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The Director-General, Greater London Council
The Chief Executive

6 October 1978

Dear Sir

[42/78]
FIRE SERVICE CIRCULAR NO 42/1978
PRINCIPLES OF OPERATIONAL COMMAND AND CONTROL AT INCIDENTS AND MAJOR
DISASTER PLANNING

1. A Study Group set up by the Joint Committee on Fire Brigade Operations has examined aspects of command and control at incidents and major disaster planning and has produced guidance on these matters in the form of two reports "Principles of Operational Command and Control at Incidents" and "Major Disaster Planning". The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council has agreed the reports and has recommended that they be issued to fire authorities. Copies of the reports are enclosed with this circular.

2. The fire authority will wish to review existing procedures in their brigades in the light of the guidance and to consider whether any amendments to those procedures are required.

3. Additional copies of this circular and the reports are enclosed for the information of the Chief Fire Officer and the Chief Financial Officer.

Yours faithfully

H V H MARKS

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in England and Wales

Copies sent for information to: The Association of County Councils and the
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FIRE SERVICE CIRCULAR NO 42/1978

REPORT ON "PRINCIPLES OF OPERATIONAL COMMAND AND CONTROL AT INCIDENTS"

CORRIGENDUM

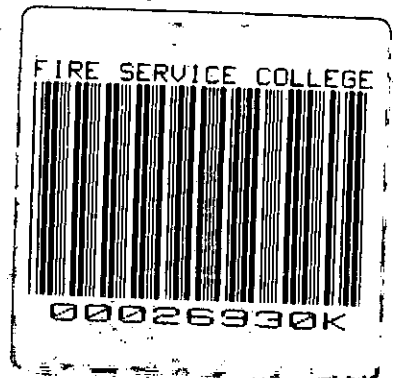
In paragraph 10 the reference in brackets is incorrect and should read:-
"(see also paragraph 17)"

April 1978

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON FIRE BRIGADE OPERATIONS

PRINCIPLES OF OPERATIONAL COMMAND AND CONTROL AT INCIDENTS



INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this paper is to set out the principles which should apply in exercising command and control at an incident, and in particular the basic principles of command which should be followed by members of the Fire Service at all levels irrespective of rank. In framing the guidance regard has been had to the advice set out in Part 6(a) of the Manual of Firemanship. For the purposes of the guidance the officer in overall command of an incident or other situation is hereinafter referred to as the officer in charge.

THE FUNCTION OF THE OFFICER IN CHARGE

2. The basic principles of good command apply to all incidents irrespective of size or the need to call for additional resources. Thus, at the start of an incident the officer in charge of the first attendance, who is the senior member of the Brigade present, will remain in charge until such time as a more senior officer takes command. The officer in charge is responsible for the control of the incident and the action taken; he must therefore concern himself with an assessment of the situation, an assessment of how the incident might develop and the necessity or otherwise of calling for additional resources. His prime responsibility is that of directing operations, although at the smaller incident he may of necessity have to take an active part in operations.

3. There are certain basic steps that any officer in charge should take to enable him to exercise effective control and to make the fullest use of his resources.

These steps are as follows:-

PREPARE. Before arrival at the incident he should know the PDA for the risk and should have informed himself as far as possible of any known information

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about the risk involved and related pre-planning measures. He should use his knowledge of the risk and its location together with any known details of the incident to anticipate likely difficulties and possible ways of overcoming them.

ASSESS. On his arrival at the scene of the incident he should carry out an immediate assessment of the situation, including the extent and effectiveness of measures taken before his arrival.

PLAN. In the light of his assessment of the situation and his knowledge of the risks involved the Officer in Charge should then formulate his plan for dealing with the situation. The action he takes on arrival is fundamental to the successful control of the situation and the principles set out in the Manual of Firemanship should be carefully observed.

RESOURCES. He should decide whether his plan calls for additional resources and request them as necessary.

IMPLEMENT. The Officer in Charge should then put his plan into action by means of clear and concise instructions to his subordinates.

CONTROL. As the situation progresses he should ensure that his orders are being fully and effectively implemented.

EVALUATE. He should continuously evaluate the situation as it develops so that changes to his initial plan can be made to meet a changing situation. The Officer in Charge must be prepared to brief a more Senior Officer at any time, whether or not he is taking over command, on all matters relating to the incident, including an assessment of how it is likely to develop.

