



VALENCIA COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS STANDARDS

Effective Date: 07/01/2014

Article #: 3.4

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INCIDENT COMMAND
 POLICY GUIDELINE DIRECTIVE

PURPOSE

Valencia County Fire Department responds to a wide range of emergency incidents. In order to effectively manage personnel and resources and to provide for the safety and welfare of personnel, we will always operate within the Incident Command System at an incident scene. This procedure identifies the policy to be employed in establishing the incident management system (IMS) in accordance with the general criteria of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and NFPA 1561.

COMMAND PROCEDURES

- Assign the responsibility for Command on a certain individual through a standard identification system, depending on the arrival sequence of members, crews, and Command officers.
- Ensure that a strong, direct, and visible Command will be established from the onset of the incident.
- Establish an effective incident organization defining the activities and responsibilities assigned to the I/C and the other individuals operating within the Incident Command System.
- Provide a system to process information to support incident management, planning, and decision making.
- Provide a system for the orderly transfer of Command to subsequent arriving most qualified members.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMAND

The I/C is responsible for ensuring the completion of the tactical objectives. **The tactical objectives (listed in order of priority) are:**

- A. Provide for the safety, accountability, and welfare of personnel. This priority is on-going throughout the incident
- B. Life Safety - Remove endangered occupants and treat the injured.
- C. Stabilize the incident.
- D. Conserve property.

The Incident Command System is used to facilitate the completion of the tactical objectives. The I/C is the person who drives the Command system towards that end. The I/C is responsible for building a Command structure that matches the organizational needs of the incident to achieve the completion of the tactical objectives for the incident. **The functions of Command** defines standard activities that are performed by the I/C to achieve the tactical objectives.



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FUNCTIONS OF COMMAND

The functions of Command include:

- Assume and announce Command and establish an effective operating position (Command Post).
- Rapidly evaluate the situation (size-up).
- Initiate, maintain, and control the communications process.
- Identify the overall strategy, develop an incident action plan, and assign equipment and personnel consistent with plans and standard operating procedures/guidelines.
- Develop an effective Incident Command organization.
- Review, evaluate, and revise (as needed) the Incident Action plan.
- Provide for the continuity, transfer, and termination of Command.

The I/C is responsible for all of these functions. As Command is transferred, so is the responsibility for these functions. The first five (5) functions must be addressed immediately from the initial assumption of Command.

ESTABLISHING COMMAND

The first Most Qualified Fire Department Member (MQM) to arrive at the scene of a multiple unit response shall assume command of the incident. The initial I/C shall remain in command until command is transferred or the incident is stabilized and command is terminated.

A single unit response that is not going to escalate beyond the commitment of this unit does not require a formal activation of the Incident Command System (as on-scene report with the assumption of Command). The first arriving unit will however, remain responsible for any needed command functions.

The **Radio Report** shall include:

- A) (Who am I?) Unit designation of the unit arriving on the scene.
- B) (What do I have?) A brief description of the incident situation, (i.e. building size, occupancy, nearest water source, Hazmat release, multi-vehicle accident, etc.)
 1. Obvious conditions (working fire, Hazmat spill, multiple patients, etc.).
 2. Assumption and identification of Command, (i.e. working command or stationary command)
- C) (What I am doing?) Brief description of action taken.
 1. Declaration of Strategy (for structural fires this would be declaring an offensive or defensive mode).
 2. Any obvious safety concerns.



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- D) (What resources do I need?) Request of resources for type of incident (i.e. second alarm, tenders for non-hydrant areas, ladder truck for rescue/ventilation, ensure command staff notified). Are resources needed emergent or non-emergent?
- E) (Where am I located?) Announce the following locations: command post, check-in, and staging.

Example:

For an offensive structure fire -

"Engine 3 is on the scene of a large two story home with a working fire on the second floor. Engine 3 will be setting up a water shuttle with drop tanks and going in with a handline to the second floor for search and rescue. This is an offensive fire attack. Engine 3 will be El-Cerro Loop I/C."

For an defensive fire -

"Pumper 2-1 is on the scene of a medium size warehouse fully involved with exposures to the east. Pumper 2-1 is laying a supply line and attacking the fire with a deck gun and a handline to the exposure for search and rescue and fire attack. This is a defensive fire. Engine 2-1 will be Hwy 47 I/C."

