

Introduction to the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)

The Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) is a state-wide California system police officers, firefighters and other disaster responders use in disaster events. The primary goal of SEMS is to aid in communication and response by providing a common management system and language.

As a result of the 1991 East Bay Hills Fire in Oakland, a law was passed by the legislature to improve the coordination of state and local emergency response in California. The statute directed the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES), in coordination with other state agencies and interested local emergency management agencies, to establish by regulation the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). State agencies and local governments are required to use SEMS to participate in disasters.

The basic framework of SEMS incorporates the use of the Incident Command System (ICS) (developed under the Fire Fighting Resources of California Organized for Potential Emergencies (FIREScope) Program,) multi-agency or inter-agency coordination, the State's master mutual aid agreement and mutual aid program, the operational area concept and the Operational Area Satellite Information System (OASIS).

SEMS is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the varied emergencies that can occur in California, and to meet the emergency management needs of all responders. By law, state agencies must use SEMS when responding to emergencies involving multiple jurisdictions or multiple agencies. Local governments are strongly encouraged to use SEMS, and they must use SEMS in order to be eligible for state funding of certain response related personnel costs. While local governments are not required to take the State Approved Courses of Instruction on SEMS, they are required to maintain minimum training competencies in SEMS.

SEMS is a **management** system. It provides an organizational framework and acts as the umbrella under which all response agencies may function in an integrated fashion. Training is essential to the effective use of SEMS at all levels. The State has developed and provided an approved Course of Instruction that can be used at each of the five levels in SEMS. Agencies at all SEMS levels may use the Approved Course of Instruction developed by the State, or use an internal training program to meet required training competencies. Training competencies are described at each level of the State's training curriculum as performance objectives.

Common SEMS terms and definitions

In order to gain a better understanding of SEMS, and to allow you to more effectively use the system, it is important to be able to describe the following terms and know their relationships in SEMS.

Action plan: When a disaster occurs, a written or oral plan is drafted by the Planning Section with the Incident Commander which establishes goals and identifies the operational period.

After action report: A written report is submitted to the EOC within ninety days of a declared disaster that details your response and what you plan to do to improve it.

Command post: A physical location designated at the beginning of any disaster where the Incident Commander is stationed. Depending on conditions, the command post may be moved. Multiple incidents would have multiple command posts.

Demobilize: When specific personnel or equipment are no longer needed, they are returned to the original dispatch location.

Disaster Service Worker: All volunteers (including veterinarians) must be sworn in as disaster service workers BEFORE a disaster. Taking this oath affords them coverage if injured through the State Worker's Compensation Fund. It also allows for more protection than the Good Samaritan Act with respect to liability issues.

Emergency: A condition of disaster or extreme peril to the safety of persons or property. Emergencies can be small or large.

Emergency Operations Center: A location that monitors and coordinates the disaster response. EOC facilities are found at local governments, operational areas, regions and state.

Emergency response agency: Any organization responding to an emergency or providing mutual aid support to such an organization whether in the field, at the scene of an incident, or to the operations center.

Emergency response personnel: Personnel involved with an agency's response to an emergency.

Incident Commander (IC): This may be a local government official or the primary Veterinary Disaster Team Coordinator. If the primary Veterinary Disaster Team Coordinator has this designation, their duties are to organize and oversee the animal disaster response.

Incident Command System (ICS): A nationally used standardized on-scene emergency management system.

Liaison Officer: One person will be assigned to aid in the coordination of the response by being the point of contact for other agencies responding to an incident. The Liaison Officer reports directly to IC.

Memorandum Of Understanding: A written agreement between the Veterinary Disaster Team and other disaster responders must be signed prior to a response in a disaster to formalize the understanding that they will assist in the animal disaster response.

Mitigation: Before or after a disaster, there are actions that can be taken to reduce the impact of the event.

Multi-agency or inter-agency coordination: Agencies working together at any SEMS level to facilitate decisions.

Mutual Aid: Voluntary provision of services and facilities when existing resources prove to be inadequate. California mutual aid is based upon the State's Master Mutual Aid Agreement. There are several mutual aid systems included in the mutual aid program.

Operational Area: An intermediate level of the state emergency services organization consisting of a county and all political subdivisions within the county area.