THE OPERATIONAL COMMAND STRUCTURE

4. A command organisation consists principally of a command structure established by the Officer in Charge, together with operating elements on the ground. Properly applied it will ensure that best use is made of available resources. The command structure should provide for orders to flow downwards and situation reports upwards. The Officer in Charge will take decisions and initiate action based on the information received.

5. From the outset of the incident the Officer in Charge should direct operations and relate brigade strategy and tactics to accepted pre-planning measures. Care must be taken to ensure central direction of the operational plan with a practical measure of control, whilst at the same time ensuring that appropriate initiative in the prescribed plan is not denied to subordinates. Overlap of functions should be avoided as this can only lead to duplication of effort with consequent wastage of manpower.

THE ATTENDANCE OF OFFICERS

6. It will be appreciated that the number of officers attending an incident should relate to the size and potential severity of the incident, bearing in mind the risk category and the resources of individual brigades.

Attendance by Divisional Commanders and Assistant Chief Officers

7. A Divisional Commander, or one of his supervisory officers, may attend an incident of any size and take command at his discretion. He should be kept informed of all messages other than for small incidents (as decided locally) and other matters of importance.

8. It is common practice for an officer of Assistant Chief Officer rank to be informed of all fires where more than 5 jets are in use and of all incidents with unusual features. It is usual for him to attend incidents where more than 12 pumps are in use, though he may decide to attend in a monitoring function at smaller incidents.

Special Duties

9. At larger incidents the Officer in Charge may request additional officers for specific functions. Officers may be nominated to take charge of the following references where the incident warrants it, although several of these references could in some cases be carried out by one officer.

1. Control Unit
2. Safety
3. Breathing Apparatus
4. Communications

5. Water
6. Foam
7. General Staff Officer to Officer in Charge
8. Salvage
9. Transport
10. Decontamination
11. Press Liaison
12. Fire Investigation
13. General Liaison with other organisations
14. Equipment Recovery

10. It is important to appreciate that where an officer attends an incident for a specific function to give assistance to the Officer in Charge, he has nothing to do with the usual chain of command - interference in this sphere could lead to indirect leadership with consequent frustration and loss of efficiency. It is therefore desirable that these officers be readily identifiable for which purpose it is suggested that they wear the red and white chequered armbands, or saturn yellow surcoats with superimposed red and white colouring, similar to those used by control point personnel (see also paragraph 18). This would not apply to the BA function for which distinctive identification already exists.

11. It is essential that Staff Officers should know the requirements of the Officer in Charge and that they are given clear-cut references. Training in these special duties and some knowledge of all pre-planning measures is essential.

CONTROL OF THE COMMAND STRUCTURE

12. A command structure cannot operate efficiently without a central control point from which command is exercised and through which all messages to Brigade Control or to other organisations at the incident are channelled. The arrangements for setting up a control point will vary with the size of the incident, but they should be so organised as to permit efficient hand-over should it prove necessary to bring in more complex arrangements (eg the bringing on of a mobile control unit) as an incident develops.

The Smaller Incident - Contact Points

13. Whilst it is usual to establish a contact point with Brigade Control at a one pump incident, it is essential to do so at incidents involving 2 or more pumps. An appliance can be designated for the purpose. Contact points are an efficient and simple means of maintaining contact with Brigade Control and can result in the saving of valuable time if surplus appliances have to be re-deployed. There is no call for special manpower as this simple task can be undertaken by an appliance driver maintaining a "listening-watch" on the radio. Experience has indicated that it is an advantage to switch off the radio and flashing beacons of the remaining appliances, unless there are compelling reasons, such as poor visibility, for the flashing beacons to remain on.

14. An alternative means of providing a contact point is by maintaining a set of equipment in an officer's car. One of the advantages of using an officer's car is that it can be more easily re-positioned if radio screening difficulties are encountered. A disadvantage is that it may not be possible to allocate a trained fireman to an officer's car specifically for contact point work during a pressing fire situation.

The Larger Incident - Control Points

15. Command and Control at the larger incidents revolves around the control point, which is the nerve centre of the operation. The control point may be set up either in an officer's car, in a control unit specially designed for the purpose or in a building which is suitably equipped with communications and other appropriate facilities. It is usual for an officer of at least the rank of sub-officer to take charge of the control point. The primary functions of a control unit are set out in the Manual of Firemanship.

16. One of the most important tasks devolving on the control point is that of instituting a search when fire brigade personnel are reported missing. It is vitally important that in such cases a quick physical check be made using the nominal roll boards deposited at the control point; this is made especially difficult when crews have been split or have flexible roles.

