



# ANN ARBOR FIRE DEPARTMENT

## Standard Operating Procedures - 3.02 Establishing Command



### COMMAND FUNCTION #2 - ESTABLISHING COMMAND

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 Approved: Fire Chief Mike Kennedy

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#### I. COMMAND FUNCTION #2 - ESTABLISHING COMMAND

Command should be formally declared on all incidents where two (2) or more units are dispatched.

One or two company responses that are not going to escalate beyond the commitment of these companies do not require the first arriving unit or officer to establish command. The first arriving unit or officer will remain responsible for any needed command when required.

Examples would include:

- Single unit response check welfare
- Check Hazard
- Any EMS call requiring only one company

The first unit or member to arrive to the scene of a multi-unit dispatched incident will establish command of the incident by transmitting a standard Initial Radio Report (IRR).

The confirmation of command occurs when Central Fire Dispatch uses the order model to repeat the IRR back to all responding units, confirming that the initial arriving unit is in command of the incident.

Establishing command causes the first-arriving unit or officer the Incident Commander (IC)) to size up the incident, determine the incident’s strategy and formulate an incident action plan (IAP). All of this is executed and shared with all the incident participants when the IC transmits an IRR.

When the incident begins with an in-place IC, all later-arriving units will be assigned based on the IC’s IAP. This puts all the incident players on the same page. Everyone knows what the problem is and what action is being taken to solve it.

The absence of an effective IC is the most common reason for ragged incident beginnings and unsafe endings. Effective (and coordinated) action is the result of beginning (and ongoing) incident operations with an in-place and in-charge IC.

Once command has been established, all routine communication between the dispatch center and the incident will be directed through command. The initial IC shall remain in command until command is transferred, or the incident is stabilized, and command is terminated. A formal IC must be in place, performing the functions of command, whenever a hazard zone exists.



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### II. NAMING COMMAND - RADIO DESIGNATION

The radio designation "COMMAND" will be used along with the major cross road, or the specific occupancy name of the incident site, e.g., "Main Street Command," "Michigan Stadium." This designation will not change throughout the duration of the incident. The designation of "Command" will remain with the IC throughout the duration of the entire incident.

### III. COMMAND POSITIONING

The IC's position will greatly affect their ability to control the incident scene. Typically, the company officer of the first arriving company will become the initial IC for the incident, IC #1.

There are three command positions that a company officer can place themselves in, depending on the situation. These three command positions are:  
Investigating Command position

**Fast-Attacking Command position** – Inside the hazard zone

**"Command" position** - Stationary, inside of a command vehicle

**Investigative Command Position (Nothing Showing)** - This is a mobile IC on a portable radio, moving around and evaluating conditions while trying to identify the incident problem. The company officer should remain with their company to investigate while utilizing a portable radio to command the incident.

When the initial IC reports "nothing showing" or an equivalent report, any additional units to the incident shall continue into the scene using a normal traffic response.

#### **Fast Attacking Command Position**

Many times, the strength of our local Incident Management System (IMS) is the fast-attacking IC, who directly supervises the use of quick force at the beginning of the event. That action is reinforced and upgraded by response chiefs who come in behind the initial fast-attacking IC to quickly establish a stationary, exterior command post that supports and expands on the fast-attacking IC's initial actions. The fast-attacking command position provides the front-end command structure for that capability.

The fast-attacking command position is defined as: IC #1 enters the hazard zone (when in the offensive strategy) in full PPE, with a portable radio, supervising and assisting their crew in the attack.

The advantages of a fast-attacking IC:

- Enhances crew safety and accountability
- Gives the IC another set of critical factors to evaluate and base unit assignments on (interior conditions)
- Usually solves the problem quickly



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The disadvantages of a Fast-Attacking IC:

- Combining action and command is tough to do
- Difficult communication position (full PPE in a hazard zone)
- Limited field of vision
- Reduces strategic span of control

The entire response team coming in behind a fast-attacking IC must realize that the initial IC is in an attack position, not a command position. We trade off this position disadvantage because many times this initial front end “hit” is enough to stabilize the incidents problems.

When the front-end assault does not stabilize the situation, the fast-attacking IC is not in the best position to continue command; they are in the worst position. The fast-attacking Command position should end in one of three (3) ways:

1. Situation is quickly stabilized.
2. Command is transferred from the fast-attacking company officer IC (#1) to a subsequent arriving command officer (IC #2).
3. If the situation is not stabilized and there is a delay in the arrival of a command officer, the Fast-Attacking Company Officer IC must move to an exterior (stationary) command position and operate in the Command position. When this happens, the company officer has the following crew options:
  1. Assign crew member(s) to another company in the hazard zone. This must be acknowledged by both the original and the receiving officer and by their inclusion in the accountability system.
  2. Have crew exit with the IC and perform IC support roles.
  3. No crew will remain in a hazard zone without radio communications.