For an E.M.S. incident--

"Rescue 4 is on the scene with a multi-vehicle accident with multiple patients. Give me an additional engine and ambulance unit. Rescue 4 will be Meadow Lake Rd I/C."

RADIO DESIGNATION

The radio designation "**I/C**" will be used along with the geographical location of the incident (i.e. "El-Cerro I/C", "Hwy 47 I/C"). This designation will not change throughout the duration of the incident. The designation of "I/C" will remain with the officer currently in command of the incident throughout the event.

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 a chief officer, member, or unit without tactical capabilities (i.e. staff vehicle, no equipment, etc.) initiates command, the establishment of a Command Post should be a top priority. At most incidents the initial I/C will be the MQM. The following command options define the MQM's direct involvement in tactical activities and the modes of command that may be utilized.



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Nothing Showing--Investigative Mode:

These situations generally require investigation by the initial arriving company while other units remain in level one staging. The MQM should go with the company to investigate while utilizing a portable radio to command the incident.

Fast Attack--Working Command Mode:

Situations that require immediate action to stabilize and requires I/C's assistance and direct involvement in the attack. In these situations the I/C 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) must be achieved in a compressed time.
- Any incident where the safety and welfare of firefighters is a major concern.
- Obvious working incidents that require further investigation by the MQM.

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

- A. Situation is stabilized.
- B. Situation is not stabilized and the I/C must withdraw to a safe distance and establish a Command Post. At some time the I/C must 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 should remain in a hazardous area without radio communication capabilities.
- C. Command is transferred to another MQM. When a Command officer is assuming Command, the Command officer may opt to return the member to his/her crew, utilize the member as staff support, or assign him/her as a Division/group officer.

Command Mode--Stationary Command Post

Certain incidents, by virtue of their size, complexity, or potential for rapid expansion, require immediate strong, direct, overall command. In such cases, the MQM will initially assume an exterior, safe, and effective command position and maintain that position until relieved by a chief officer. The tactical command board shall be initiated and utilized to assist in managing these types of incidents.

If the MQM assumes a command mode (I/C), the following options are available with regards to the assignment of the remaining crewmembers.



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- A. A crewmember may "move up" within the crew and place the crew into action with two or three members, that crewmember will serve as the acting crew supervisor and must be provided with a portable radio. The collective and individual capabilities and experience of the crew will regulate this action.
- B. The I/C may assign the crew members to work under the supervision of another supervisor. In such cases, the assigned supervisor must communicate with the supervisor of the other crew and indicate the assignment of those personnel.
- C. The I/C may elect to assign the crew members to perform staff functions to assist command, such as information reconnaissance, filling out the tactical command board, etc.

A MQM assuming I/C 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 judgment of the member are of great importance. The modes identified are guidelines to assist the member in planning appropriate actions. The actions initiated should conform to one of the above-mentioned modes of operation.

TRANSFER OF COMMAND

Command is transferred to improve the quality of the command organization. When command is transferred it should trigger upgrades in the command structure. The following guidelines outline the transfer of command.

- A. The first fire department member arriving on the scene will automatically assume command. This will normally be the MQM but could be any fire department member up to and including the Fire Chief.
- B. The next arriving MQM (more qualified than the first arriving MQM) will assume Command after the transfer of Command procedures has been completed (assuming an equal or MQM has not already assumed Command).
- C. The first arriving Command Officer may assume Command of the incident following transfer of Command procedures. Assumption of Command is discretionary for the VCFD Captain, Assistant Chief, and/or the Fire Chief.
- D. The second arriving Command officer should report to the Command Post, to receive assignment.

In certain situations, it may be advantageous for the first arriving I/C to transfer Command to the next crew ON THE SCENE. This is indicated when the initial commitment of the first arriving crew requires a full crew (i.e., an immediate rescue situation, interior attack) and another supervisor or Command officer is on the scene. When a chief officer arrives at the scene at the same time as the initial arriving Company, the chief officer should assume Command of the incident.