17. Crews manning the control point should be issued with suitable armbands or surcoats for identification. Red and white chequered squares have always been associated with the marking of control points and this would seem to be an appropriate marking for the armbands and surcoats.

18. Where the type and size of incident justifies it, one or more forward control points can play an important part in command and control.

COMMUNICATIONS

19. It is accepted that communications play a vital part in all operational situations, but during larger scale operations the efficiency with which they are established, used, and maintained may well dictate the success or otherwise of the overall plan. Therefore it is essential for an officer who is conversant with Brigade communications, equipment and procedures to be nominated as communications officer for the incident. He should be responsible for speedily ascertaining from the Officer in Charge the communications requirements for the incident and for organising the setting up of suitable and effective personal set networks and other communications links as required. He should also be responsible for supervising the usage of communications and for organising the necessary technical support and maintenance which is essential for incidents of long duration.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

20. The Code of Safety Practice for the Fire Service set out in Fire Service Circular No. 18/1974 should be regarded as a set of desirable objectives which, if routinely pursued, should maximise safety at incidents to the fullest extent consistent with efficient and effective fire brigade operations. The delegation of duties should make it clear that the principles outlined in the Code should be observed by all ranks.

PRE-PLANNING

21. Whilst it is not possible to conduct operations according to a precise set of rules it is essential that proper pre-planning is carried out. It should be recognised that successful operations stem from knowledge of the risks involved and thought given to the problem before an incident occurs. A thorough completion of 1(1)(d) Inspection Reports is a solid foundation on which to work, providing as it does opportunity to study specific aspects of a risk under non-stress conditions. By this means it is possible to take account of, and plan for, exceptional hazards. Discussion of the risks involved with those concerned during 1(1)(d) inspections will also lead to a better mutual understanding of the problems involved and closer co-operation during the course of an incident.

22. The essential need is for a simple and flexible plan which is capable of being readily understood and applied by all ranks.

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Home Office
Fire Department

CENTRAL FIRE BRIGADES ADVISORY COUNCILS FOR
ENGLAND WALES AND FOR SCOTLAND

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON FIRE BRIGADE OPERATIONS

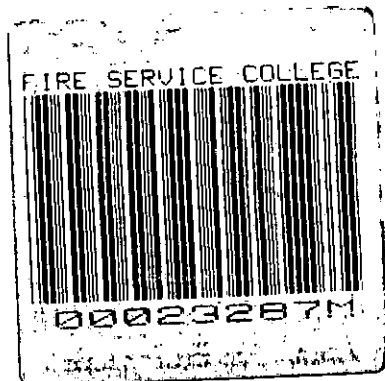
MAJOR DISASTER PLANNING

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FIRE DEPARTMENT
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JOINT COMMITTEE OF FIRE BRIGADE OPERATIONS

MAJOR DISASTER PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

1. Major Disasters

From time to time an emergency incident of disaster proportions occurs in which the public Fire Service will find itself working alongside and in close co-operation with other services and organisations, some of which may not usually be regarded as 'emergency services' in the course of their normal duties. The fire brigade's wide experience in emergency and rescue work and in establishing their own command and control arrangements will enable them to function efficiently and effectively as an individual service; but it will be necessary for them to recognise not merely their own specific responsibilities and contribution but also the extent and form of their co-operation with other organisations who will invariably be involved at an emergency of disaster proportions.

2. County disaster plans*

Most local authorities, including those who are fire authorities, will have produced major disaster plans in co-operation with the Fire Service, Police, Regional Health Authorities, other Councils, Public Utilities etc. These plans are usually co-ordinated and kept under periodic review by the County Emergency Planning Officer and the organisations who are a party to the plans.

✓ 3. Definition of a major disaster

A major disaster might be defined as:-

"A situation, usually arising with little or no warning, causing or threatening death or injury or serious disruption to numbers of people and/or services in excess of those which can be dealt with by the fire, police and ambulance services operating alone, and requiring from the outset the special mobilisation, organisation and co-ordination of other services".