#### IV. COMPANY OFFICER IC'S

There are three operational levels that function at the scene of a hazard zone. They are:

**Strategic level**

**Tactical level**

**Task level**

Each of these levels is distinct and has their own set of responsibilities. For the majority of the incidents we respond to, the initial responsibility for managing all three organizational levels is handled by IC#1, when they are a company officer.

The first arriving Company Officer IC will size up the incident's critical factors, declare the incident strategy and assume command. IC #1 has initial command and control responsibility for the entire incident operation on the strategic level until command is transferred or terminated.

On the tactical level, the fast-attacking IC will implement and execute an incident action plan that addresses the incidents critical factors in order to facilitate the completion of the tactical priorities.



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A fast-attacking company officer IC will also directly supervise and assist their crew members with the tasks required to bring the incident's problems under control. In most cases, this initial attack wave eliminates the incident hazards. For incidents that are not quickly controlled, are escalating, or are significant in scope and size upon our arrival, the strategic and tactical operational levels must be upgraded with chief officers as required.

The strategic level of command on these types of incidents will be the first operational level that is upgraded. This command transfer significantly improves the IC's position and ability to perform and manage the 8 functions of command and the corresponding strategic safety requirements for the entire incident operation. Placing the IC in a standard command vehicle position where they can exclusively focus on incident management, enhances and facilitates both the completion of the tactical priorities and firefighter task level safety.

The command position (CP) is defined as: a command position that is stationary, remote, outside of the hazard zone and inside of a vehicle. The most effective command position is inside a CP, not inside a burning building. If the battalion chief is the initial-arriving unit to the same structure fire, they will operate in the command position.

Certain incidents, by virtue of their size, complexity, or potential for rapid expansion, demand early, strong, stationary command from the outset of the incident. In these cases, the first arriving Company Officer (IC #1) will assume command and, from the beginning of the event, stay out of the hazard zone in a stationary exterior CP (most of these situations present as larger, defensive fires).

If the company officer assumes a CP from the onset of the Incident, the following options are available to assign of the remaining crew members on the IC's Unit.

- A. Assign the crew members to perform staff functions to assist the IC. Staff functions include recon/reporting, communications assistance; help with tactical worksheet tracking etc.
- B. Assign company personnel to another company. This must be acknowledged by both the original and the receiving officer and by their inclusion in the accountability system.

"Passing Command" to a unit that is not on the scene creates a gap in the command process and compromises incident management and safety. To prevent this command and control gap, command shall not be transferred to any officer who is not physically located on the scene. When a chief officer arrives at the scene first or at the same time as the initial arriving company, the chief officer should establish command of the incident.

### V. TRANSFERRING COMMAND

To a major extent, command effectiveness is directly connected to regular command positioning; the entire command system revolves around the rapid establishment of a stationary, remote IC, operating in a standard CP.

By setting up and staying in a CP, the IC is in the ideal position to maintain on-line control; remain continuously available to communicate; and monitor and evaluate responders' changing welfare and survival needs while they are operating within the hazard zone.



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Upon the arrival of the battalion chief or chief officer, if an active hazard zone still exists, or if there are still tactical benchmarks to coordinate, command should be upgraded into the command position. When arriving to the scene, IC #2 must transfer command in the following manner:

- A. Transmit that your unit is on-scene "Battalion 1-1 On-Scene"
- B. Conduct a 360-degree assessment if possible; while developing a separate command Size-Up verifying all operating positions match the current incident conditions. The 360° may happen before or after the command transfer based on incident dynamics.
- C. If the battalion chief goes mobile to conduct a 360°, the battalion chief needs to state via radio they will be mobile for a 360°. This needs to be a rapid process with the battalion chief ending up in the command vehicle and transferring command from the fast-attacking IC. The battalion chief needs to also state via radio when they are back in the command vehicle.
- D. Fill out an AAFD Tactical Worksheet as much as possible given incident dynamics and circumstances.
- E. Utilizing the AAFD Tactical Worksheet; contact IC #1 and announce that you will be transferring command: "taking it from out here"
- F. Verify/verbalize a 360-degree Size-Up was completed or was unable to be completed; the position and function of all hazard zone resource with IC#1
- G. Contact and confirm the command transfer with Central Fire Dispatch, announce the current strategy, and make a resource determination.

Command transfers should be short and concise. When IC #1 (usually a fast-attacking IC) transmits a concise, clear initial radio report, unit assignments and condition reports, it ensures that IC #2 (usually a command officer working out of an SUV) will have quality information to quickly facilitate the command transfer.

When the IC assumes a standard command position inside a vehicle, the CP becomes the IC's "field office."

- Stationary, remote and quiet place to listen, analyze and make decisions. The incident commander is expected to manage the incident from the command vehicle.
- Superior communication position (better radios, no PPE, quiet)
- More radio channels available
- Place to write and record
- Protection from the elements
- Better intelligence equipment (MCTs, reference materials)

Upon the arrival of other chief officer(s), if the battalion chief wants to be mobile, they possess the option of transferring command, donning gear, and taking on a sector / division assignment.