

Operating Guidelines

Section: Incident Command

Subject: Command on the Fire Ground

Number: 801

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Purpose

This guideline identifies standard operating procedures that can be employed in establishing command. The incident command system provides for the effective management of personnel and resources, thus providing for the implementation of all components of the incident management system for structural/fire operations.

Command procedures are designed to:

- a) Fix responsibility for command on specific individuals through a standard identification system, depending on the arrival sequence of members and officers;
- b) Ensure that a strong, direct and visible command shall be established from the onset of the incident;
- c) Establish an efficient incident organization defining the activities and responsibilities assigned to the incident commander and to other individuals operating within the incident management system;
- d) Provide a system to process information to support incident management, planning and decision making;
- e) Provide a system for the orderly transfer of command subject to subsequent arriving officers.

Guidelines

801.1

Responsibilities of Command: Incident Command is responsible for the completion of the tactical priorities. The tactical procedures are:

- a) Provide for the safety, responsibility and welfare of personnel. This priority is ongoing throughout the incident.
- b) Remove endangered occupants and treat the injured.
- c) Stabilize the incident and provide for life safety.

- d) Conserve property.

801.2

Functions of Command: The functions of command include:

- a) Assume and announce command and establish an effective operating position (command post);
- b) Rapidly evaluate the situation (size-up);
- c) Initiate, maintain and control the communications process;
- d) Identify the overall strategy, develop an incident action plan and assign personnel consistent with plans and standard operating procedures;
- e) Develop an effective incident management organization;
- f) Provide tactical objectives;
- g) Review, evaluate and revise (as needed) the incident action plan;
- h) Provide for the continuity, transfer and termination of command.
- i) Assign Safety Officer

801.3

Establishing Command: The first fire department member or unit to arrive at the scene shall assume command of the incident. The initial commander shall remain in command until command is transferred, or the incident is stabilized and terminated.

- a) The first unit or member on the scene shall initiate whatever parts of the incident management system that are needed to effectively manage the incident scene.
- b) A simple incident (medical assist, etc.) should only require that the officer or unit acknowledge their arrival on the scene.

Radio Designation

The radio designation “command” shall be used along with the geographic location of the incident (i.e. Miller Drive Command), this designation will not change throughout the duration of the incident. The designation of “command” shall remain with the officer currently in command of the incident throughout the event.

801.4

Command Options: The responsibility of the first arriving unit or member to assume command of the incident presents several options, depending on the situation. If an officer or a member without tactical capabilities initiates command, the establishment of a command post should be a top priority. At most incidents, the initial incident commander will be an officer. The following command options define the officer’s direct involvement in tactical activities and modes of command that may be utilized.

- a) **Nothing Showing mode:** These situations generally require investigation by the initial arriving unit while other units remain in a staged mode. The officer should

go with someone else to investigate while utilizing a portable radio to command the incident.

b) **Fast Attack Mode:** These situations require immediate action to stabilize, and requires the officer's assistance and direct involvement in the attack. In these situations, the officer goes with the crew to provide the appropriate level of supervision. Examples of these situations include:

- Offensive fire attacks (especially in marginal situations);
- Critical life safety situations (i.e. rescue) which must be achieved in a compressed time;
- Any incident where the safety and welfare of fire-fighters is a major concern;
- Obvious working incidents that require further investigation by the officer.

Where fast intervention is critical, utilization of the portable radio will permit the officer's involvement in the attack without neglecting command responsibilities. The fast attack mode should not last more than a few minutes and will end with one of the following:

- i. The situation is stabilized.
 - ii. The situation is not stabilized and the officer must withdraw to the exterior and establish a command post. At some point, the officer shall decide whether or not to withdraw the remainder of the crew, based on the crew's capabilities and experience, safety issues, and the ability to communicate with the crew. No crew shall remain in a hazardous area without radio communications capabilities.
 - iii. Command is transferred to a higher-ranking officer. When a chief officer is assuming command, the chief officer may opt to return the officer to his/her crew, or assign him/her to a subordinate position.
- c) **Command Mode:** Certain incidents, by virtue of their site, complexity or potential for rapid expansion, require immediate, strong and direct overall command. In such cases, the officer shall initially assume an exterior, safe and effective command position and maintain that position until relieved by a higher-ranking officer. A tactical worksheet shall be initiated and utilized to assist in managing this type of incident.

If the officer selects the command mode, the officer should place the remaining crewmembers into action with two or more members. One of the crewmembers shall serve as the acting officer and should be provided with a portable radio. The collective and individual capabilities and experience of the crewmembers will regulate this action.

An officer assuming command has a choice of modes and degrees of personal involvement in the tactical activities, but continues to be fully responsible for the command functions. The initiative and judgement of the officer are of great

importance. The modes identified are guidelines to assist the officer in planning appropriate actions. The actions initiated should conform to one of the above-mentioned modes of operation.

801.5

Transfer of Command:

- a) Command is transferred to improve the quality of the command organization. Transfer of command should be done face to face if practical. The following guideline outlines the transfer of commands process the transfer of command through various ranking officers will be handled as follows:
- b) The first fire department member arriving shall automatically assume command. This will normally be an officer but could be any fire department member up to and including the chief officer.
- c) The first arriving officer shall assume command (after the transfer process has been complete assuming an equal or higher-ranking officer has not already assumed command).
- d) The first arriving chief officer should assume command of the incident following transfer of command procedures.
- e) Later arriving, higher-ranking chief officers may choose to assume command, or assume an advisors position.
- f) Within the chain of command, the actual transfer of command shall be regulated by the following procedures:
- g) The officer assuming command shall communicate with the officer being relived by radio or face-to-face. Face-to-face is the preferred method to transfer command.
- h) The person being relived will brief the officer assuming command indicating at least the following:
 - iv. Incident conditions (fire located and extent, Hazmat spill or release, number of patients, etc.)
 - v. Incident action plan
 - vi. Progress towards completion of tactical objectives
 - vii. Safety considerations
 - viii. Deployment and assignment of operating personnel
 - ix. Appraisal of need for additional resources.

The person being relived of command should review the tactical worksheet with the officer assuming command. This sheet provides the most effective framework for command transfer as it outlines the location and status of personnel and resources in a standard form that should be well known to all members.

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of every officer and firefighter, to know the Incident Command System and to follow it, at every incident to allow everyone to become more familiar with and comfortable with its use.