NB. The number of casualties involved should not necessarily be regarded as the main criterion for determining whether an emergency reaches the magnitude of a major disaster. Other factors such as the type and location of the incident, the probable number of services likely to be involved and the time which will be taken in rescuing the trapped and injured and restoring normality must all be included in the assessment. For example, an air crash on an airport involving 50 casualties,

* The term "County disaster plans" does not apply in Scotland where the equivalent plans are named "Regional and District plans" or in London where they are named "London Borough Disaster plans". It follows that in these other areas the "County Emergency Planning Officer" will also have a different title.

who, in a relatively short time, can be extracted and removed to hospital is not necessarily a major disaster in terms of the widespread mobilisation of numerous non-emergency organisations; whereas the same incident in a built-up area could be termed a major disaster, because of the overall disruption to life and to services and the length of time and extensive operations involving numerous organisations required to deal with it. Each County disaster plan will usually include its own definition and interpretation.

4. The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils for England and Wales and for Scotland have produced a paper entitled Operational Command and Control at Incidents which covers the basic principles of command and control in the Fire Service. Whilst this document is primarily intended for emergency situations where the Fire Service is the principal or primary service involved, it is also relevant to their contribution and their command and control functions when they are working alongside other services or organisations at the scene of a major disaster.

5. By the very nature of their everyday operational activities, fire brigades have developed considerable skill and expertise in dealing with all kinds and sizes of fires and the rescue of persons trapped by fire. This practical skill and expertise has also extended to the rescue of persons trapped in emergency incidents other than fire, and this latter role has been acknowledged and advanced by the provision of certain special rescue equipment and specialised training. In addition to this practical experience in fire and rescue techniques, local authority fire brigades and the Fire Service Central Training Establishments spend a great deal of time in training, exercising and pre-planning for all aspects of fire and rescue.

6. The purpose of this paper is to give guidance on initial actions and to highlight those points of Command and Control which may need amplifying, extending or varying to take account of the need to work in close co-operation with other Services and/or with a Co-ordinator or Controller from another discipline.

7. Initiation

The initiation of the major disaster procedure in the Fire Service may come about as a result of indications from the following sources:-

- a. From another service, eg. Police or Ambulance or other emergency organisation, who themselves have received or attended a call which is clearly a major disaster.

- b. Following arrival by fire crews at an emergency incident.
- c. From an initial call from the public, or numerous such calls, from which it is quite clear that the incident is of major disaster proportions.

The implementation within the Fire Service of the major disaster procedure will be subject to local brigade practice, procedure and training.

8. Action by Fire Brigade Control 10

Following the receipt of a major disaster message, from whatever source, Fire Brigade Control will activate the fire brigade element of the procedure under two main headings as follows:-

- a. Mobilisation of the fire brigade attendance and information to Fire Service personnel in accordance with the brigade's predetermined arrangements.
- b. Notification to other organisations and individuals in accordance with the County major disaster plan, eg. Police, Ambulance, County Emergency Planning Officer etc.

9. Fire Brigade mobilising 10

It would be preferable for brigades to have one Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) and initial action list for any major disaster, though in respect of over the border incidents personnel should be aware of the PDA of neighbouring authorities which may be different from their own. While it is not practical or desirable to produce a standard action list applicable to all Brigades, the Study Group consider that such a list should provide for a minimum of 6/10 pumping appliances plus any other special appliances and equipment deemed necessary or agreed within the county disaster plan.

10. Such an action list should also contain instructions and advice on the number and ranks of officers to attend major disasters, including details of officers required for specialist duties (see paragraph 9 of the report "Principles of Operational Command and Control at Incidents"). Provision should also be made for informing officers of Assistant Chief Officer Rank or above of all matters of importance relating to the incident.

11. Support from other Brigades 10

It would be desirable for mobilising and other arrangements to cater for the possible need for reinforcements to be obtained from other brigades quite apart from any arrangements which might have been made for normal mutual assistance.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND TASKS OF THE PUBLIC FIRE SERVICE

12. Fire

Section 30(3) of the Fire Services Act 1947 states that "The senior fire brigade officer present shall have sole charge and control of all operations for the extinction of the fire". Where, however, there are aspects of the situation which go beyond the question of fire alone then the senior fire brigade officer would obviously need to consult with other organisations and take into account any guidance or advice which may be relevant.

13. Rescue

It is an established practice that rescues in a fire situation is a fire service responsibility. In situations other than fire the position is not precisely defined by law but the County disaster plan will usually recognise that in the first instance this is an appropriate task for the Fire Service in view of its speed of mobilisation, suitability of equipment and expertise gained from normal day to day operational activities in this sphere.

14. Other tasks

There are a variety of other ways in which Fire Service equipment, knowledge and skills might be used at a major disaster, eg. First Aid, Pumping, Water Carrying, the provision of Lighting and general assistance to other services.

