

# Virtual Incident Management System Guide



*Oil Spill Response*

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page, consisting of three wavy lines in shades of blue and green, similar to the logo, set against a light grey background.

---

---

## Virtual IMS – An Introduction

This Virtual Incident Management System (IMS) Guide is an addendum to the OSRL Incident Management Handbook (IMH Add). It is primarily aimed at Incident Management Team (IMT) members, Senior Managers and Responders who have a role that supports the IMT, during a period where there is a need to manage an incident 'virtually' from various locations rather than a dedicated Incident Command Post (ICP).

IMS, as a process, is proven and will not change in a virtual environment, but a team working remotely will need to rely on, and have confidence in, the process for it to be successful; the exchange of information both formally and informally needs to be managed meticulously with clear meeting schedules and agendas, this would be aided by everyone being fully aware of and familiar with their role.

This addendum does not supersede the original IMH but is designed to supplement by providing additional guidance, taking into consideration the additional needs of the response, the virtual ICP and differences in working modes. This addendum will also introduce another factor in emergency management – Managing Under Pressure – which may be greater, but LESS evident when working from a remote location. Visual clues of team members feeling stressed or pressured are much harder to spot over a team call than when there is physical interaction, this together with unfamiliar tools and IT infrastructure issues may hinder working practices.

The typical IMT member roles within the ICP will remain consistent with a physical ICP. However, the team will need additional support to be able to work remotely, including but not limited to ability to conduct meetings (either formal meetings as per the Planning Schedule and informal meetings within their own working group), and share information on screen, verbally, or by files or folders simulating a Common Operating Picture (COP). Additional roles may be necessary which will be covered in this Virtual IMS Guide.

As the planning process does not change, teams will need to adapt to working together remotely. The planning process will follow a defined schedule, driven by agreed agendas, and supported with the relevant documentation; groups may have to spend longer periods in formal/informal meetings, where everyone works together on necessary tasks to enable the dissemination of information and documents to the rest of the IMT. It is therefore recommended to designate a decision maker in each of the meetings to ensure better-defined outputs. This could result in the process taking longer than usual, perhaps initially – this will be reflected in the schedule. As people become familiar with the modified method of working, they will become more fluent with the process. A guide on communication procedures will also be covered in this Virtual IMS Guide.

Information management is essential to ensure the right information is always available to the IMT; this becomes even more challenging with the nature of remote working. Central to the planning process is the Incident Action Plan (IAP), which needs to be consolidated, managed, and reviewed/endorsed by the IMT. Generally, a 'hard-copy' IAP is required in larger, more complex incidents; however, this may be impractical when working remotely – hence, the need to produce a 'soft-copy' IAP that can be produced and disseminated securely. It becomes important that a comprehensive documentation plan be developed to document and control the dissemination of a large volume of potentially sensitive materials. A guide on managing information whilst working remotely is also available in this Virtual IMS Guide.

Disseminating the IAP from the ICP to the Field teams will also need to be conducted remotely. Field supervisors will need to be allowed additional time from when they receive the IAP to the Operational Brief, so that they can formulate questions which can be addressed. It is prudent to minimise the number of people involved in the briefing, to those crucial to the expected operations and the field supervisors; it will not be easy to manage too many staff members at the briefing, which should be concise and convey specific taskings.

---

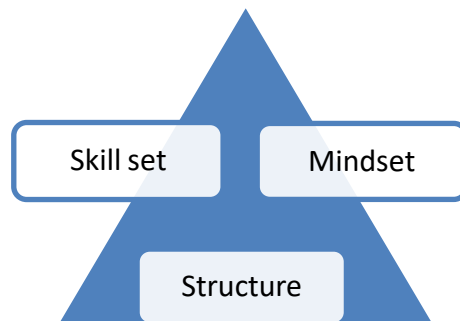
---

## Introducing the Incident Management Triangle

During an incident, everyone wants to perform to their best and deliver results. To aid this, it is useful to consider 'performance' on an incident from 3 perspectives:

1. Structures – how well do the critical systems enable an incident to be managed efficiently? For example, did people adhere to, and use the Incident Management System, or did the IT system hold up?
2. Skills set – how did each person perform in their roles in terms of specific skills set and level of technical knowledge required?
3. Mindset – did personnel stay on task when the pressure was on? Did they seek information, consider options and remain calm when making decisions?

