

FLORIDA GOVERNOR'S HURRICANE CONFERENCE

A Twenty-Year Look at the National Incident Management System and the EOC

Lessons from Florida's Hurricane Responses, 2004–2024

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Workshop Session · 60–75 minutes





Many of you helped build this profession.

If you were on a SERT team in 2004, on the ground in Mississippi after Katrina, in the State EOC for Wilma or Irma, or running Branch Ops during Ian or Helene — **this presentation is as much yours as it is mine.**

The goal today isn't to teach NIMS — it's to look back at twenty years of real-world activations together, agree on what we got right, name what still strains under load, and talk honestly about where the profession needs to go next.



LOOK BACK

Honestly. The good and the hard.



LOOK AROUND

Where the doctrine sits today.



LOOK FORWARD

What the next 20 years demand.



Where we're going today.

1 Origins How NIMS was born.	2 Katrina Florida's largest mission ever.	3 20-Year Timeline The storms that shaped us.	4 Doctrine How NIMS matured.	5 The EOC ICP vs. EOC, models, hybrid.	6 Lessons Wins, strains, themes.	7 Next 20 Years Where we go from here.
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Plenty of room for stories from the floor — please jump in.

PART ONE

Origins

How a directive in 2003 became the operating system of American emergency management.



A patchwork of systems.



ICS was a fire-service tool

Born from FIRESCOPE in 1970s California after the Laguna Fire and other massive wildfires.

Fire services adopted ICS broadly. Law enforcement, public works, and public health did not.

Different agencies. Different terminology. Different command structures.



Hurricane Andrew, 1992

The cost of fragmentation, made visible.

Federal, state, and local responders arrived in South Florida with different command structures, different vocabularies, and no shared planning cycle.

The lessons were studied. They were not codified. Yet.



February 28, 2003. The system gets a name.

2003

HSPD-5 signed

First NIMS document released March 1, 2004.

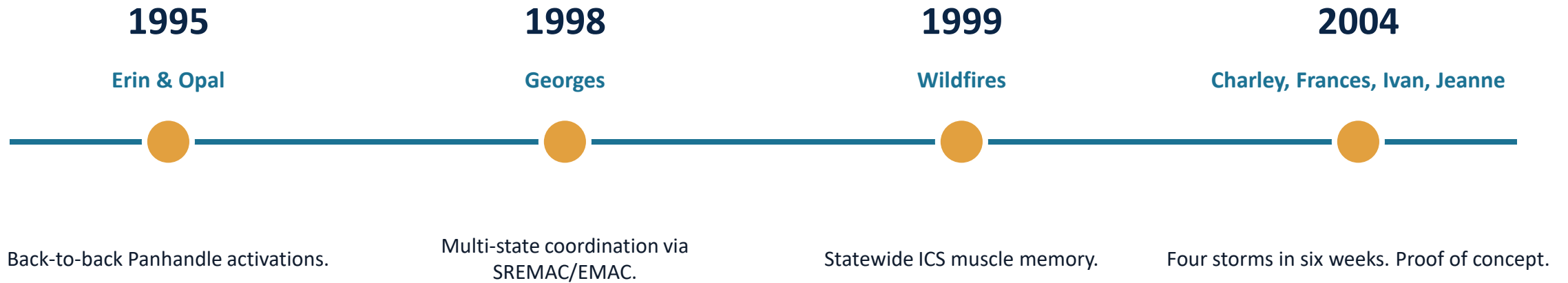
HSPD-5 did three things that still drive the profession today:

- 1 Federal mandate**
All federal departments and agencies required to adopt NIMS.
- 2 Grant funding leverage**
State, local, tribal, and territorial NIMS adoption tied to federal preparedness grants. Compliance became non-negotiable.
- 3 Companion framework**
Mandated the National Response Plan — later the National Response Framework — to sit alongside NIMS.



Already running the playbook.

By the time NIMS arrived, Florida had been refining ESF-based unified command for nearly a decade.



FCO Bill Carwile and SCO Craig Fugate ran the 2004 season as a unified state-federal team — a model of NIMS Unified Command before the doctrine had finished drying.

PART TWO

Katrina, 2005

Florida's largest state-to-state mission in history. NIMS's first national stress test.



Katrina's Florida footprint, then catastrophe.

