

ON SCENE: INCIDENT COMMANDER



Take Action

The incident commander (IC) is responsible for ensuring the strategic goals of an incident are completed in a safe, effective and efficient manner. Because this involves looking at “the big picture” and accounting for all aspects of the emergency, it can be argued that the IC has the most important role on the fireground. This document takes into consideration the factors affecting the large-scale, decision-making process facing command-level officers.

En Route

- What resources are responding to this call? Are they adequate for the situation? Will you be working with mutual aid departments and, if so, how will that change operations? Should staging be used?
- What issues is the “battleground” going to present? Can you picture what the building looks like? Is it an abnormally-hazardous location? What is the usual occupancy? Are there water supply or access issues or other factors that will affect operations?
- What does the radio traffic from on-scene units tell you? Does it sound like a serious incident, a minor one or something ‘out of the ordinary’? Does the voice of that seasoned, usually calm officer relay concern?
- Is radio traffic giving you information that could help you perform your job? Will it tell you which hose line to pull? What tools to grab? What the ‘battlefield’ looks like?
- Will unusual factors play a role in this incident? Weather? Wind? Hazardous materials? Terrorism? Arson?

The First Five Minutes

Spend the week of June 19-25 focusing on the first five minutes of structural fire response at the chief, incident commander, company officer, and firefighter levels. Make sure all duty shifts are able to participate in the training throughout the week.

IAFC Rules of Engagement for Structural Firefighting

Section 1: Increasing Firefighter Survival provides lesson plans for firefighter survival. Section 3: Rules of Engagement provides resources for firefighters and incident commanders.

NVFC Volunteer Firefighter Health and Safety Priorities

Sets forth a series of B.E.S.T Practices for Behavior, Equipment, Standards and Codes, Training.

Stand Down Resources

All resources are available at www.safetystanddown.org.



Size-Up

- Does your initial size-up match what you thought the situation would be? Do your initial units completely understand the situation?
- Has the survival profile and risk assessment changed since the first unit arrived? Do current strategy and tactics need to be changed?
- What does the smoke tell you? Where is the fire going? Are exposures a concern? Has the incident expanded since the initial size-up?
- What should be the necessary time for incident stabilization? Do you have a mechanism in place that is necessary to bring the fire under control? What indicators inside should be of concern?
- Do you understand what new research is telling us about flow paths? The effects of wind? Does dispatch start a timer to remind you to do a PAR check?

Command

- Will you be establishing or assuming command? Does your command structure allow unity of command and a manageable span of control?
- Do you follow proper procedures for transferring command so no details are lost?
- Have your crews implemented an accountability system? Who will be your safety officer? Do you have the resources to establish a rehab and EMS group?
- Are there enough resources on scene to complete all tasks safely?
- Are you located so as not to interfere with operations? Do you keep command in one location? Do your crews know the location of command?
- Will outside influences (noise, crowd, media, weather) affect your ability to perform?
- Will there be an extended Incident Action Plan? Is it flexible enough to allow for easy change should the initial plan be ineffective? Will there be a need for unusual documentation of the event? Do higher-level supervisors need to be notified of this event? Will you need to set up a media location?

Other Considerations

- Will the incident require outside resources? Utility companies? Red Cross? Law Enforcement? Specialty teams?
- Have firefighter emergency egress points been identified and are they adequate? Are ladders needed or do points need to be enlarged or opened (with flow path considerations taken into account)?
- Has RIT been established? If a Mayday were declared, what could they reasonably accomplish in their current form? Will further resources need to be added as the incident escalates? Does a RIT group need to be established with a seasoned officer overseeing it?
- Do you need to ask for progress reports from working companies or are they provided with adequate frequency? Are they effective at relaying the conditions, actions, and needs of those conducting tactical operations? How is getting the first hose line in place and conducting the primary search progressing? Do further personnel need to be assigned?