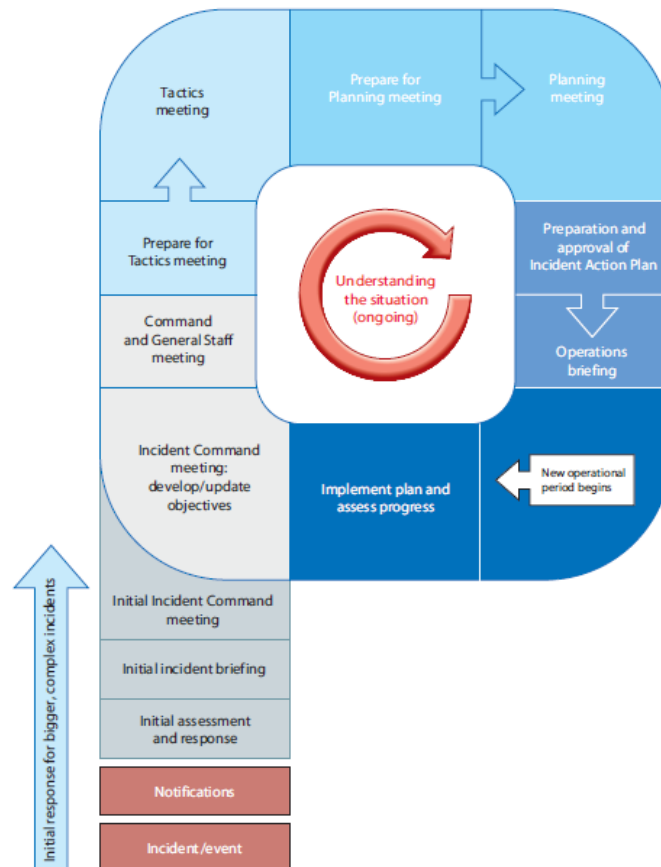
The three areas above help with clarity, problem solving and adaptation under pressure – all these factors are important. Broadening your diagnosis around performance helps you improve how you perform during the execution of incident management in a virtual setting.



**Figure 1 The Incident Management Triangle**

### Structure

The Structure includes tangible and non-tangible elements that allow the IMS to be executed efficiently. The main framework remains the planning process, also known as the Planning P, with other elements in place as replacement or addition to the normal/non-virtual IMS practice.



**Figure 2 Planning P**

### Platforms for Virtual Incident Command Post (ICP)

The platform (software/computer programme) shall serve as the virtual ICP where people come together, and information is shared. There are many different platforms that offer virtual meetings and mechanism to share information; it is ultimately up to the Operator which platforms suits the needs of the business. An example of a readily available platform which can combine both meetings and information management functions is *Microsoft Teams*. Other platforms that are widely available for meetings and live information sharing include: *Zoom, Skype, EzMeetings, FastMeeting, ReadyTalk, GoToTraining*. These platforms do not necessarily offer the capacity for information management, however, and as such, may require the combined use of other platforms such as electronic IMS forms/apps, Microsoft OneNote, SharePoint or other Cloud drives to attain the function.

When deciding on a platform, there are some considerations to be made:

1. Number of users.
2. Ability to share materials securely – share screen, cross platform, etc.
3. An instant communication function (e.g., chat).
4. Separate meeting rooms/Breakout rooms.
5. IT security across the business.
6. Platform intuitiveness.
7. Ability to share information with external agencies (secure invite & access).
8. Possible use of multiple platforms due to other agencies security protocols (compatibility).

---

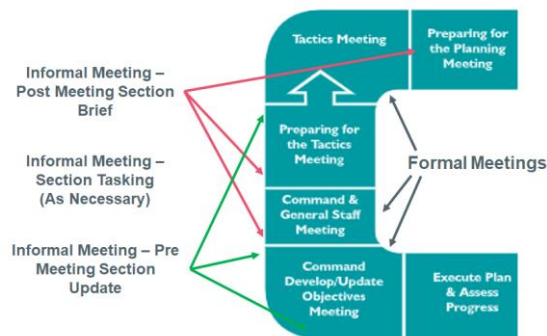
---

## Communication Procedures (Formal/Informal Communications)

Formal communications will continue as if a formal ICP is established. This will require positions in the IMT having the access to the relevant documentation, as necessary. Informal communication will need to be conducted through a suitable platform that can manage multiple concurrent conversations and meetings that could be recorded. If the platform used has the capability to enable several 'breakout' rooms for meetings, this needs to be managed to avoid conflicts. In a large ICP with many staff all competing for meeting space, it will be even harder to deconflict, therefore. It would be advantageous to have someone (or a team, dependant on the size of the ICP) to manage and organise the meeting schedules and allocate breakout rooms for the whole team.

