



United Safety & Quality Council

ISO CERTIFICATION · TRAINING · CONSULTING · EST. 1953

ISO 22320 · ISO 22320:2018

Guidelines for Incident Management

Security and resilience · Emergency management · Guidelines for incident management

Implementation Guideline

This implementation guideline is prepared by USQC to help emergency-services organizations, critical infrastructure operators, and large private-sector organizations understand what ISO 22320 requires, how to build incident-management arrangements that meet it, and how to prepare for third-party certification.

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REVISION

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Introduction

ISO 22320 sits within the ISO 22300 family for security and resilience. Where ISO 22301 covers the management system that governs business continuity, ISO 22320 covers the operational response – how the organization actually commands, coordinates, communicates, and cooperates when an incident occurs.

The second edition, ISO 22320:2018, restructured the standard around three pillars: the principles that give incident management its value, the basic components of process and structure, and joint direction and cooperation across organizations. It was reviewed and confirmed by ISO in 2024 without revision, so the 2018 edition remains current.

APPLICABILITY

ISO 22320 applies to any organization involved in responding to incidents of any type and scale – single-organization or multi-agency, small or national, private or public.

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Scope & Applicability

The standard is applicable regardless of the type of hazard, the type of organization, or the size of the response. It supports both single-organization arrangements and multi-agency coordination across organizational, regional, or national boundaries.

When ISO 22320 applies to your organization

- You have statutory or contractual responsibility to prepare for and respond to incidents
- You operate infrastructure or services whose disruption affects customers, communities, or the public
- You participate in mutual-aid or joint-response arrangements with other organizations
- You are subject to regulator, insurer, or client scrutiny of your incident-management arrangements
- You want to align your incident-response practice with an internationally recognized framework

How it relates to other standards

- ISO 22301 · Business continuity management systems (the surrounding management system)
- ISO 22361 · Crisis management (strategic-level crisis leadership)
- ISO 22398 · Guidelines for exercises
- ISO 31000 · Risk management (the input to identifying incident scenarios)

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Structural Overview of the Standard

ISO 22320:2018 is structured around principles, process, structure, and joint working. Firms preparing for certification should be able to demonstrate procedures, roles, records, and exercises addressing each element.

CLAUSE	FOCUS	WHAT YOUR ARRANGEMENTS MUST ADDRESS
4	Principles of incident management	How your arrangements reflect the ISO 22320 principles · risk-based, ethics-driven, safety-first, human-centred, cooperative.
5.1	Process overview	The end-to-end response process from alert through demobilization and after-action review.
5.2	Structure	The command-and-control structure, including Incident Commander authority and delegation.
5.3	Roles & responsibilities	Documented roles for command, planning, operations, logistics, finance/admin, and communications.
5.4	Resources	How you plan, mobilize, deploy, track, and release personnel, equipment, and consumables.
5.5	Information & communication	The common operating picture, situation reports, and internal/external communications.
6	Joint direction & cooperation	How you work with other organizations · shared objectives, joint plans, interoperability.

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Implementation Roadmap

USQC recommends a five-phase roadmap. Each phase produces artefacts and evidence that Stage 1 and Stage 2 auditors will examine.

Phase 1 · Scope, principles & leadership

WEEK 1 TO 2

- Documented incident-management scope (sites, functions, hazard classes)
- Statement of principles aligned to ISO 22320 clause 4
- Executive sponsor and program owner formally appointed

Phase 2 · Process, structure & roles

WEEK 2 TO 6

- Incident-management process document covering activation to demobilization
- Command-and-control structure diagram with escalation paths
- Role cards for Incident Commander and each function (planning, operations, logistics, finance/admin, communications)
- Delegation-of-authority matrix

Phase 3 · Resources, information & cooperation

WEEK 4 TO 8

- Resource inventory and mobilization procedures
- Common operating picture template and situation report template
- External communication templates for regulators, public, and media
- Mutual-aid or cooperation agreements with partner organizations

Phase 4 · Exercises & readiness

WEEK 7 TO 10

- Tabletop exercise report with lessons and corrective actions
- Functional or full-scale exercise covering command, communications, and cooperation
- Debrief records with tracked improvements

Phase 5 · Internal audit & certification**WEEK 9 TO 12**

- Internal audit report against ISO 22320 clauses
- Management review record showing decisions on findings
- Stage 1 documentation review and Stage 2 audit completed with USQC

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Documentation Requirements

USQC auditors will look for a controlled set of documents that reflect real operating practice. The names below are illustrative · what matters is that each function is documented, version-controlled, and actually used during exercises and real incidents.