AUG 23	AUG 25	AUG 28	AUG 29
Tropical depression forms near the Bahamas.	Crosses South Florida as a Cat 1. 14 deaths, \$623M FL damage.	Rapid intensification over the Gulf to Cat 5.	Catastrophic landfall. MS coast devastated. NOLA levees breached.

1,800+ deaths across the Gulf	\$125B in damages	47 MS counties declared	Cat 5 peak Gulf intensity
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The largest state-to-state mission in U.S. history.

Within hours of landfall, Governor Bush pledged Florida's full support to Governor Barbour. Resources moved through EMAC.

3,052

Florida responders committed

44

EMAC mission requests completed

\$67.8M

in aid to neighboring states

Many of you in this room were on those teams. Some of you ran them.



Who went, when, where.

Resource	Destination	Personnel	Deployed
Task Force I (NE Florida)	Harrison County, MS	14	8/30/05
Tampa Bay Incident Mgmt Team	Hancock County, MS	12	8/30/05
Florida SERT IMT	Mississippi	29	8/30/05
Search & Rescue Assets	Mississippi	295	8/30/05
Two Water Teams	Mississippi	41	8/30/05
Bridge Recovery Team	Louisiana	6	9/2/05
Mutual Aid Radio Cache Unit	Mississippi	5	8/30/05
FL Dept. of Forestry — Blue Team	Mississippi	37	8/30/05

Source: Florida State EOC Situation Report #20, August 30 – September 3, 2005.



Three findings that shaped the next decade.

01

Tactical ICS held. The seams did not.

Field-level Divisions, Branches, and Task Forces performed. The breakdowns were between state EOCs, between state and federal, and between civilian and military commands.

02

EMAC was the unsung hero — and showed its limits.

Within 36 hours of landfall, 6,335 personnel were on the ground. But resource typing was inconsistent, credentialing uneven, and reimbursement paperwork nearly buried the assisting states.

03

Documentation was a disaster of its own.

ICS 214s missing. Resource orders without audit trails. Reimbursement requests built from memory. This single issue would echo through every Florida response that followed.

PART THREE

Twenty Years, Sixteen Storms

Each one taught the system something. Florida wrote the lessons.



Eight storms in 14 months.

CHARLEY 2004 Cat 4 · Punta Gorda Track shift exposed warning/EOC info-flow gaps.	FRANCES 2004 Cat 2 · Sewall's Point Op-period rotation discipline first formalized.	IVAN 2004 Cat 3 · AL / FL Pan. Multi-state Unified Command stress test.	JEANNE 2004 Cat 3 · Stuart Demob → reset → re-activate cycle codified.
DENNIS 2005 Cat 3 · Santa Rosa Is. EOC stand-up muscle memory tested early.	KATRINA 2005 Cat 1 · Miami-Dade Largest EMAC mission ever for FL.	WILMA 2005 Cat 3 · Cape Romano 1M+ evacuated. POD logistics restructured.	



After eleven quiet years, the storms came back.

HERMINE 2016 Cat 1 · Big Bend First FL landfall in 11 years.	MATTHEW 2016 Cat 3 · Offshore E. Mature pre-landfall coordination cadence.	IRMA 2017 Cat 4 · Cudjoe Key Statewide impact. Every county activated.	MICHAEL 2018 Cat 5 · Mexico Beach First Cat 5 in CONUS since Andrew.
IAN 2022 Cat 4 · Cayo Costa Costliest storm in FL history.	IDALIA 2023 Cat 3 · Keaton Beach Pre-staging doctrine matured.	HELENE 2024 Cat 4 · Big Bend FL → GA, NC, TN cascading mission.	MILTON 2024 Cat 3 · Siesta Key Two-storm overlap with Helene recovery.

PART FOUR

Doctrine Evolution

How NIMS matured 2004 → 2025 — and how Florida's hands are on every page.

Post-Katrina corrections.

2008

First major NIMS update

Three years after Katrina exposed the seams, FEMA published the corrections.



Multi-Agency Coordination System (MACS)

Strengthened language clarifying EOC vs. ICP roles.



Credentialing & Resource Typing

Clearer standards for what 'a Type 2 Hand Crew' actually means.



Local-First Principle

Reinforced: all incidents begin and end locally.