### Planning Process

In addition to the prescribed meetings in the planning process to collate information prior to a meeting, and disseminate new information or tasks post-meeting, additional meetings can be convened, either as a group (in a relatively small IMT) or as 'Sections' in a large IMT. The IC, Section Chief, Officer or Lead may wish to hold individual 'catch-up' meetings to ensure the team is being managed effectively, and maintain oversight on the members' physical and mental wellbeing; this will include, but not limited to, considerations for the working period, be mindful that it is easy to confine yourself to a computer without allowing for rest periods.



**Figure 3 Formal and Informal Meeting in Planning Process**

Formal meetings, as prescribed throughout the planning process, will be conducted, as per the Incident Management Handbook (IMH) with a meeting facilitator (usually the PSC) managing the meeting and guided by the agenda laid down. Prior to these meetings, and to ensure those in attendance have the latest and most relevant information, an informal Section pre-meeting is encouraged, so that the formal meeting can be conducted in accordance to the agenda, without any delay due to a lack of information. Similarly, an informal Section post-meeting is used to disseminate the meeting information and set tasks for the team to work towards. Other person-to-person, team or group meetings will need to be arranged on an ad-hoc basis to ensure work is progressing, and to 'check-in' with everyone in the team to manage their mental and physical wellbeing.

### Agendas

The meeting agendas, as laid down in the IMH will need little, or no alterations as the same output is needed to produce the IAP. The meetings themselves may need to be managed, dependant on the platform and number of participants. The Facilitator (or Meeting Host) will have the main control over the meeting and will need to ensure any participant who needs to address everyone is prepared to present remotely and has the ability to share the information appropriately. It is good practice to have all microphones muted unless invited to speak; if anyone has information to share - maybe a pertinent point at that time - they can use a 'raise hand' (or equivalent) so the host is aware of it. Having a 'co-host' (someone to manage the meeting behind the scenes) is useful as they can support the host and monitor the 'raise hand' and 'chat' function. It would be acknowledged

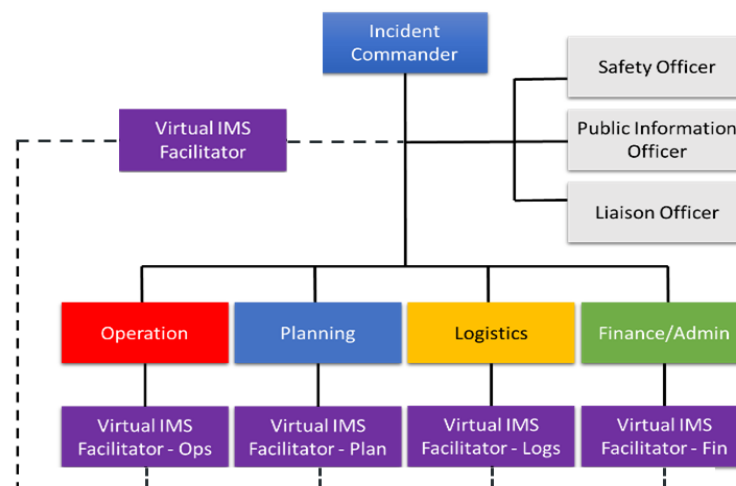
that side conversations using the chat function privately cannot be effectively monitored; these should not be encouraged during the formal meetings.

Additional meeting rules will need to be covered at the first meeting and agreed by command; some of the typical meeting rules for working remotely could include, but not limited to:

1. Stay muted unless you are presenting or asked by the host.
2. Use the Chat function for questions to avoid talking over the presenter.
3. Be respectful – everyone has their opinion; good or bad.
4. When using written text be aware of strong language, all caps, and exclamation points.
5. Don't post or share (even privately) inappropriate material.
6. Be on time and attentive (practice using the meeting tools before the meeting begins).
7. Use of video – this will ultimately depend on each Operator internal policy and guidance in using video (turning camera on or off) during meetings. Considerations should be taken including use of virtual background, camera positioning, etc. in order not to distract the audience in the meeting. A potential limiting factor to be considered as well is the bandwidth capacity.