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"Passing Command" to a unit that is not on the scene creates a gap in the command process and compromises incident management. To prevent this "gap", command SHALL NOT BE TRANSFERRED TO AN MQM WHO IS NOT ON THE SCENE. It is preferable to have the initial arriving MQM continue to operate in the working mode until command can be transferred to an arriving on-scene unit.

Should a situation occur where a later arriving company or command officer cannot locate or communicate with command (after several radio attempts), they will assume and announce their assumption of command and initiate whatever actions are necessary to confirm the safety of the missing crew.

Within the chain of Command, the actual Transfer of Command will be regulated by the following procedure:

- A. The member assuming command will communicate with the person being relieved by radio or face-to-face. Face-to-face is the preferred method to transfer command.
- B. The person being relieved will brief the officer assuming command indicating at least the following:
 1. General situation status:
 - a. Safety considerations.
 - b. Incident conditions (fire location and extent, Hazmat spill or release, number of patients, etc.)
 - c. Resources committed to incident.
 - d. Incident Action Plan.
 - e. Progress of the tactical objectives.
 2. Deployment and assignments of operating crews.
 3. Appraisals of need for additional resources.
- C. The person being relieved of command should review the tactical command board with the officer assuming command. This board 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.
- D. Notification of transfer of command over the dispatch channel and tactical channels. (i.e. Dispatch, all supervisors on scene)

The arrival of a ranking officer on the incident scene does not mean that command has been automatically transferred to that officer. Command is only transferred when the outlined transfer of command process has been completed.

The officer assuming command will assign the person being relieved of command to the most appropriate position.



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A MQM may elect to have a subordinate continue the role of I/C. In cases where an individual is effectively commanding an incident, and satisfactory progress is being made to bring the incident under control, it may be desirable for that person to continue in an active command role. The MQM must determine that the I/C is completely aware of the position and function of operating crews and the general status of the situation. In these cases, the arriving MQM may assume a supportive role in the overall command function. The MQM will assume responsibility for the incident by virtue of being involved in the command process.

REMARKS ON COMMAND

The response and arrival of additional District Chief officers or County Command staff on the incident scene strengthens the overall command function. As the incident escalates, the I/C should use these officers to fill Division/groups, Branch, and Safety positions, strengthening the command structure. Additional officers should be assigned to positions as needed.

When the first arriving unit is a District Chief officer or County Command staff, efforts should be automatically directed towards establishing a Command Post and fulfilling the Command functions. A Command Post in a vehicle equipped for this purpose is a priority at all working incidents. A vehicle that provides appropriate workspace for the I/C and staff personnel, lighting, communications equipment, supplies reference items, and some isolation from outside distractions will make command more effective.

All responding personnel **SHALL** eliminate all unnecessary radio traffic while responding, unless such communications are required to ensure that Command functions are initiated and completed. This requires the initial I/C to give a clear on-the-scene report and continue to give updated progress reports as needed. All radio communications **SHALL** be in CLEAR TEXT.

All personnel SHALL report directly to the Command Post to notify the I/C of their availability to assume incident duties unless directed to another location by the I/C. All POV's and unassigned apparatus should park in a location that does not restrict access to the scene and report to the designated area for assignment.

The I/C is responsible for managing the incident. The fire department empowers that individual (the I/C) with the authority to turn his/her decisions into actions (formulate a plan and assign crews). Simply stated, the I/C outranks everybody. If a higher-ranking officer wants to affect a change in the management of an incident, he/she must first be on the scene of the incident, and then utilize the transfer of command procedure.

The I/C is responsible for gathering and documenting all information that will be included into the NFIRS report.



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COMMAND STAFF

The incident scene is often a dynamic, intense, and exciting place. As the incident grows into and past the requirements of a first alarm assignment, the I/C can become overloaded and overwhelmed with information management, assigning crews, filling out and updating the command board, planning, forecasting, calling for additional resources, talking on the radio, and fulfilling all the other functions of command. The immediate need of command at this point in the incident is support. Assignment of NIMS ICS functions is essential as the incident grows.

COMMAND STRUCTURE - Division/groups, Groups, Basic Operational Approach

Normally, at this type of incident, a MQM can effectively supervise his/her own crew and direct and coordinate the efforts of one or two additional crews assigned to his/her division/group. As operations expand in complexity and size, and as additional District Chief Officers and or Valencia County Command Staff become available, the I/C should assign them to relieve MQMs and assume division/group responsibilities.

