

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

By Steve Prziborowski

The responsibilities of the first-due company officer and/or chief officer are tremendous and ever growing. The items below are information I have taken from my experiences, as well as numerous other sources to put together a checklist as a guideline to base your emergency scene decision-making on. This list is not an ending, as much as it is a beginning. Take the time to modify to best meet your needs, based on the situation you may find yourself faced with. Be safe out there, and remember our personnel deserve a round-trip ticket home, every time they come to work.

Size-up:

The things you are thinking about, starting with even before the call is dispatched, and ending when you have left the scene.

- F (Facts)
 - o Time of emergency
 - o Location of emergency
 - o Nature of emergency
 - o Life hazard
 - o Exposures
 - o Building or buildings involved
 - o Fire
 - o Weather
- P (Probabilities/possibilities)
 - o Life hazard
 - o Extension of fire
 - o Explosions
 - o Collapse of component parts of involved building
 - o Weather changes
 - o Preventable damage (water, heat, smoke, other causes)
- O (Own situation)
 - o Personnel and equipment
 - o Additional assistance available
 - o Water supply
 - o Private fire protection equipment
 - o Action that has been taken
- P (Plan)
 - o Initial decision
 - o Supplemental decisions
- D (Decision)
 - o Orders and instructions
 - o Supervision of operations

NOTE: The above items come from Lloyd Layman's "Firefighting Tactics" book, and are in many ways, similar to the "Critical Fireground Factors" mentioned on the next page.

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

For all emergencies:

- Verify the map pages/find where you are going
- View any applicable pre-plans
- Start tracking responding resources (responding units, where each are responding from, in what order they may arrive, possible assignments, etc.)
- Ensure radios are on the appropriate channels
- Ensure appropriate PPE is on or easy to don upon arrival, and not to be put on while enroute unless you can do so with your seatbelt still on!
- Ensure your personnel are not getting too “amped up”
- Remember, fires do not kill firefighters. Instead, lack of situational awareness, complacency, over aggressiveness, poor risk management, acting outside your scope of practice, lack of building construction knowledge, lack of fire behavior knowledge, lack of strategy and tactics knowledge, lack of accountability, lack of using ICS, forgetting we did not create the emergency – we are there to mitigate the emergency and not be a part of the problem, and most importantly, the inability to learn from history kills firefighters!

For structure fires

- Fire behavior (Think where the fire will most likely travel to and stop it!)
 - o Center hallway construction? If so, stop the horizontal spread and keep the hallways tenable!
 - o Strip Malls? If so, stop the horizontal spread
- Building construction (especially type of construction – I, II, III, IV, or V; is it pre-1933 construction – unreinforced masonry, etc.)

For EMS responses (or any response where patients may be involved): “ENAMES”

- E (Are there any **E**nvironmental dangers?)
- N (What are the **N**umber of patients?)
- A (Is there a need for **A**dditional resources?)
- M (What is the **M**echanism of injury/illness?)
- E (Is **E**xtrication needed?)
- S (Are **S**pinal precautions necessary?)

For wildland fires:

- Fire history
- Weather conditions
- Fuels
- Topography
- Fire behavior
- Access
- Water sources/supply
- Number of structures being threatened
- Evacuation issues
- Available firefighting resources
- Special hazards

Critical Fireground Factors:

To be used in conjunction with your size-up information above, and to help you make decisions and develop your Incident Action Plan: “WALLACE WAS HOT”

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

Every company officer and chief officer should be considering ALL of these items enroute to the incident and upon arrival at the incident to ensure they are covering ALL bases.

- W (Water Supply)
- A (Area)
- L (Life Safety)
- L (Location/Extent of fire)
- A (Apparatus responding)
- C (Construction/Collapse potential)
- E (Exposures)
- W (Weather)
- A (Auxiliary appliances)
- S (Special matters)
- H (Height)
- O (Occupancy)
- T (Time of day)

Radio Report:

- Unit designation of arriving unit
- A brief description of the incident situation (type of building/occupancy/location, type of construction, etc.)
- Obvious conditions (fire showing, smoke showing, multiple vehicles involved, etc.)
- Brief description of action taken
- Declaration of strategy (structure fires)
- Any obvious safety concerns
- Assumption of Incident Command
- Location of Command Post
- Request for additional resources or release of responding resources

Strategic Mode:

- Offensive
- Defensive
- Marginal/Transitional (Offensive/defensive or Defensive/offensive – key point: not both at the same time!)