### IMT Positions

Below is a suggested organisation chart for an incident, where a full IMT has been mobilised. All positions, as necessary, based on the size and complexity of the incident, are filled with the Command & General Staff conducting many formal and informal meetings. For this to be managed, it is suggested that an IMS Facilitator, whose responsibility is to arrange and deconflict the meetings schedules and apportion the appropriate meeting platform, be integrated into the Command Staff (Lead Facilitator) and General Staff (Section Facilitators) to manage the remote team-working. For smaller incidents that require fewer staff members, this role can be covered for all positions by the Lead Facilitator. More information on the 'Role and Responsibilities' of this position can be found under **Skill Sets**.



**Figure 4 Example of Virtual IMS Facilitator Role Being Embedded into an IMS organization**

*Note: Virtual IMS Facilitator within each Section can be a separate/dedicated role or combined into existing role.*

### Information Management Procedures

Maintaining 'situational awareness' in the virtual IMT has proved to be more challenging, particularly in maintaining common understanding over a sustained period. As such, it becomes imperative to ensure an information management procedure is established to provide a framework in which IMT members can follow whilst handling various type of information. This should include creating, sharing, and storing information. Most of the tasks are part of the responsibilities of the Documentation Unit; however, all IMT members are ultimately



---

---

responsible for ensuring proper information management. Key considerations in information management include:

1. Establish a centralised documentation structure (hierarchy) at the beginning of incident; this could be tailored to the organisation or response needs. Documentation Unit may need to actively ensure the discipline of IMT members in adhering to the structure.
2. Ensure IMT members are briefed on where to keep and find various type of information (e.g. approved documents, working documents, incident information, etc.) This should be included as part of handover as well.
3. Ensure information/documents are correct or properly vetted before being shared with the wider audience. Detecting and correcting misunderstandings and clarifications has proved to be more challenging when working virtually.

### Additional Resources

Additional resources that each IMT member may need in conducting virtual IMS includes, but not limited to:

1. Mifi (portable/mobile Wi-Fi) – in case internet bandwidth or supply is compromised.
2. Printer/Scanner – in case any hardcopy materials need to be used/kept (do not forget to have spare consumables available). Ensure that only print materials that are absolutely necessary, exercise control of information and liaise with Documentation Unit Leader as required.
3. Headset – this will allow for cleared voice and hearing during meetings, background noise and interference is reduced.
4. Additional screen – working off a single screen laptop is not desirable, having a second screen allows multiple layers of information to be seen/shown or worked.
5. External storage – for back-up of work and personal data in case of any outage issues with a computer.
6. Display Screen Equipment (DSE) – typically DSE set up and assessment would have been carried out even as per normal working (non-incident response situation). If this has not been done, consider the implementation as early as possible. Responding to incident may require personnel to work long hours in front of the screen which may lead to various ergonomics issues if not done properly and safely.

### Skill Sets

During the Incident Management System process, we will need to ensure that we have the right people in the right positions with the right level of skills and technical knowledge. This will enable the process to run efficiently even under extreme pressure.

The specific job roles and responsibilities for each of the positions in a typical Incident Management Team (IMT) are all referred to in the Incident Management Handbook (IMH), but each role will have to adapt to the needs of the virtual environment.

Incident Commander (IC) - Will need to ensure they stay constantly up to date with the situation especially with the amount of separate remote meetings and work taking place. They will have to use the Virtual IMS Facilitator (VIMS Facilitator) on a smaller incident/event or the Command specific Virtual IMS Facilitator for and expanding incident to ensure that all information is captured and communicated.

Safety Officer (SO)/Liaison Officer (LO)/Public Information Officer (PIO) (Media) – Will need to ensure they engage with the VIMS Facilitator (Command, if applicable) to ensure that key information in their respective areas of work within the IMT is communicated to the other sections including the Incident Commander.

