



**Innovative Applications of  
the National Incident  
Management System (NIMS)**

**International City/County Management Association  
2012 Annual Awards Program**

Community Sustainability Award Submission

March 16, 2012

**City of Olathe, Kansas**

City of Olathe  
100 E. Santa Fe  
P.O. Box 768  
Olathe, KS 66051

J. Michael Wilkes  
City Manager



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

## 2012 Annual Awards Program

### Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

**Deadline for Nominations: March 16, 2012**

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

#### SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Snow Removal – Application of National Incident Management System

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: City of Olathe, Kansas

Jurisdiction population(s): 125,872

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented by or before January 31, 2011, to be eligible. The start date should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: November Year: 2010

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, October 2012. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: J. Michael Wilkes

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: City of Olathe

Name: Danny Turner

Title: Street Maintenance Jurisdiction: City of Olathe

Supervisor

Name: Jeff DeGraffenreid  
Title: Fire Chief Jurisdiction: City of Olathe

**SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact**

Name of contact: Amanda Kaufman  
Title: ICMA Jurisdiction: City of Olathe  
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## **Innovative Applications of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) — City of Olathe, Kansas**

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Local governments across the nation are required to adopt the National Incident Management System (NIMS), a comprehensive approach to incident management. NIMS utilizes a military-like incident command structure, system, and nomenclature that puts all key players on the same page with one another.

For many jurisdictions, obtaining the required training for its staff is where NIMS ends—a book on a shelf. The City of Olathe, Kansas decided to take that book off the shelf and integrate NIMS throughout the organization by utilizing the structure in its daily operations. The City Manager and Emergency Managers, seeking ways to gain efficiencies and integrate this system into the organization, made the decision to apply the NIMS structure to a widespread weather event, common to Midwestern communities—snow removal.

The decision to integrate the NIMS structure into the snow removal process was made with two outcomes in mind. First, the thought was if application of the NIMS structure is valuable in unexpected, major disaster situations, its use should also benefit anticipated, extensive weather events; a snow event is a common issue affecting the entire jurisdiction, and is not contained to a particular disaster area. By implementing NIMS, the City hoped to bring structure and greater efficiency to the snow removal operation. Second, the City hoped that by utilizing the NIMS structure in its daily operations, it would be well-practiced and better prepared to apply it if the City were

suddenly faced with an unexpected disaster situation.

## **How this was Accomplished**

Command-level officers in Olathe's Fire Department, already familiar with the application of NIMS, acted as mentors to the lead snow removal staff in the City's Streets Division. This mentor relationship allowed for the snow removal operation to transition smoothly into the NIMS structure, which was a major change and introduced a brand new way of operating. Once the snow removal staff was familiar with NIMS, they took ownership of the system, allowing Fire to move from a mentoring role to one of support.

## **Results**

Two years ago, the City lacked coordination in its snow removal effort; plow drivers assigned to arterial routes would leave once their assigned routes were cleared, while residential plow drivers were still out working on their routes. This lack of a coordinated effort resulted in citizen complaints regarding the timeliness of residential snow removal.

By integrating the NIMS structure into snow removal, the City has realized efficiencies, improved its service delivery, and provided structure to this operation. Having this coordinated system in place, the Streets Division now plans for the worst snow scenarios and manages each snow event as if it were a disaster situation. The City has recently entered its second snow season, while utilizing the NIMS structure for its snow

removal operations; this unified incident management command structure for snow removal involves staff from across the organization—in the Police Department, Fire Department, and Streets Division.

## **Collaboration**

The resulting cross-departmental collaboration was an additional benefit that arose from this unique application of NIMS. The strong relationship formed between the Fire Department and Streets Division still remains, though the snow removal operation no longer has the need for a mentoring relationship.

This collaboration does not end there—the Fire Department plans to work with the Parks and Recreation Department during 2012 to get it better acclimated to the application of NIMS. The system has begun to be utilized during special events put on by Parks and Recreation, but the department wants to further integrate its application into its operations. The Fire Department will play a mentoring role, similar to its past participation with the snow removal operation in the Streets Division. The intended outcome of this relationship will be for the Parks and Recreation Department to apply NIMS to many of its special events, particularly the City’s popular summer concert series.

## **Transferability**

The successes realized by the City of Olathe through its embrace of NIMS in its daily

operations can be replicated in other local governments, regardless of whether snow removal is an issue for a community. It can be applied to other events or daily operations, so that staff will already be familiar with the incident management structure, should they need to employ it during a future unexpected disaster.

Aside from staff time, which was already being dedicated to the required NIMS training, no additional costs were incurred when adopting the system for the snow removal operation.

## **Conclusion**

The ability to practice in advance of a disaster has changed the way the City of Olathe thinks about snow removal. Olathe looks forward to pursuing new ways of integrating NIMS into its organization to not only improve its daily operations, but to become better prepared and well-practiced with the system, in the event that a major disaster may strike in the future.