The use of division/groups in the Command organization provides a standard system to divide the incident scene into smaller subordinate Command units or areas.

The number of division/groups that can be effectively managed by the I/C varies. In fast moving complex operations, a span of control of no more than five division/groups is preferred. In slower moving less complex operations, the I/C may effectively manage no more than seven division/groups.

Where the number of division/groups exceed the span of control that the I/C can effectively manage, the Incident Organization should be divided to Branches. Each Branch is responsible for several division/groups and should be assigned a separate radio channel.

Division/group procedures also provide an array of major functions, which may be selectively implemented according to the needs of a particular situation. This places responsibility for the details and execution of each particular function on a Division/group supervisor.

When effective division/groups have been established, the I/C can concentrate on overall strategy and resource allocation, allowing the Division/Group Supervisor to manage their assigned units. The I/C determines strategic goals and assigns tactical objectives and resources to the division/groups. Each Division/Group Supervisor is responsible for the tactical deployment of the resources at his/her disposal in order to complete the tactical objectives assigned by the I/C. Division/group supervisors are also responsible for communicating needs and progress to Command.



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Division/groups reduce the overall amount of radio communications. Most routine communications within a division/group should be conducted in a face-to-face manner between MQMs and their Division/group officer. This process reduces unnecessary radio traffic and increases ability to transmit critical radio communications.

The safety of firefighting personnel represents the major reason for establishing division/groups. Each Division/Group Supervisor must maintain communication with assigned crews to control both their position and function. The Division/group must constantly monitor all hazardous situations and risks to personnel. The Division/Group Supervisor must take appropriate action to ensure that crews are operating in a safe and effective manner.

I/C Should Begin to Assign Division/Groups Based on the Following Factors:

- Situations which will eventually involve a number of crews or functions, beyond the capability of I/C to directly control. The I/C should initially assign division/group responsibilities to the first crews assigned to a geographic area or function until a MQM is available.
- When the I/C can no longer effectively cope with (or manage) the number of crews currently involved in the operation.
- When crews are involved in complex operations (Large interior or geographic area, hazardous materials, technical rescues, etc.)
- When crews are operating from tactical positions of which the I/C has little or no direct control over (i.e. out of sight).
- When the situation presents special hazards and close control is required over operating crews (i.e., unstable structural conditions, hazardous materials, heavy fire load, marginal offensive situations, etc.).

When establishing a division/group, the I/C will assign each Division/Group Supervisor:

- A. Tactical objectives.
 - B. A radio designation (i.e. Division A, Ventilation Group, etc.)
 - C. The identity of resources assigned to the sector.
- Divisions assigned to specific operating areas shall be designated as division A, B, C, or D, etc. Division "A" would be the front of the building and the other divisions would go clockwise around the building in alphabetical order. Functional groups will be named by their function and called a group (i.e., ventilation group).

In multi-story occupancies, divisions will usually be indicated by floor numbers (Division 4 indicates 4th floor). In some cases the floor division identification may be subdivided into geographic areas such as "Division 4 A" or "Division 4 B" depending on stairwell and floor access.



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Division/Group Supervisor will be responsible for and in control of all assigned functions within their division/group. This requires each Division/Group Supervisor to:

- A. Complete objectives assigned by I/C.
- B. Account for all assigned personnel.
- C. Ensure that operations are conducted safely.
- D. Monitor work progress.
- E. Redirect activities as necessary.
- F. Coordinate actions with related activities, and adjacent division/groups.
- G. Monitor welfare of division/group personnel.
- H. Request additional resources as needed.
- I. Provide Command with essential and frequent progress reports.
- J. Re-allocate resources within the division/group.

The Division/Group Supervisor should be readily identifiable and maintain a visible position as much as possible.

I/C must be advised immediately of significant changes, particularly those involving the ability or inability to complete an objective, hazardous conditions, accidents, structural collapse, etc.

Division/Group Supervisors will insure an orderly and thorough reassignment of crews to rehab division/group. Crews must report to rehab intact to facilitate accountability.