For wildland fires:

- Direct Attack (Offensive), 4 types:
 - o Pincer
 - o Envelopment
 - o Tandem
 - o Flanking
- Indirect Attack (Defensive)

Command Options:

- Nothing showing (investigative) mode
- Fast attack (possibly passing command if another unit is on scene) mode
- Command mode

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

Incident Priorities:

- Life Safety / Customer Service (internal and external)
- Incident Stabilization / Hazard Mitigation
- Property Conservation
- Environmental Considerations

Strategic Priorities/Objectives/Goals:

- Rescue
- Exposures
- Confinement
- Extinguishment
- Overhaul
- Ventilation
- Salvage

Tactical Objectives:

Direction/orders assigned to companies. Based on the above Strategic Priorities/Objectives/Goals, but may include:

- Locate and confine the fire to the room/building of origin
- Rescue (and/or evacuate) all occupants from the building
- Establish water supply
- Place a ___ hoseline into operation on the _____
- Evacuate all occupants from the neighboring buildings
- Provide medical treatment for patients
- Triage for patients
- Establish a treatment area
- Establish a staging area
- Keep the fire from _____
- Check for extension
- Assess for ventilation needs
- Collect T-cards/Establish accountability
- Provide ventilation (horizontal or ventilations)
- Secure utilities
- Ladder the building
- Provide salvage
- Establish rehab
- Utilize a gated wye and bundles to ____
- Establish SCBA bottle support cache

Incident Objectives:

In addition to the above, primary Strategic Priorities/Objectives/Goals (RECEOVS), but also to consider the following):

- Provide for scene safety
- Provide for the safety, accountability and welfare of personnel
- Stabilize the patient
- Keep the fire from spreading to _____ (location, street, building, etc.)
- Conserve property
- Secure (or control) the perimeter

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

- Create hazard zones
- Establish control zones
- Identification of hazard/problem/material
- Secure ignition sources
- Establish decontamination process
- Notify proper agencies
- Establish protective action options
- Stabilize the incident and provide for life safety
- Remove endangered occupants and treat the injured
- Contain/control the hazardous materials release
- Identify and eliminate debris and fall hazards
- Providing information to media
- Providing support to on-scene personnel (rehab, tools/equipment, SCBA bottle support, etc.)
- Provide shelter to displaced occupants
- Determine cause and origin of problem
- Determine what caused the explosion
- Secure the scene (prior to departure)
- Notify appropriate other agencies

NOTE: The best way to describe incident objectives is they are items beginning with action verbs. Many of these are found within our Standard Operating Guidelines.

Benchmarks to State on Radio:

Not necessarily in the order below:

- On scene / report on conditions
- Command established
- Location of command post
- Strategic mode
- Water supply (who will establish)
- 2 in/2 out established (or not established)
- Utilities secured
- RIC established (including location)
- Staging area location
- All clear (primary search)
- Confirm core stations are covered
- Confirm all standard notifications are made and agencies/people are confirmed to be responding
- PARs (as appropriate)
- Knockdown
- Under control
- Secondary search completed
- Command terminated or transferred
- Duty Chief notified/updated

When Establishing a Division or Group (or Branch/Unit, etc.):

- Advise of who will be in charge / their radio designator
- Advise them of their tactical objectives
- Advise them of their assigned resources
- Remind them to provide a CAN (Conditions/Actions/Needs) report as needed.

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

Alarm Responses:

Level 1 Structure

1st:

- 2 Engines
- 1 Truck
- 1 Support Unit (not in MH)
- 1 BC

2nd:

- 2 Engines
- 1 Truck
- 1 Support Unit (not in MH)
- 1 BC

2nd (Morgan Hill):

- 2 Engines (Mutual Aid)
- 1 Truck (Mutual Aid)
- Haz Mat 2
- 1 BC (Mutual Aid)

3rd:

- 1 Engine (CNT)
- 2 Engines (Mutual Aid)
- 1 Truck (Mutual Aid)
- 1 BC (Mutual Aid)

3rd (Morgan Hill):

- 2 Engines (Mutual Aid)
- 1 Truck (Mutual Aid)
- 1 BC (Mutual Aid)

Proposed Changes:

1st:

- 2 Engines
- 1 Truck
- 1 BC

2nd (Morgan Hill):

- 2 Engines (Mutual Aid)
- 1 Truck (Mutual Aid)
- 1 BC (Mutual Aid)

Full 1st (in addition to the above units)

- 1 Engine
- Haz Mat 2 / Breathing Support 2
- 1 Support Unit
- 1 BC

3rd:

- 1 Engine (CNT)
- 2 Engines (Mutual Aid)
- 1 Truck (Mutual Aid)
- 1 BC (Mutual Aid)

