

# Incident Command Post (ICP) VS Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)

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Since South Africa adopted the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-based Incident Command System within the emergency response arena, started with veld and forest fire fighting and quickly moved from a Fire Management System to an All Hazards Incident Response system within the country, one should ask the question what is the reason for still using the term Joint Operations Centre (JOC) on larger more complex incidents (non-military incidents) instead of the term Emergency Operation Centre (EOC)?

In a National Incident Management System (NIMS) and within the Incident Command System (ICS), one will not easily find the term 'Joint Operations Centre' or 'JOC' as sometimes prefer to refer to during larger more complex incidents. This term is used in the military arena or when managing major events.

A NIMS and within ICS (a sub-component of a NIMS) during larger/complex incidents, one would rather use the term Emergency Operation Centre (EOC), instead of 'JOC' to coordinate and NOT to manage the incident. Let us explore the differences between an incident command post (ICP) and an emergency operations centre in more detail.

## Incident command post

The incident command post (ICP) is located at or in the immediate vicinity

of the incident site and is the focus of the conducting of direct, on-scene control of tactical operations. Incident planning is also conducted at the ICP. The ICP may be collocated with the incident base camp. This is the location (ICP) where the incident commander (IC) and his/her incident management team such as command and general staff, is located and from where they direct ALL tactical operations and incident management, whether it is from a first response vehicle or in a full incident command post located in a building or an ICP within a base camp.

## Incident management team

An incident management team is a group of highly skilled and trained personnel that work as a cohesive unit during the phase of an incident, often in support of a specific community or region and with a specific delegation of authority.

On the other side of the coin is the emergency operation centre (EOC).

## Emergency operation centre

An emergency operation centre (EOC) is a place removed from the incident and this centre fulfils a coordination function and NOT a command function. Within the EOC various agency representatives could be found where they discuss: priorities, resources, public information, agency policy and provide coordination and guidance functions to the incident commander (IC) and his/

her team at the ICP. A joint information centre (JIC) may be housed at the EOC and in many situations all or some of the resource order would go through the EOC.

Notice the word 'coordination' thus EOCs are more about coordination than command and control.

Decisions made at the EOC affect the incident response as well as the public response. The decisions made at the EOC are not tactical decisions; tactical decisions are made by the incident commander and the command staff at the incident scene from the incident command post.

The critical role of the emergency operation centre is:

- Supporting incident commanders
- Supporting other communities or jurisdictions
- Coordinating resources
- Developing situational awareness
- Informing the public

When we use correct and generic terminology, we will make a difference in every single important role during large/complex incidents from coordination, guidance from an emergency operation centre and from directing and managing the tactical management of the incident from the incident command post.

Together we can make a difference!

In summary, the difference between an incident command post (ICP) and an emergency operations centre (EOC) is:

Incident command post (ICP)	Emergency operations centre (EOC)
Works at tactical level focusing on the specific incident only	Works at a strategic level focusing on the big picture of the incident. It does not have the operational focus
It is located near the incident	It is not located at the incident place
Is responsible for operational activities	Provides resources, coordination and guidelines