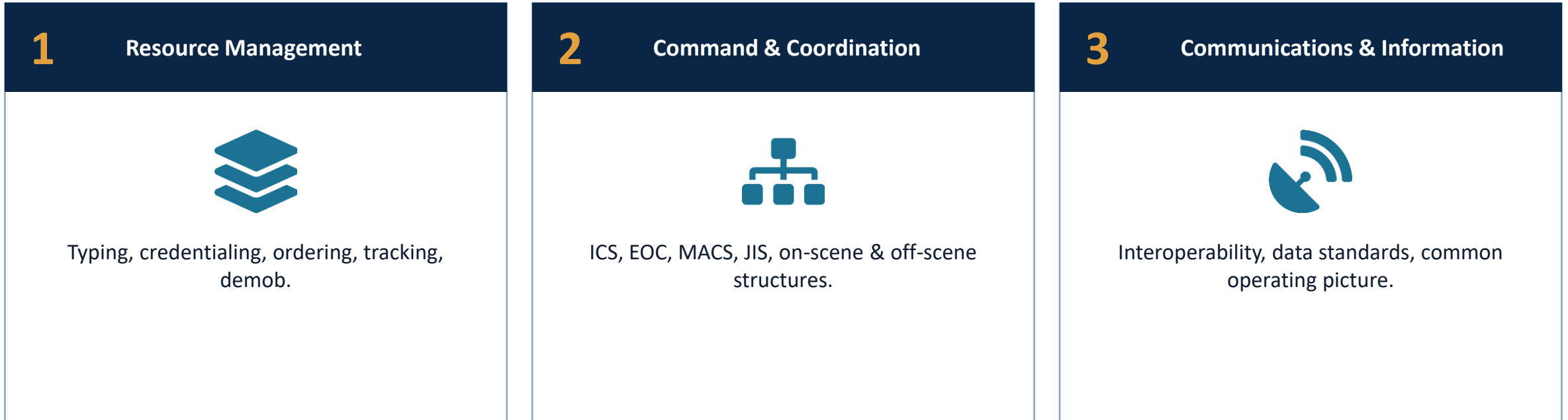
Joint Information System / JIC

Codified public information coordination structure.



The modern framework.

Reorganized NIMS into three components — and finally drew a clear line between the ICP and the EOC.



Most importantly: the EOC is finally treated as a peer to the ICP — interoperable, not duplicative — with three accepted organizational models.



Field-tested here. Written into doctrine later.



Hybrid ESF + ICS EOC structure

Florida ran this from the 1990s. NIMS validated it nationally in 2017.



Pre-landfall IMT deployments under EMAC

A-Teams in place before landfall — pioneered in the 2004–2005 cycle.



Forward SERT / Area Command in impacted areas

What NIMS now calls 'Area Command' — Florida has done it for thirty years.



Logistics staging area doctrine

Refined through Charley, Wilma, Irma, and Michael.

If you've worked a SERT activation, an EMAC mission, or a state-level ESF desk — your work is in this doctrine.

PART FIVE

NIMS in the EOC

Three models, one Florida hybrid, and the ICP/EOC line.



Different jobs. Same doctrine.

ICP — Incident Command Post

Manages the tactical response at the scene.

- Operations Section runs the field.
- Planning Section runs the IAP cycle.
- Logistics gets resources into the fight.
- Finance/Admin tracks cost and time.

EOC — Emergency Operations Center

Manages the support to multiple incidents across a jurisdiction.

- Resource ordering across the whole event.
- Multi-agency policy coordination.
- Public information and JIC operations.
- Continuity of government and operations.

Interoperable. Not duplicative.



NIMS doesn't pick one. Pick what fits.

ICS-Based

EOC mirrors ICS structure — Operations, Planning, Logistics, Finance/Admin sections.

STRENGTH

Familiar to fire/LE leadership. Strong tactical coordination.

WATCH-OUT

Can struggle when policy and political dimensions dominate.

ESF-Based

EOC organized around Emergency Support Functions — ESF-1, ESF-2, ESF-8, etc.

STRENGTH

Strong inter-agency coordination at state level. Florida's traditional model.

WATCH-OUT

Requires translation when interfacing with field-level ICS.

Incident Support Model (ISM)

Separates situational awareness/planning from resource support functions.

STRENGTH

Designed for EOCs supporting many field incidents simultaneously.

WATCH-OUT

Newer model — less institutional muscle memory across the workforce.

