappropriate behavior, verify them, and initiate corrective steps

Incident Management Team

Since members of the incident management team supervise many individuals and numerous types of incident personnel, the human resource specialist works closely with the command and general staff looking for general trends, themes, or concerns. Or—the HRSP can assist one on one, if a situation arises.

When necessary, the HRSP may communicate—on behalf of the incident management team—general information pertinent to all incident personnel either at the daily briefing or in the daily incident action plan.

Agencies and Liaisons

HRSPs communicate with various agencies and individuals on behalf of the incident management team. For example, HSRPs can interface with the incident agency about human resource related issues.

HSRPs also communicate with other representatives and liaisons—for example, with a spokesperson for an agency with multiple engine crews at an incident, or a union representative from the U.S. Forest Service on large incidents. Or, some state agencies assign a liaison to oversee human resource issues, such as pay entitlements.

Incident Personnel

In addition to matters concerning civil rights, conduct, and ethics—the HRSP can help with other human resource matters.

For example, if someone has something happen back home—e.g., a death in the family—the HRSP works closely with incident management folks to make the necessary arrangements for the person and the affected units. In effect, the HRSP serves as the advocate for the individual in order to help everyone through the process.

Responsibility to Investigate

When an HRSP receives a report of an incident involving inappropriate behavior or conduct, he or she must thoroughly investigate.

This means gathering the FACTS—not just hearsay. A human resource specialist cannot rely on just one person’s word. Done properly, the HRSP’s job is to get the whole story—the facts from all available viewpoints.

He or she also initiates steps to correct inappropriate acts or conditions through the proper authorities.

Identify THREE responsibilities of a human resource specialist.

Serves as the point of contact for incident personnel to discuss human resource issues

Reports directly to the finance/administration section chief

Verifies reports of inappropriate behavior

Maintains relationships with the incident management team, agencies, and liaisons

Serves as the union representative for the U.S. Forest Service

In this topic, we reviewed the role and responsibilities of a very important member of the incident management team—the human resource specialist.

Human resource specialists can be worth their weight in gold if you end up in a situation that is uncomfortable, inappropriate, or even downright wrong!

These specialists can even help you out with other more general human resource concerns. That’s their job—don’t hesitate to seek them out.