Operational Period: In each action plan, there will be a period of time specified in which identified goals must be accomplished.

Operations Section Chief: If several agencies are working together in the same area, the Primary Veterinary Disaster Coordinator may direct this section of the Animal Response.

Public Information Officer (PIO): One person is designated to be the ONLY contact for the media to ensure that accurate information about the disaster response is released. Press releases are approved by the Incident Commander prior to release.

Span of control: To insure the most effective disaster response, the optimum number of people reporting to one supervisor is no more than five people and the maximum is seven people.

Triage: When there are many injuries, animals with the most life threatening injuries are treated first (if they have a good prognosis with treatment).

Levels of response using SEMS

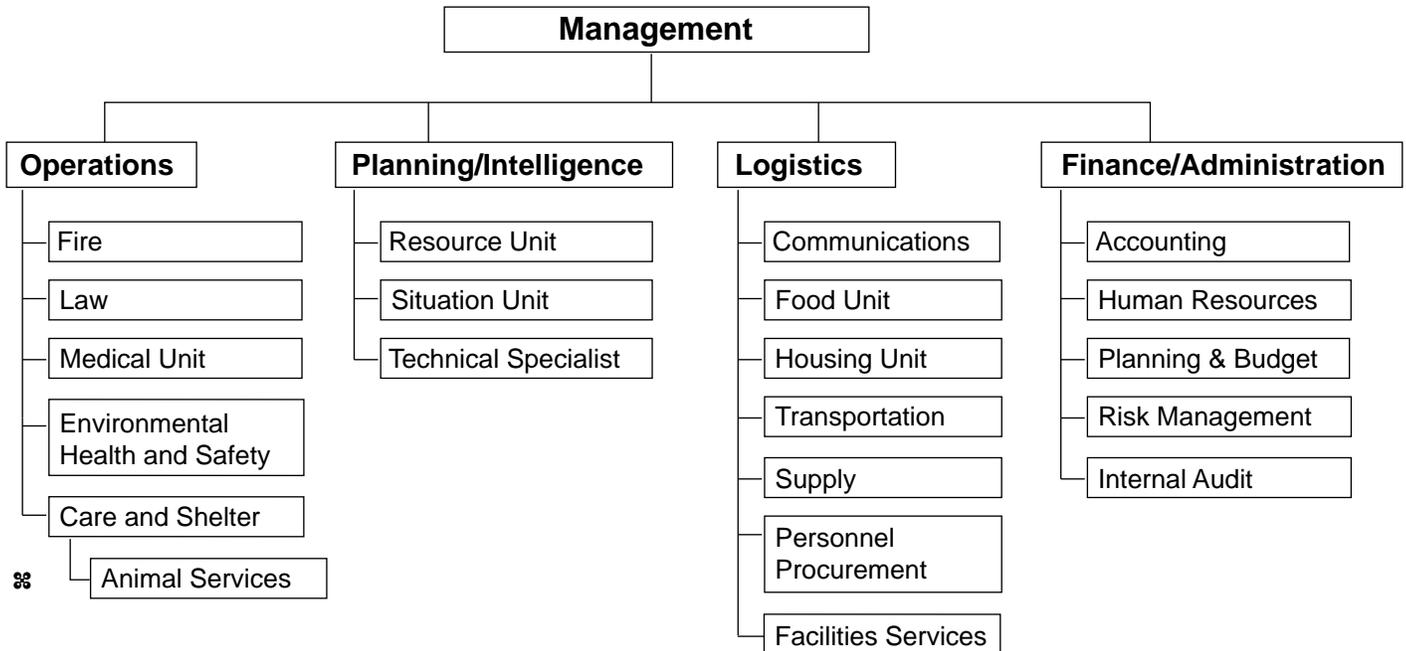
SEMS provides for a five level emergency response organization, activated as needed, to provide an effective response to multi-agency and multi-jurisdiction emergencies. SEMS allows the response to shrink and grow as the incident evolves. Only the levels needed to respond are activated. Each level utilizes the same Incident Command System.

