

---

# Unit 4: Information Gathering

STUDENT GUIDE

---

---

---

**Objectives**

---

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Describe how to gather, organize, and communicate information necessary to perform as an Operations Section Chief
- Explain the importance of gathering accurate, usable, and timely information
- Describe sources and methods for gathering information (e.g., briefings, ICS forms)
- Describe how information is vetted, organized, and communicated in the Incident Commander Briefing

**Methodology**

---

This unit uses lecture, handouts, and discussion.

Students will be tested on this unit's content through the administration of Quiz 1 (to be administered upon completion of Unit 7). Knowledge of unit content will also be evaluated through the administration of the Final Exam (to be administered upon completion of the course).

**Time Plan**

---

A suggested time plan for this unit is shown below. More or less time may be required based on the experience level of the group.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Time</b>
Lesson	1 hour
<b>Total Time</b>	1 hour

## Topic

Unit Title Slide

---

**Key Points**

---

**Scope Statement**

Through this unit, students will learn the significance of information gathering, organization, and communication to their success as an Operations Section Chief. Sources of information (e.g., the Agency Administrator Briefing, Initial Response Incident Commander Debriefing, Technical Specialists) will be identified and described in detail. The Incident Commander Briefing, one of the most important steps in information gathering as an Operations Section Chief, will also be explained.

**Topic** Unit Objectives

---

**Unit Terminal Objective**

---

**Describe how to gather, organize, and communicate information necessary to perform as an Operations Section Chief.**

**Key Points**

---

**Unit Terminal Objective**

Describe how to gather, organize, and communicate the information necessary to perform as an Operations Section Chief.

- Explain the importance of gathering accurate, usable, and timely information
- Describe sources and methods for gathering information (e.g., briefings, ICS forms)
- Describe how information is vetted, organized, and communicated in the Incident Commander Briefing

It is important that the Operations Section Chief gather all available information. There are numerous sources of information available to assist the Operations Section Chief in developing a mental picture of an escalating incident. Having the best information available will enable the Operations Section Chief to organize a successful Tactical Plan.

**Topic** Information Gathering

### Information Gathering

- Develop a mental picture
- Current incident conditions
- Plan of action
- Consider resources
- Plan ahead
- Information flow



Unit 4:  
Information Gathering

Visual 4-3

**Key Points**

If the Operations Section Chief's job is to translate objectives into tactics, they need to predicate decision making on information. A major component of the Operations Section Chief's position is knowing where and how to seek out the necessary information, as well as synthesizing it in a mental picture. For example, if you are traveling outside your home area, it's a good idea to take the "temperature" of the area, getting information on the influence of the different agencies, political issues, local attitudes, and so forth.

Information on current incident conditions can come from the radio, newspapers, or internal sources such as local responders.

Maintain the information flow between you and your subordinates. This can be accomplished through briefings, debriefings, face-to-face meetings in the field, and so forth. If they interact with citizens, your subordinates will be the public face of the organization. If so, consider presenting information strategically.

Empower Division/Group Supervisors with the authority to complete their assignments and consider them a valuable source of information. Communicate the need to report back with updates.

As an Operations Section Chief, you're responsible for sending Division/Group Supervisors (DIVS) into the field on assignment. Be sure to communicate your expectation that the DIVS: (1) return with useful intelligence for a debriefing; and (2) can vet information for relevance and accuracy.

## Topic

## Sources of Information

**Sources of Information**

- Agency Administrator Briefing becomes your marching orders
- Incident Commander is responsible and reports to Agency Administrator



Unit 4:  
Information Gathering

Visual 4-4

**Key Points**

The Incident Commander is assigned by the Agency Administrator to manage the incident. The Agency Administrator therefore sets the overarching parameters and priorities. The Agency Administrator Briefing will probably be a high-level discussion of overall Incident Objectives. Although most of the briefing will target the Incident Commander (not the Operations Section Chief), information about local conditions (such as ecological details in a HAZMAT cleanup or political pressures) will affect operations.

The Incident Briefing Form (ICS Form 201) is a way to ensure that nothing is forgotten. It is a summary of current actions and a place to record oral orders, which is especially important when you are using local governmental resources. The Incident Briefing Form is also useful because the two segments (the inventory of the current situation and the resource ledger) can be pulled apart. The first part can go to the Planning Section for use by the Situation Unit. The second part can go to the Resource Unit.

Be aware that written plans may be available for public scrutiny under the Freedom of Information Act.