Operations Section Chief (OSC) – Liaison with the VIMS Facilitator is essential; for expanding incidents, there may be a 'VIMS Facilitator (Operations)' who works with the 'VIMS-Facilitator (Command)'.

---

---

Planning Section Chief (PSC) - Liaison with the VIMS Facilitator is essential; for expanding incidents, there may be a 'VIMS Facilitator (Planning)' who works with the 'VIMS Facilitator (Command)'. The Planning Section Chief must ensure that they work extremely closely with the VIMS Facilitator as they would normally facilitate the meetings (in the 'Planning P') held by an IMT.

Logistics Section Chief (LSC) - Liaison with the VIMS Facilitator is essential; for expanding incidents, there may be a 'VIMS Facilitator (Logistics)' who works with the 'VIMS Facilitator (Command)'.

Finance Section Chief (FSC) - Liaison with the VIMS Facilitator is essential; for expanding incidents, there may be a 'VIMS Facilitator (Finance)' who works with the 'VIMS Facilitator (Command)'.

Virtual Incident Management System Facilitator (VIMS Facilitator) - The Virtual Incident Management Facilitator is responsible for ensuring that the remote incident management system runs as smoothly as possible. For a small incident of event they may be the only VIMS Facilitator; for an expanding incident, there may be several, such as one for Command and General Staff sections - if this is the case, then the Virtual Incident Management System Facilitator-Command (VIMS Command) will be the lead Facilitator liaising with all other Facilitators to ensure that all relevant information and meetings, and work, is communicated to the Incident Commander (IC) and all other relevant positions. The VIMS Facilitator will be required to carry out the following:

1. Assist to facilitate remote meetings to reduce the workload on the Planning Section Chief.
2. The dissemination of any information regarding meeting timings, etc.
3. The monitoring of the meeting "Chat" functions to ensure important issues are not missed and that meeting attendees can ask questions at the appropriate times.
4. Assisting members of the IMT with the aid of IT Support with any remote platform issues.
5. The management of "additional rooms" when required during the Planning "P" meetings and work periods such as preparing for the Tactics Meeting etc.
6. Liaise with all other VIMS Facilitators to ensure the clarity and smooth conduct of all tasks/meetings.
7. Any other task requested by the Command Staff.

Virtual Incident Management System Facilitator (Operations) (VIMS Facilitator Ops) – When required, such as for expanding incidents, the VIMS Facilitator Ops will be required to assist the Operations section during the remote IMT activation to ensure the following:

1. Liaison with the VIMS Facilitator (Command) and pass any required information both up and down the chain.
2. Liaison with all other section VIMS Facilitators when required.
3. Work closely with the Operations Section Chief to relieve them of some of the workload.
4. The dissemination of any information regarding meeting timings etc to the Operations Section.
5. Manage all Operations Section meetings and sessions and assist members of the Operations Section with the aid of IT Support with any remote platform issues.
6. The monitoring of the meeting "Chat" functions to ensure important issues are not missed and that meeting attendees can ask questions at the appropriate times.

Virtual Incident Management System Facilitator (Planning) (VIMS Facilitator Planning) - When required, such as for expanding incidents, the VIMS Facilitator Planning will be required to assist the Planning section during the remote IMT activation ensuring the following:

1. Liaison with the VIMS Facilitator (Command) and pass any required information both up and down the chain.
2. Working closely with the VIMS Facilitator (Command), decide who will be the lead facilitator for the planning process meetings.



- 
- 
3. Working closely with the Planning Section Chief and assist with the facilitation of all the meetings required as per the planning process such as the Tactics and Planning Meetings.
  4. Work closely with the Planning Section Chief to relieve them of some of the workload.
  5. Manage all Planning Section meetings and sessions and assist members of the Planning Section with the aid of IT Support with any remote platform issues.
  6. The monitoring of the meeting “Chat” functions to ensure important issues are not missed and that meeting attendees can ask questions at the appropriate times.

Virtual Incident Management System Facilitator (Logistics) (VIMS Facilitator Logs) – When required, such as for expanding incidents, the VIMS Facilitator Logs will be required to assist the Logistics section during the remote IMT activation ensuring the following:

1. Liaison with the VIMS Facilitator (Command) and pass any required information both up and down the chain.
2. Liaison with all other section VIMS Facilitators when required.
3. Work closely with the Logistics Section Chief to relieve them of some of the workload.
4. The dissemination of any information regarding meeting timings etc to the Logistics Section.
5. Manage all Logistics Section meetings and sessions and assist members of the Logistics Section with the aid of IT Support with any remote platform issues.
6. The monitoring of the meeting “Chat” functions to ensure important issues are not missed and that meeting attendees can ask questions at the appropriate times.