1. Field level: commands emergency response personnel and resources to carry out tactical decisions and activities in direct response to an incident or threat.
2. Local level: manages and coordinates the overall emergency response and recovery activities within their jurisdiction.
3. Operational area level: manages and coordinates information, resources, and priorities among local governments and special districts within the operational area and serves as the coordination and communication link between the local governmental level and the regional level. An operational area is the geographical boundaries of a county.
4. Regional level: manages and coordinates information and resources among operational areas within the mutual aid region and between operational areas and the state level. This level along with the state level coordinates overall state agency support for emergency response activities.
5. State level: manages state resources in response to the emergency needs of the other levels, manages and coordinates mutual aid among the mutual aid regions and between the regional level and state level, and serves as the coordination and communication link with the federal disaster response system.

Why is it important to train our disaster team to use SEMS?

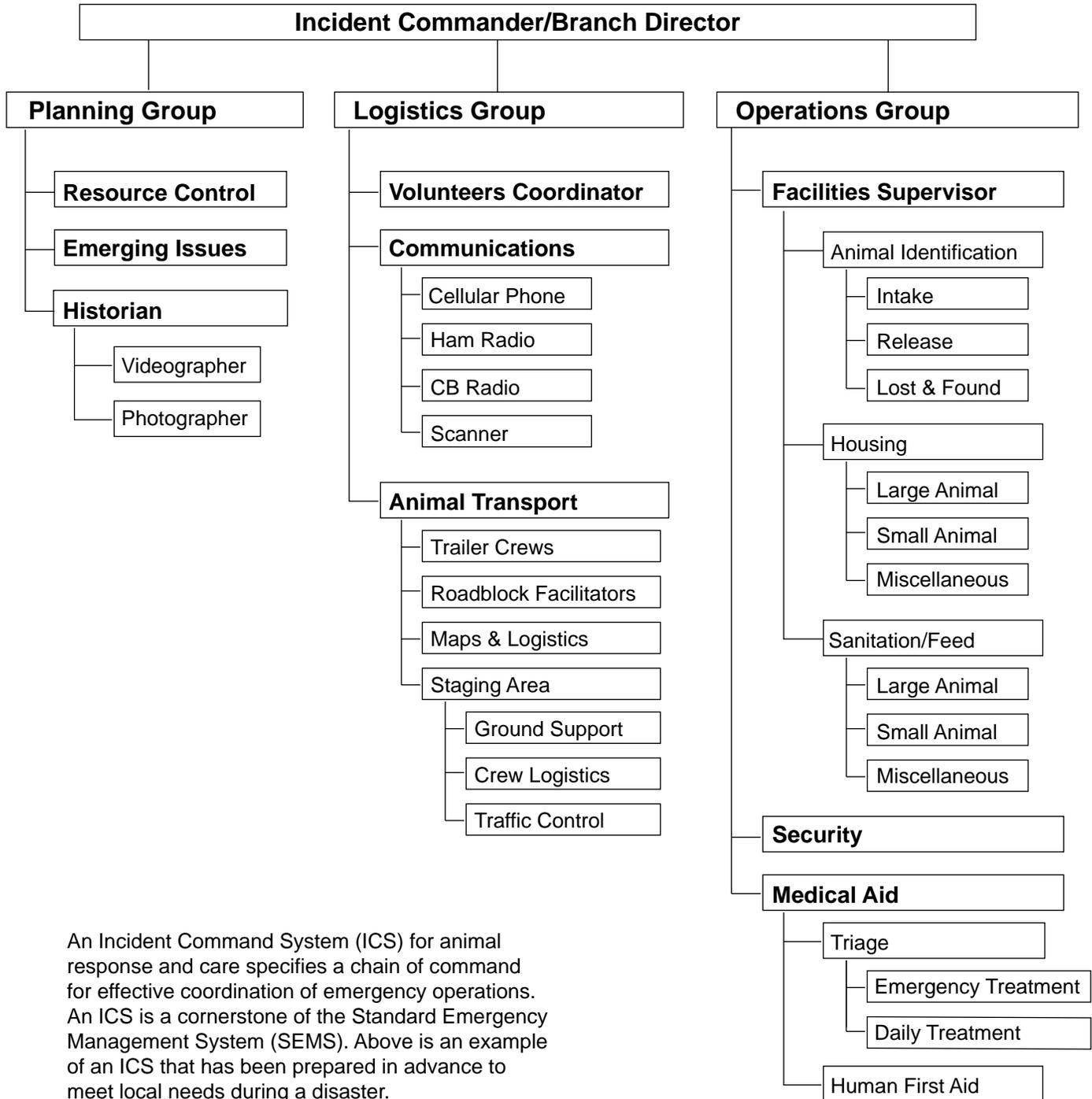
The number one reason to use SEMS is that it is required for disaster response. In addition, it provides the team with an effective way to communicate with other agencies. This allows the team to respond more quickly to disasters, to focus team resources where they are most effective, and to avoid duplication of efforts. It also helps the team understand state-wide organization and the team's role in these larger responses.