**Topic** Sources of Information (cont.)

**Sources of Information (cont.)**

**Debrief the Initial Response Incident Commander:**

- Be sensitive
- Concise briefing
- Understand Incident Objectives
- ICS Form 201



Unit 4:  
Information Gathering

Visual 4-5

**Key Points**

When debriefing of the Initial Response Incident Commander (IRIC) or the current team:

- Be aware of the situation. The IRIC/Team may be tired, rushed, or resentful. Treat them with respect and be sensitive to the situation and you will receive the full benefit of their knowledge and experience.
- Make the debriefing as concise as possible. Discuss the history of the incident.
- Get a good briefing and understanding of Incident Objectives (strategy).
- The IRIC may provide the Operations Section Chief with a completed ICS Form 201.

**Topic** Sources of Information (cont.)

**Sources of Information (cont.)**

- Technical Specialists
- Delegation of Authority
- Complexity Analysis
- Agency Administrator's Staff



Unit 4:  
Information Gathering

Visual 4-6

**Key Points****Discussion**

Discuss the use of Incident Transition Forms, including the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA). The WFSA is a decision process that employs a systematic and reasonable approach to determine the most appropriate strategy for a particular situation.

- During this process reasonable suppression alternatives are identified, analyzed, and evaluated
  - Alternatives must be consistent with the expected probability of success and the consequences of failure
- The Agency Administrator evaluates and approves the WFSA and any revisions
  - Evaluation criteria includes the anticipated suppression costs; resource impacts; and environmental, social, and political considerations
  - The evaluation of alternatives must identify the point at which the failure of the alternative is imminent

**Topic** Incident Commander Briefing

---

**Incident Commander Briefing**

---

- Incident Commander sets incident priorities
- Identifies deficiencies in incident intelligence
- Sets timeframes for meetings
- Sets broad strategic objectives
- Establishes operational period
- Makes special assignments

Unit 4:  
Information Gathering

Visual 4-7

**Key Points**

---

In setting the incident priorities, the Incident Commander may identify holes in intelligence. You can fill them by: (1) asking out-going Operations Section Chiefs or Incident Commanders; (2) getting information from returning responders; or (3) getting information from other sources, such as Local Administrators or Technical Specialists.

The Incident Commander will:

- Set immediate priorities
- Identify deficiencies in incident intelligence
- Set timeframes for meetings
- Set broad strategic objectives
- Establish the operational period
- Make special assignments

**Topic** Sources of Information (cont.)

---

**Sources of Information (cont.)**

---

**Operations Section Chief must know:**

- **Current and projected situation status**
- **Current and projected resource status**

**These elements are critical for developing  
Tactical Plans.**

Unit 4:  
Information Gathering Visual 4-8

**Key Points**

---

At all times, the Operations Section Chief must know the current and projected:

- Situation status
- Resource status

These elements of situation and resource status should become a mental checklist for Operations Section Chiefs:

- They will constantly use these elements in developing Tactical Plans for the IAP
- Operations Section Chiefs will find these elements very helpful when debriefing Branch Directors and Division/Group Supervisors or when gathering intelligence for building future Tactical Plans

**Topic** Sources of Information (cont.)

---

**Sources of Information (cont.)**

---

- Local agency representatives
- Line personnel and field observers
- Ground and aerial reconnaissance
- Briefing from other functions



Unit 4:  
Information Gathering

Visual 4-9

**Key Points**

---

A Local Administrator may want to have a presence (or a delegate) within the IMT.

Logistics will tell you practical obstacles to tactics and Finance/Administration will tell you whether your tactics are doable under reimbursement procedures and so forth. All of this information should shape the operational strategies.

### Objectives Review

---

1. *Why is it important to gather accurate, usable, and timely information?*
2. *What are the sources and methods for gathering information?*
3. *How is information vetted, organized, and communicated in an Incident Commander Briefing?*

Unit 4: Information Gathering Visual 4-10

## Key Points

---

### Unit Terminal Objective

Describe how to gather, organize, and communicate the information necessary to perform as an Operations Section Chief.

Continue to review the Enabling Objectives for this unit to ensure that the class has obtained the knowledge necessary to successfully meet the Unit Terminal Objective.

### Unit Enabling Objectives

- Explain the importance of gathering accurate, useable, and timely information
- Describe sources and methods for gathering information (e.g., briefings, ICS forms)
- Describe how information is vetted, organized, and communicated in the Incident Commander Briefing