

SUBJECT: 2.1 – FIRE GROUND INCIDENT COMMAND & MANAGEMENT  
EFFECTIVE DATE: February, 2020  
REVISED: N/A SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

## PURPOSE

A standard managed response to incidents enhances safety of personnel and provides for efficient use of resources. From the arrival of the first-in company management of the incident should follow a well-defined and communicated Incident Action Plan (IAP). In general the National Incident Management System (NIMS) is an effective solution to incident management that works well on mid to large scale events. While it is designed as a scaleable system, there is less guidance as to how NIMS positions should operate on smaller events with significant staffing limitations. Smaller fire departments struggle with manpower to fill NIMS positions and struggle to interpret how those positions should function on residential and small commercial fire scenes. Particularly in the early stages of the incident and before additional resources arrive. This guideline is designed to provide standards and direction for first arriving and Incident Commanders of smaller scenes, fill the gaps that occur in NIMS for smaller resource limited incidents, and allow for a smooth transition to NIMS as incident size and complexity grows. This guideline applies to, and should be embraced by all incident personnel.

## TOPICS COVERED

Command Structure, Command Responsibilities, Incident Strategy, Size-up, Radio Reports, Fire Ground Communications, Command Modes, Benchmarks

### A. Command Structure

It is the responsibility of the IC to develop a standardized command structure to safely and effectively manage the incident. The IC must develop the command structure with an effective span of control at a pace which stays ahead of operations. **When this is not possible, operations must be delayed until an effective command structure is developed.** The basic configuration of a command structure includes three levels:

1. **Strategic Level:** Incident Commander and command staff
2. **Tactical Level:** Division/Group Leaders
3. **Task Level:** Resources/Personnel working within a division/group

During the initial stages of an incident, the IC will be wearing many “hats” with many responsibilities. The IC should assign those “hats/responsibilities” to other qualified personnel as soon as possible. IC responsibilities at an incident include developing an incident action plan, staging, accountability, and safety, and others. These responsibilities do not change based on how many personnel are available. What does change is the ability for the IC to share responsibilities, which improves safety and effectiveness.

The following roles must be created as soon as possible:

- **Staging Officer:** This position establishes level 1 staging at a location away from the warm/operational zone and ensures that unassigned personnel are located in staging. The Staging Officer also assesses the qualifications and abilities of available personnel and assembles teams ready for assignment.
- **Accountability Officer:** This position ensures that all operating personnel check into and out of the warm/operational zone using the MABAS 35 passport system. The Accountability Officer also acts as “passport control” to ensure strict accountability.
- **Support Officer:** This position directly supports the IC by performing ancillary functions that allow the IC to focus exclusively on commanding the incident. The Support Officer may also be a more seasoned chief/command officer that provides advice and is available for consultation
- **Safety Officer:** This position is concerned with all aspects of safety on the incident and is, by default, a function of the Incident Commander until otherwise assigned. Incident Command may assign this role along with other responsibilities to Division or Group Officers. As the size of the incident increases responsibilities for safety are not removed from other officers but a dedicated Safety Officer position with single focus should be created to oversee operations.

The following roles should be created as necessary to maintain span of control:

- **Division Officer:** these positions are created when operations have exceeded the IC’s span of control. Divisions are based on location; Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Basement, etc. The Division officer has control of personnel operating in that location. They are also the safety officer for that location. For example, Alpha Division may be assigned by an IC when multiple companies are operating around or in the Alpha side of the building. This can be expanded to other locations: Charlie Division, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Division, etc.
- **Group Officer:** these positions are created when operations have exceeded the IC’s span of control. Groups are based on function; water supply, EMS, evacuation, Rehab. For example, Water Supply Group may be assigned by an IC when a water tender shuttle is needed. An EMS Group may be assigned during a mass casualty incident.