Virtual Incident Management System Facilitator (Finance) (VIMS Facilitator Fin) - When required, such as for expanding incidents, the VIMS Facilitator Fin will be required to assist the Finance section during the remote IMT activation ensuring the following:

1. Liaison with the VIMS Facilitator (Command) and pass any required information both up and down the chain.
2. Liaison with all other section VIMS Facilitators when required.
3. Work closely with the Finance Section Chief to relieve them of some of the workload.
4. The dissemination of any information regarding meeting timings etc to the Finance Section.
5. Manage all Finance Section meetings and sessions and assist members of the Finance Section with the aid of IT Support with any remote platform issues.
6. The monitoring of the meeting “Chat” functions to ensure important issues are not missed and that meeting attendees can ask questions at the appropriate times.

#### Information Technology (IT) Support

It is always an idea to have IT support for any Incident Command Post (ICP) during an incident/event. This remains the case for a virtual IMS; however, the IT Support will need to ensure that they are familiar with the relevant platforms that the IMT is going to use. The IT support will have to work closely with the VIMS Facilitators to help with the smooth running of meetings and tasks and to communicate with them and other positions in the IMT.

#### **Accountability**

One of the principles of Incident Management Systems (IMS) is accountability; this is even more important when operating on virtual IMS. During this type of incident management, team members need to be accountable for more, such as specific tasks - this may include section members being given forms to complete which require working with other sections to compile the required information or facilitating informal meetings with other sections to reach an objective. In these tasks, there will be outcomes that must be communicated to the Section Chief and others; this needs to be carefully managed.

---

---

Section Chiefs will need to ensure that anyone detailed to complete tasks/forms etc., is capable and aware of what they are required to do, and any deadlines there may be, and that these are delivered.

## Mindset

The very label 'incident' can bring immediate pressure. *'Something has gone wrong. You have to fix it.'* Expectations are high, scrutiny is high, and the consequences of a bad outcome can be catastrophic.

It is this sort of pressure that we can thrive on, and it is this sort of pressure that we must train for. For some of us, pressure really does bring out our best – however everyone is vulnerable under pressure and sometimes we get overwhelmed.

### Mindset as a skill – Red2Blue

All factors can be improved. Usually a lot of attention and effort is made to refine our systems and processes, and we train our technical skills regularly; often, 'Mindset' is the least well-resourced area. In terms of performance it is treated like a problem to solve rather than a skill to develop.

To support mindset skill development, 'Gazing Performance Systems' have distilled the components into one simple map. The Red2Blue map allows people to locate where their attention is, and to adjust and move accordingly. The one-page simple reference and language is useful because it is accessible for when the heat is really on.

When mindset is developed under pressure and treated as a skill, it gets better. Everyone can improve and high performers want to improve. In simple terms attention is either 'On Task' (Blue headed) or 'Diverted' (Red Headed).



Figure 5 Red2Blue Map

### Red Head: Blue Head

Everyone knows logically that we should focus on what we can control. Yet, under pressure we often do not. We can lose clarity around what is in our control and what we would like to be in our control and the difference is very real. The prime issue in performing under pressure is where we place our attention. To help us remember the difference and continually **refocus** attention the Red head Blue head map shows a simple dichotomy.

Are we 'on task Blue headed' or are we 'diverted Red headed'?



**Figure 6 Red and Blue Head Dichotomy**

Developing your own Red2Blue mental skills tool kit is essential and will enable you to shift your attention when you become diverted. If you want to receive a copy of the Red2Blue map and more information, tools and exercises on how to improve your mental skills under pressure then check out the Performing Under Pressure During an incident workbook:

<https://oilspillresponse.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/group-imscoregroup/ERoXNQJrRIGmkodZYxqEJcBXMbSHAy2FnloFrMwJveCvg?e=2PPbg8>

To create a sustainable 'Blue headed' team environment, feel free to contact OSRL or Gazing Performance directly.