2nd:

- 2 Engines
- 1 Truck
- 1 Support Unit
- 1 BC (Mutual Aid)

3rd (Morgan Hill):

- 2 Engines (Mutual Aid)
- 1 Truck (Mutual Aid)
- 1 BC (Mutual Aid)

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

Level 6 – Brush Alarm

1st:

- 2 Engines
- 1 Patrol
- 1 BC

2nd:

- 2 Engines
- 1 Patrol
- 1 BC

3rd:

- 2 Engines
- 1 Patrol
- Haz Mat 2
- Duty Chief

Greater Alarm Notifications:

1st:

- Duty Investigator / PIO (DTINV)

2nd:

- Automatic Move-ups
- Off-duty callbacks (B-12 and 30)
- Mutual Aid (B-12 area)
- Safety Officer (CFSAF)
- Law Enforcement
- Gas and electric
- On-call duty chief
- Fire Associates

3rd:

- Automatic move-ups
- 2A1
- Fire Mechanic
- County Fire “A” and “B” staff
- CNT Staging Area Manager group (CFSTG)
- Ambulance standby
- Mutual Aid
- Overhead Support Team

Additional Notifications to Consider:

(Besides standard notifications):

- MCI / MPMP Alert or Activation?
 - o Alert (Local or Countywide)
 - o Activation (If requesting an Activation, don't forget to provide the following information):
 - Level of Activation (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5)
 - Number of patients requiring transportation
 - Ground ambulance staging location
 - Safety or approach instructions
 - Request additional units
- AMR Supervisor
- Ambulances (currently one is responding on a third alarm, code 2 as a standby).
- Law enforcement Supervisor
- Mutual aid resources not normally dispatched (water tenders, etc.)

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

Transfer of Command Briefing:

- Incident Conditions (Fire location and extent; haz mat conditions – spill or release; number of patients, etc.)
- IAP
- Progress toward completion of the Tactical Objectives
- Safety considerations
- Deployment and assignment of operating companies and personnel
- Appraisal of need for additional resources

OR

- What I have
- What I have done
- What I need
- What I recommend doing

OR

- What is the life hazard and what actions are being taken to address it?
- What is the location and extent of the fire (or hazard)? Is it extending?
- What are the exposures?
- What is the occupancy? Type of construction?
- What is the location of all on scene units and where have hoselines been placed?
- Are any additional units needed?
- Who is the RIC and what is their location?

Incident Now Under Control/Post Incident:

- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing needed (need may be determined at any time during incident)?
- Start preparing a demobilization plan to get apparatus/personnel back in service and to their home stations.
- Gather the on scene officers together to determine an overhaul plan, in conjunction with the Duty Investigator
- Ensure cause and origin process has been started and/or determined
- Complete a tailboard session prior to departure
- Ensure occupants/involved citizens are knowledgeable about what we are doing, why we are doing what we are doing, and what they need to do while we are on scene and after we leave the scene
- Prepare for the Post Incident Analysis
- Obtain radio traffic tape from County Communications (automatically generated on second alarms or greater)

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

Typical ICS Organization Chart Positions Filled Or Relevant Issues:

STRUCTURE FIRE:

- Incident Commander
- Safety Officer
- Information Officer
- Operations Chief
- Planning Chief
- Logistics Chief
- Divisions:
 - o 1, 2, 3, etc.
 - o Subdivision 1, 2, 3, etc.
 - o A, B, C, D (for building/areas when looking from above)
 - o Interior
- Groups:
 - o Fire attack
 - o Ventilation
 - o Exposure
 - o Medical
 - o Patient Transportation (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - o Salvage
 - o Rescue
 - o Haz Mat
 - o RIC (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - o Rehab (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - o Structure protection
- Staging Area Manager
- Water Supply Officer
- Units:
 - o Medical
 - o Rehab
 - o Documentation
 - o Resource
 - o Situation

WILDLAND FIRE:

- Incident Commander
- Safety Officer
- Information Officer
- Operations Chief
- Planning Chief
- Logistics Chief
- Branches:
 - o A, X (left flank/right flank for wildland fires)
 - o Functional
- Divisions:
 - o A, X (left flank/right flank for wildland fires)

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

- Groups:
 - o RIC (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - o Rehab (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - o Structure protection
- Staging Area Manager
- Water Supply Officer
- Units:
 - o Medical
 - o Rehab
 - o Documentation
 - o Ground Support
 - o Resource
 - o Situation

HIGH-RISE FIRE:

- Incident Commander
- Safety Officer
- Information Officer
- Operations Chief
- Planning Chief
- Logistics Chief
- Divisions:
 - o 1, 2, 3, etc.
 - o Subdivision 1, 2, 3, etc.
 - o A, B, C, D (for building/areas when looking from above)
 - o Interior
- Groups:
 - o Fire attack
 - o Ventilation
 - o Medical
 - o Patient Transportation (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - o Salvage
 - o Rescue
 - o Haz Mat
 - o RIC (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - o Rehab (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
- Staging Area Manager
- Base Manager
- Water Supply Officer
- Units:
 - o Medical
 - o Rehab
 - o Lobby
 - o Systems Control
 - o Ground Support
 - o Resource
 - o Situation

Typical Hierarchy High Rise:

(Below Section Chief level) – Per Santa Clara County Mutual Aid Plan, Appendix 12, updated November 1, 2001

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

“ALS Base”

- A = Fire Attack/Investigation
- L = Lobby/Systems Control
- S = Staging/Supply
- Base = Incident Base

NOTE: If smoke or fire is present at a high-rise, upgrade to a 3rd alarm, strongly consider a 4th or 5th alarm!

Support Branch:

- Lobby Control Unit
 - o Elevator Operator
 - o Access Control
 - o Personnel Accounting
- Systems Unit
 - o Fire Control Room
 - o Systems Management
- Ground Support Unit
 - o Transport
 - o SCBA Air Supply
 - o Equipment/Apparatus Support
- Base
 - o Staffing
 - o Equipment
 - o Security
- Supply Unit

Service Branch:

- Communications Unit
- Rehab Unit
- Medical Unit

No Food Unit, Cost Unit or Demobilization Unit (not to say we wouldn't need them)

Not to mention other options normally found under Operations, Planning and Logistics, implemented as needed.

HAZ MAT:

- Incident Commander
- Safety Officer
- Information Officer
- Operations Chief
- Planning Chief
- Logistics Chief
- Divisions:
 - o 1, 2, 3, etc.
 - o Subdivision 1, 2, 3, etc.

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

- A, B, C, D (for buildings/areas when looking from above)
- A, X (left flank/right flank for wildland fires)
- Interior
- Groups:
 - Fire attack
 - Ventilation
 - Exposure
 - Medical
 - Patient Transportation (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - Rescue
 - Evacuation
 - Haz Mat
 - RIC (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - Rehab (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
- Staging Area Manager
- Units:
 - Medical
 - Rehab
 - Entry
 - Site Access Control
 - Documentation
 - Decontamination
 - Resource
 - Situation

Typical Hierarchy Haz Mat:

(Below Section Chief level) – Per F.O.G., June 2004 version

Assistant Safety Officer (Haz Mat) – reporting to the Safety Officer/I.C.

Haz Mat Group Supervisor

- Entry Unit Leader
- Site Access Control Unit Leader
 - Safe Refuge Area Manager
- Decontamination Unit Leader
- Technical Specialists

Not to mention other options normally found under Operations, Planning and Logistics, implemented as needed.

MCI / MPMP EVENT:

- Incident Commander
- Safety Officer
- Information Officer
- Operations Chief
- Planning Chief
- Logistics Chief
- Branches:
 - Geographical or functional
- Divisions:

Emergency Scene Priorities for the Incident Commander

- A, B, C, D (for buildings/areas when looking from above)
- Groups:
 - Fire
 - Law
 - Medical
 - Patient Transportation (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
 - Rescue
 - Haz Mat
 - Rehab (may or may not be a group – could be a Unit)
- Units:
 - Triage
 - Treatment
 - Site Access Control
 - Documentation
 - Resource
- Managers:
 - Staging Area Manager
 - Treatment Dispatch Manager
 - Immediate Treatment Area Manager
 - Delayed Treatment Area Manager
 - Minor Treatment Area Manager
- Other:
 - Medical Supply Coordinator
 - Medical Communications Coordinator
 - Ground Ambulance Coordinator

Typical Hierarchy MCI/MPMP:

(Below Section Chief level) – Per MPMP January 2007 version

Medical Group Supervisor

- Triage Unit Leader
 - Triage Personnel
 - Morgue Manager
- Medical Supply Coordinator
- Treatment Unit Leader
 - Treatment Dispatch Manager
 - Immediate Treatment Manager
 - Delayed Treatment Manager
 - Minor Treatment Area Manager

Patient Transportation Group Supervisor

- Medical Communications Coordinator
- Ground Ambulance Coordinator

Not to mention other options normally found under Operations, Planning and Logistics, implemented as needed.