## **B. General Responsibilities of Command**

1. Establish command upon arrival as soon as possible.
2. Ensure safety of all personnel on scene.
3. Perform initial and ongoing incident size-up and risk/benefit analysis.
4. Develop and disseminate an Incident Action Plan including strategy and tactics.
5. Assign and request resources.
6. Ensure proper transfer of command, when appropriate.
7. Confirm strategic objectives have been accomplished.
8. Terminate incident and release resources.

**C. Incident Strategy**

1. Offensive (operating inside the hazard zone)
2. Defensive (operating outside of the hazard zone)

**D. Strategic Objectives**

1. Life Safety
2. Incident Stabilization
3. Environmental Protection / Property Preservation

**E. Strategic Objective Priorities**

1. The RECEO-VS acronym helps to organize Strategic Objectives.
  - R – Rescue
  - E – Exposures
  - C – Confinement
  - E – Extinguishment
  - O – Overhaul
  - V – Ventilation
  - S – Salvage

**F. Tactical Objective Priorities**

1. Develop and clearly communicate an Incident Action Plan that assembles and directs an adequate number of resources to overwhelm the problem.
2. The SLICE-RS acronym helps to organize Tactical Objectives.
  - S – Size up the incident/building
  - L – Locate the fire
  - I – Identify and control flow path
  - C – Cool from the safest location
  - E – Extinguish the fire
  - R – Rescue (whenever **probable** - risk a lot to save a lot, risk a little to save a little, risk nothing to save what is lost)
  - S – Salvage (when it is safe)

**G. Establishing Command**

The officer or firefighter in charge of the first arriving unit shall establish incident command and remain in command until command is transferred or terminated.

While the Incident Commander (IC) is ultimately responsible for **all** aspects of the fire ground, no one person can safely manage all of the command roles for a working fire by themselves. There is a big difference in what an IC can accomplish in the early stages of an incident with a few firefighters on scene and the later stages of an incident when resources begin to arrive.

In the early stages of an incident the IC's priorities should be:

1. Size up the incident
2. Create and communicate over the radio an initial Incident Action Plan which includes:
  - a. Assign actions for personnel currently on-scene
  - b. Assign actions for the next incoming crew to arrive on scene
3. Complete a 360 survey of the building
4. Confirm or update the initial Incident Action Plan

As the incident develops and resources begin to arrive, the IC should distribute command roles to qualified officers as they become available:

1. Staging
2. Accountability
3. Support Officer
4. Safety/Division/Group Officers
5. Water Supply
6. EMS
7. Rehab
8. Etc.

## H. Initial Size-up

Many times the initial scene size-up is performed from the vehicle as you are arriving at the scene. Driving slowly past the building may allow you to see three sides of the structure. Information is limited at this point in the response but it is important to begin assembling what you know about the incident to send to incoming units with the **Initial Radio Report**. During the Initial Size-up attempt to determine the following:

- **Building size**
  - Small (one 200ft. hose line can access 100% of building)
  - Medium (one 200ft. hose line can access 75% of building)
  - Large (one 200ft. hose line can access 50% of building)
  - Mega (one 200ft. hose line can access 25% of building)
- **Occupancy type**
  - Residential
  - Apartment
  - Strip Mall
  - Big Box
  - Commercial
  - High Rise
- **Conditions and location of fire**
  - Nothing showing
  - Light smoke
  - Working fire
  - Defensive fire conditions

## **I. Initial Radio Report**

Information is limited during the Initial Radio Report but it is important to “paint the picture” of what you are seeing so incoming units can prepare for when they arrive on scene. Sometimes information announced during the Initial Radio Report turns out to be incorrect. Any inaccuracies in information or changes in the Incident Action Plan are corrected during the Follow-up Radio Report.