Standardized Emergency Management System in the Emergency Operations Center



The Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) provides the model for all levels of emergency operations—local, regional and statewide. During a disaster the SEMS serves as an "incident command system" (ICS) with a manager (the "incident commander") to coordinate leaders in each of four areas—operations, planning/intelligence, logistics and finance/administration—through a definite chain of command. The ICS is set up in an Emergency Operations Center, where the leaders of each unit can be present at a single site in order to quickly facilitate communication and coordinate the response. If a need exists, for instance, at the local level, the person in charge of filling that particular need may contact the person who serves in a parallel position at the regional level—that person may be able to access resources located elsewhere. The Animal Services Coordinator (☞) is a veterinarian, animal control officer or other knowledgeable person trained in disaster response, animal care and animal rescue.

Animal Services Branch



An Incident Command System (ICS) for animal response and care specifies a chain of command for effective coordination of emergency operations. An ICS is a cornerstone of the Standard Emergency Management System (SEMS). Above is an example of an ICS that has been prepared in advance to meet local needs during a disaster.

SEMS in action

The key to SEMS power and the ICS is the system's ability to shrink or grow as the incident demands. In a small disaster, the Incident Commander may fill all ICS roles. As the size of the disaster increases, (s)he may activate committees, officers and other team members to fill team's needs. Each time the number of people working under one supervisor exceeds 5, that person can create another level of supervision to maintain the optimum ratio. This process is simply reversed as team needs decline. By dynamically controlling team structure and size, optimum communication can be maintained with a minimum of confusion or redundancy. Please review the following examples.

The Veterinary Disaster Team receives an activation call from the local OES:

1. There has been damage to a house on the edge of town and help is needed caring for the owner's two dogs and one cat until the owner can return to his house. The Veterinary Coordinator would be the IC and would probably need little help locating boarding facilities or a foster home for the animals.
2. A fire involving a large apartment complex and several blocks of houses has left 20 cats and dogs injured and in need of medical attention and housing. In this case, the OES officer would be the IC. The Veterinary Coordinator would be acting under Animal Control, who would be acting under the IC. The VC would need to activate the small animal response coordinator, the supply committee, and the volunteer coordinator. The VC would brief these coordinators on the situation, and they would in turn activate other team members as necessary to provide for the immediate response and the housing needs of the injured animals.
3. A levee unexpectedly gave way, flooding an entire town and forcing most of the residents to evacuate without their animals. The area is under a stage 2 roadblock and a significant number of small and large animals are stranded in the water. As in #2, the VC would be working under the Animal Control arm of the ICS. This case would require activation of both the large and small animal response coordinators, all committee members, the public information officer and probably all team members. By having volunteers respond to the volunteer coordinator, who then works with the response coordinators under the supervision of the VC, the team can efficiently and rapidly mobilize and begin addressing animal needs.

Role of the primary veterinary coordinator before a disaster

The Veterinary Coordinator has a number of responsibilities assigned by the CVMA. You are designated to complete the county guide and send a copy of completed guide to CVMA and to the Disaster Response Committee of the local VMA. CVMA will keep one copy for backup reference and will reproduce copies for the Coordinator to distribute to the appropriate agency contacts.

The Coordinator must select at least one Assistant Coordinator to serve as resource contact in the event that the Coordinator is unavailable and to aid the coordinator in the event of a major disaster. Both the Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator must be available at all times to respond to disasters either by phone or pager.

The Coordinator serves on the Disaster Response Committee of the local VMA. The Coordinator and alternates should attend appropriate media training provided by CVMA. It is also recommended that the Veterinary Coordinator join the disaster committee for their local American Red Cross chapter, and the VC should work closely with the American Humane Association, which has extensive experience in disaster planning.