DOCUMENT	PURPOSE
Incident-management policy	Leadership commitment, principles, and scope statement.
Incident-management process	Activation, response, demobilization, and after-action review.
Command-and-control structure	Diagram of roles, reporting lines, and delegation.
Role cards	One per role · Incident Commander, planning, operations, logistics, finance/admin, communications.
Resource register	Personnel, equipment, and consumables available for response with mobilization times.
Situation report template	The common operating picture format used during response.
External communication procedure	Regulator notification, public information, media handling, social media.
Cooperation agreements	Mutual aid, host-nation support, service-level agreements with partners.
Exercise programme	Schedule of tabletop, functional, and full-scale exercises with objectives and outputs.
After-action review procedure	How lessons are captured, prioritised, tracked, and closed.

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Roles & Responsibilities

ISO 22320 puts the Incident Commander at the top of the command-and-control hierarchy. Every organization's arrangements should document this role and how authority is delegated during a response.

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
Incident Commander	Overall authority for the incident response. Sets objectives, approves the Incident Action Plan, activates, escalates, and terminates the response.
Planning	Collects, evaluates, and shares incident data. Maintains the common operating picture. Prepares situation reports and the Incident Action Plan.
Operations	Delivers the tactical response. Commands field teams and applies resources to meet the objectives set by the Incident Commander.
Logistics	Provides personnel, equipment, transport, and welfare needed to sustain the response.
Finance / Administration	Handles cost tracking, procurement, compensation, claims, and compliance for the response.
Communications / Public Information	Manages internal and external communications, including with regulators, public, and media.
Liaison (multi-agency)	Coordinates with cooperating organizations under joint direction and cooperation arrangements.

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Common Pitfalls

No documented Incident Commander authority

The role appears in exercises but its delegation, decision authority, and financial limits are not written down. When a real incident escalates, decisions stall waiting for board approval.

Documents that don't match practice

Beautifully written plans that no responder has read. USQC auditors will interview role holders - if they can't describe their role from memory, the documents are not being used.

Exercises without corrective action tracking

Debriefs identify lessons but nothing changes before the next exercise finds the same lessons. A visible after-action tracker with closed-out actions is essential.

Communication planning ignoring the public

External communication is treated as an afterthought. ISO 22320 expects arrangements for regulator notification, public information, and media as core elements of the response.

No cooperation arrangements

Response plans assume all resources are internal. In practice, mutual aid, host-nation support, and service-provider agreements are needed and must be documented, tested, and current.

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Certification Readiness Checklist

- ✓ Scope of certification defined · which sites, functions, and hazard classes are covered
- ✓ ISO 22320-aligned incident-management arrangements documented and version-controlled
- ✓ Incident Commander role card issued with delegation-of-authority matrix
- ✓ Role cards for planning, operations, logistics, finance/admin, communications in use
- ✓ Resource register maintained and mobilization times documented
- ✓ Situation report and common operating picture templates in use
- ✓ External communication procedure covers regulators, public, and media
- ✓ Cooperation and mutual-aid agreements current and signed
- ✓ Exercise programme delivered · tabletop, functional, or full-scale within last 12 months
- ✓ After-action reviews conducted, lessons tracked to closure
- ✓ Internal audit and management review completed within the last 12 months

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USQC Support

USQC's certification services and consulting services are structurally separated. Certification is delivered by USQC Certification Services, an accredited certification body. Implementation support is delivered by USQC Advisory Services under a separate engagement and cannot be combined with the certification audit for the same client.

For a certification proposal covering scope, timeline, and fees, contact admin@usqc.us or +1 732-354-1094. USQC will issue a written proposal within one working day and can typically begin Stage 1 within two weeks of agreement.

Ready to Get Certified?

USQC will confirm scope, timeline, and fees within one working day of your inquiry. Stage 1 typically begins within two weeks of agreement.

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This document is issued by USQC for the purposes of implementation guidance. It does not constitute a certification decision or an audit report. Certification decisions are issued by USQC's independent technical review process following a successful Stage 2 audit against ISO 22320:2018.

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