The Initial Radio Report should include the information you gathered during the Initial Size-up and the first Incident Action Plan:

- **Building size**
  - Small (one 200ft. hose line can access 100% of building)
  - Medium (one 200ft. hose line can access 75% of building)
  - Large (one 200ft. hose line can access 50% of building)
  - Mega (one 200ft. hose line can access 25% of building)
- **Occupancy type**
  - Residential
  - Apartment
  - Strip Mall
  - Commercial
  - Big Box
  - High Rise
- **Conditions and location of fire (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta)**
  - Nothing showing
  - Light smoke
  - Working fire
  - Defensive fire conditions
- **Incident Strategy**
  - Announce “Offensive” or “Defensive”
- **Incident Action Plan**
  - Assign on-scene units
  - Assign incoming units
- **Incident size-up/reconnaissance actions**
  - Announce if “360 is completed” or “360 could not be completed”
- **Assume and name command**
  - Use the name of the street the incident is on

Example: “I’m arriving on scene with a small, 2 story residential, with no basement, we have a working fire on the Alpha-Delta corner, first-in engine stretch a pre-connect to the Alpha front door, second-in establish a water supply, we are in an Offensive Strategy, I will be Main Street Command, and I will be out doing a 360.”

## **J. Continued Size-up**

As part of the Incident Size-up a 360 of the building must be performed. If it cannot be performed due to size of the building or obstruction it must be announced over the radio; “360 could not be completed”, this will give incoming officers a chance to take a different view of the building and get complete 360 information to the IC.

As the 360 is being performed:

- Evaluate the structure for:
  - Building size and type
  - Location and type of problem (smoke/fire conditions)
  - People in need of rescue / survivability profile
  - Building hazards and site hazards (including utilities)
  - Basement access and if it appears to be finished or unfinished
  - Exposures
- Identify the hazard zone
- Identify a staging location
- Confirm or update the incident strategy (offensive/defensive)
- Confirm or update the incident action plan (corrections or changes)
- 

Note! When available use thermal imaging during the Incident Size-up

## **K. Follow up Radio Report**

1. When the 360 is complete, give the follow up radio report. Include any information that was left out in the Initial Radio Report and correct any information that turned out to be inaccurate. Also include the following:
  - Confirm the 360 is complete, if not say why
  - Announce life safety information (building is evacuated, occupied, unknown, etc.)
  - Confirm Basement or “no apparent basement”
    - Update Incident Action Plan
    - Update or confirm Strategy
    - Update or confirm assignments
  - Operating frequency/channel

Example:

360 is complete, we have a basement under the Charlie side of the house, but it looks clear, fire on the Alpha-Delta corner is extending into the attic, first-in engine make entry for fire suppression, you are Team 1. Next available crew stretch a second pre-connect off of Engine 1 to the Alpha side door and make entry for search you are Team 2, we are in an Offensive Strategy, Staging is located at the corner of Main and Monroe.

2. At any point in the incident the IC may identify the need for additional resources. When requesting resources:
  - Type of resource request (box alarm type and level, or individual unit)
  - Location of Level-1 staging
  - Radio frequency for incoming resources

#### **L. Modes of Command**

There are three modes of command:

1. **Investigation Mode/Nothing Showing Mode:** Incidents that require investigation by the first arriving officer. Apparent conditions do not require immediate action. Examples:  
Smell of smoke in a residence or alarm sounding with no signs of fire.
2. **Fast Attack Mode:** Incidents that require immediate action by the first arriving resource. These include incidents that can be controlled/improved only if immediate action is taken and incidents where life safety is of immediate concern. Examples:  
Small fire on the porch that has not yet spread to the house; person in window on second floor of a house on fire who needs immediate rescue.
3. **Strategic Command Mode:** Incidents that require strong, dedicated command by virtue of their size or complexity. After size-up and 360, the IC shall establish a command post and remain as a fixed IC. Example: Working fire in a strip mall with multiple units exposed.

#### **M. Mobile vs Fixed Command**

Command transition will often depend on how quickly resources arrive to an incident. In many cases the initial IC will need to be mobile to perform a size-up and 360. During a working incident, the IC should transition from mobile command to a fixed “strong” command position as soon as possible. A fixed command position reduces distractions and improves the IC’s ability to focus on radio communications while developing and implementing the Incident Action Plan.