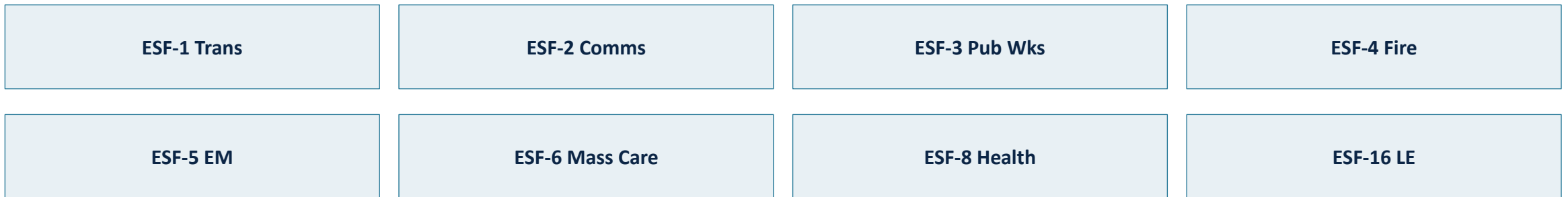


What we actually run on the floor.

ICS GENERAL STAFF



ESF DESKS



WHY IT WORKS

ESF-based desks preserve our deep inter-agency muscle memory. ICS-style General Staff sits on top to satisfy NIMS interoperability and produce the documentation FEMA needs for reimbursement — when it's done well.

PART SIX

Lessons Learned

Twenty years of activations. The honest scorecard.



The wins are real. Don't take them for granted.



Common terminology saves lives



When FL Task Force 8 deploys to NC, they walk into a structure they recognize. That wasn't true in 1992.



Resource typing works



Typed resources move faster, integrate faster, and reimburse faster.



Unified Command scales



From a multi-vehicle accident to a Cat 5 landfall, the structure holds.








EMAC is strategic



When activated early and worked well, it delivers surge capacity no single state can self-generate.



If we won't say it here, where will we?

	Documentation under load is still mostly manual	ICS 214s in trucks, in the dark. Some never make it back.
	The IAP cycle assumes time we don't have	By the time the next IAP is built, the situation has changed.
	Resource ordering > resource tracking	We move people fast. Knowing where they are is harder.
	Demob and reimbursement are under-resourced	The work doesn't stop when the storm leaves. Reimbursement is won or lost in the paperwork — sometimes years later.
	The bench is thin	The 2004–2005 generation is retiring. Doctrine without people doesn't run.



The same lessons. Every storm.

- 1 Pre-landfall posture matters more than post-landfall heroics.
- 2 The first 72 hours are won or lost in logistics.
- 3 Public information runs alongside operations now — not downstream of them.
- 4 Recovery and reimbursement preparation begin in activation, not at demob.
- 5 Every storm produces an AAR. Few jurisdictions actually exercise against it.

If the room nods at all five — that's our agenda for the next twenty years.






PART SEVEN

Where We Go From Here

The next twenty years will be defined less by the doctrine and more by how we operationalize it.



The next decade's work, named.

- 01**  **Real-Time Digital ICS Documentation**
ICS 214s, unit logs, and resource lists generated from operations as they happen — not reconstructed weeks later.
- 02**  **Integrated FEMA Reimbursement**
Reimbursement readiness as a real-time byproduct of EOC operations — not a six-month post-event scramble.
- 03**  **EOC ↔ Field ICS Interoperability**
Shared common operating picture, shared resource status, without forcing one structure onto the other.
- 04**  **The Workforce Pipeline**
Twenty years of NIMS built doctrine. The next twenty have to build the people who live it.
- 05**  **Concurrent & Compounding Events**
Helene + Milton showed us what's coming. Doctrine has to support response and recovery posture simultaneously.



Mature doctrine. Tooling that hasn't kept up.

NIMS at twenty is mature, battle-tested, and earned every page through real-world activations — many of them led from this state.

It is also a system that reflects the technology and assumptions of when it was written. The opportunity now is to modernize the tooling around the doctrine — so the next generation spends less time on documentation and more time on the work documentation is supposed to enable.

Florida wrote the first chapter. Florida should write the next one too.



Your turn.



Which storm taught your jurisdiction the most? What changed because of it?



Where do you feel the system strain most often — documentation, the IAP cycle, demob, the bench?



What's one investment we should make in the next five years that would matter most for the next twenty?

Thank you.

To everyone in this room who built this profession — thank you.

Marty Senterfitt

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