If an engine company arrives first, the officer or firefighter in charge may have to function at the strategic, tactical and task level, not only functioning as the IC but also as leader of the operational team until additional resources arrive. This initial IC should transfer command to another arriving officer as soon as possible in order limit the inherent risk associated with operating in this manner.

## **N. Transfer of Command**

1. The arrival of a higher-ranking officer does **not** automatically indicate that command has been transferred.
2. When command is transferred, the incoming IC must communicate with the current IC to receive a report on the status of the incident. This communication should be done face to face when possible, but can be performed over the radio when necessary.
3. The command transfer report should include the following:
  - a. Conditions (fire location, life safety concerns, status of benchmarks)
  - b. Actions (assignments, accountability, requested and on-scene resources)
  - c. Needs (anticipated resources needed to maintain 3 deep tactical reserve)
4. Immediately after command transfer, the officer taking command will announce the transfer of command over the radio, confirm or update the Strategy, and confirm or update the Incident Action Plan.

## **O. Incident Benchmarks**

Universal recognition of benchmarks will enhance the safety of personnel, as well as enable the IC to evaluate the effectiveness of the tactics being used. Benchmarks are a simple means of tracking progress (or lack of), as well as planning for additional resources. Benchmarks coincide with our strategic objectives.

There are three incident Benchmarks:

- **All Clear (life safety):** Primary search is complete. Efforts for lifesaving rescues (if any) are complete. A secondary search is not complete.
- **Under Control (incident stabilization):** Fire may not be completely extinguished but is under the control of the Fire Department. No additional resources are needed at the scene.
- **Loss stopped/Scene Secure (environmental protection/property preservation):** Loss is stopped and response activity is basically over. The incident has been mitigated and resources are cleaning up and preparing to return to service.

Benchmarks should be used to define geographic locations as well as the status of the overall incident. Benchmarks should be communicated over the radio to dispatch and personnel when they are achieved and verified by the IC.

## **P. Fire Ground Communications**

It is strongly recommended that scene communications take place on a dedicated tactical frequency as soon as possible to avoid being “covered” by page out/dispatch traffic. It is important to note that this may not be possible during the initial stages of an incident, especially if the IC is also operating in the Fast Attack mode at the tactical or task level.

As soon as possible, the IC should take a fixed command position to effectively plan the response, monitor radio transmissions and communicate with dispatch.

Incident communications should be “closed loop” to ensure the receiver understands the sender’s message. This involves the receiver repeating the sender’s message and the sender confirming the repeated message to close the loop.

**Status reports** should be communicated in the following format:

- Conditions: what you have
- Actions: what you are doing
- Needs: what you need

**Priority Traffic** - Use of the term *Priority Traffic* should signal to everyone on scene that an important message is to follow and to hold all radio traffic until IC has confirmed receipt of the message. Anyone on the fire ground can use Priority Traffic to communicate a time-sensitive, critical message that will likely effect scene safety, incident strategy, or operational priorities. It most often comes from someone acting in an operational role or someone supervising operations. Notifying IC of a collapse, a potential collapse, or other significant safety issue should be done with Priority Traffic.

**Emergency Traffic** – Use of the term *Emergency Traffic* should signal to everyone on scene that an important time-sensitive or critical message is to follow and to hold all radio traffic until the message is complete. Only the IC can initiate Emergency Traffic. Emergency traffic should be announced three times and preceded by a radio tone if and when available. Significant events like a change in strategy, or confirming report of a MADAY should be announced by the IC using Emergency Traffic. To ensure that everyone on the scene gets the message, IC should make every effort to announce Emergency Traffic over a powerful mobile radio. Since Dispatch has the most powerful radio, when possible dispatch should confirm and repeat the Emergency Traffic after IC has made the announcement.

## **Q. Incident Staging and Assignment Cycle**

It is critical to recognize the importance of staging at an incident and the importance of having a staging officer assigned to control incoming resources. **Level 1** staging shall be outside of the warm zone but close enough for personnel to walk up to the incident. **Level 2** staging is recommended for multiple alarm incidents. Level 2 staging shall take place at a remote location such as a parking lot.

Arriving personnel, whether in fire apparatus or in a personal vehicles, need to report to the designated staging location outside the warm/operational zone. Once assigned, personnel shall check into the warm/operational zone using the MABAS 35 passport system. Once in the warm/operational zone, the name of the team (Engine 1, Team 3, Squad 5) will not change, however their assignment/function may change several times. The following is an example of an assignment cycle:

*“Command from Engine 1, Engine 1 is in level 1 staging...”* (E-1 stages away from the incident at the designated location. The crew awaits assignment.)

*“Engine 1 from Command, you are assigned to on deck...”* (The crew of E-1 walks from level 1 staging and checks into the warm/operational zone supplying their MABAS 35 passport to the Accountability Officer as “E-1” and assumes the assignment of On Deck. The On Deck assignment means this team is ready to go “on air” and next to be assigned in the hazard zone. This team may be assigned to a geographic location such as On Deck for side Alpha or Charlie. This team, while On Deck, also functions as the rapid intervention team.)

*“Engine 1 from Command, stretch an 1 ¾” line off Engine 3, assist with fire control, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, side Alpha...”* (E-1 enters hazard zone and assists E-3 with fire control.)

*“Engine 1 from Command, recycle and then assist Team 2 with overhaul, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, side Alpha...”* (The fire is out and overhaul is starting. E-1 will remain in the warm/operational zone and recycle with a quick SCBA bottle change and drink of water and then re-enter to perform overhaul.)

*“Engine 1 from Command, report to rehab...”* (E-1 exits the hazard zone, recovers their MABAS 35 passport and reports to rehab outside of the warm/operational zone.)

*Engine 1 back to level 1 staging...* (E-1 reports to staging and awaits assignment. E-1 is then reassigned to on deck, or released by the IC.)

### **Hazard Zone Briefing:**

All personnel entering the hazard zone shall receive an incident briefing and assignment. The IC, Division officers and Staging officer should make no assumptions about the situational awareness of incoming personnel. Incoming personnel should be advised of the current conditions, benchmarks, strategy, radio frequency, and given a clear team name, assignment and location using the Assignment Model.

### **Tactical Reserve:**

Observing the three-deep concept is strongly recommended. The IC and Staging Officer should ensure enough resources are on hand to staff operations in the hazard zone with resources on deck and resources in staging.

**Alternate assignments (back-out vs. evacuate):**

*“Engine 1 from Command, back-out of the building...”* (E-1 collects their tools, hose lines, etc. and leaves the building.)

*“Emergency traffic, all units evacuate the building, evacuate the building, evacuate the building”* (followed by long duration air horn blasts from apparatus)...: (E-1 stops what they are doing, drops all tools, hose lines, etc. and immediately departs the building via the fastest, safe route. All personnel exit the building **and** move away from the hazard zone.)

**R. Selection and Continuous Evaluation of Strategy and Tactics**

The IC must continuously size-up and evaluate strategy and tactics using risk analysis, cost/benefit methods. In layman’s terms: risk a lot to save a lot, risk a little to save a little and risk nothing to save what is lost.

**An IC must always be ready to change strategies.** Just because you started in an offensive strategy doesn’t mean you have to stay in an offensive strategy. An IC must recognize situations and factors that justify moving to a defensive strategy and excluding personnel from the hazard zone. Examples:

- Elapsed time since the fire started (potential for collapse)
- Fire that has transitioned from room and contents to a structural fire (potential for collapse)
- Indicators of building collapse or partial building collapse
- An unoccupied building or a building cleared of occupants (the risk analysis for saving property is different from the risk analysis for saving life)
- Fire conditions worsen despite suppression efforts
- Interior crews report high heat conditions or no change in fire conditions despite suppression efforts
- Interior crews report soft or sagging floors
- Basement fires (especially unfinished basements)
- Hoarder homes
- Buildings with bars and security features installed

*It is the hope and desire of the Fire Chiefs of MABAS 35 that the implementation of this guideline will make for a safer and more effective fire ground.*