15. Control and co-ordination

Whilst the specific and general Fire Service responsibilities and tasks are set out above it must be recognised that at a major disaster some other person may have overall control, either in a directing capacity or more normally in a co-ordinating capacity. This may be a Police Officer or the Chief Executive of a Local Authority. The matter of control/co-ordination and the roles of the various services, including the Fire Service, are usually covered in the County Disaster Plan and there would not normally be any difficulty for the Fire Service in fitting into that plan. Whoever is responsible for control or co-ordination at such an incident should be kept informed at periodic intervals of the state and progress of Fire Service operations regarding fire and rescue and any other tasks undertaken.

16. Procedure at the incident

This should follow the pattern and guidance contained in the report "Principles of Operational Command and Control at Incidents", although at an incident of major disaster proportions the following points should be especially or additionally borne in mind.

17. Early assessment and information / not used

- a. An obvious first duty would be to make a quick assessment and send an assistance and/or informative message to brigade control as quickly as possible not only for Fire Service purposes but because of the involvement of other services and organisations.
- b. There will also be a need for an assessment of the likely effect on fire cover generally in the brigade which such an incident may create.

18. Siting of controls 4

The Fire Service may be the first to arrive in force and, whilst they will follow their own plan of action, the Officer-in-Charge should bear in mind from the beginning that other services may subsequently be in attendance in some force and that his command and control layout should make allowances for this possibility.

19. A contact point or a forward control may be set up close to the incident in the initial stages and a control point may then be established. The Fire Service control point would usually be situated some distance back from the scene of operations. Whilst such siting of the control point will usually be satisfactory also at a major disaster account, should be taken of the likely position of the main incident control and other controls, eg. Police and Ambulance, since it will be necessary for the Fire Service Officer-in-Charge and his control point to operate in close contact with these other controls. It should also be borne in mind that radio interference between mobile controls can occur if they are sited too close together, eg. less than 15 metres. Because of differing requirements and functions, it may not always be possible to site the Fire Service control point alongside the Police and/or Ambulance controls; in such circumstances it will be necessary to maintain contact and liaison by other means, eg. by runner, portable radio contact or land line.

20. Holding Area 5

In view of the possibility that a large number of appliances will be attending, be held in reserve or be awaiting deployment, it may be desirable to establish a holding area where appliances can rendezvous in the first instance and from which they could be called for deployment. This would avoid Fire Service reserves and reinforcements being scattered or located in haphazard fashion and would also prevent unnecessary congestion.

21. Advice and guidance to other services

If the Fire Service has established its presence in the early stages, inevitably other services and organisations attending will seek information and details from the Fire Service Officer-in-Charge or his representative. The Officer-in-Charge must plan to meet this contingency despite the urgency of fulfilling his own particular command function and responsibilities, possibly by earmarking a staff officer for the purpose.

22. Communications

Whilst the Fire Service will implement its own fireground communications arrangements, two particular points may need to be borne in mind:-

- a. Other services or organisations may wish to avail themselves of Fire Service facilities, particularly in the early stages.
- b. At some later stage, and particularly at a widespread incident, the communications arrangements may well be co-ordinated for more than one or all services, eg. point to point land line facilities provided by the Post Office or additional radio telephone facilities provided by the Home Office Directorate of Telecommunications.

23. Reliefs

Although this will not be a first consideration, it should be evident in the early stages whether Fire Service involvement is likely to be a matter of "hours" or "days" and at what level over this period reliefs will be required in terms of manpower, appliances and equipment. An indication from the Officer-in-Charge to fire brigade control after an hour or so will enable the latter to begin the planning of reliefs on the appropriate scale.

24. Fuel supplies and maintenance of appliances and equipment

Normal arrangements should cater adequately for Fire Service requirements but two other possibilities should be borne in mind at incidents of long duration:-

- a. Fire Service resources may well be called upon to assist other services.
- b. At some later stage the supply of fuel and maintenance of equipment on site may be co-ordinated by the co-ordinating service or Controller.

25. Feeding and refreshments

As with fuel supplies (see preceding paragraph) the Fire Service may have made its own arrangements for feeding and refreshments; but it should not be overlooked that other organisations such as the WRVS, the School Meals Service, religious organisations, whether at the scene or not, may have arrangements similar or superior to those of the Fire Service. Early liaison with the Controller/Co-ordinator or with other services may establish this. Certainly at incidents of long duration there would be merit in co-ordinating feeding and refreshments and possible rest areas for all the forces, which would no doubt be arranged through the Controller/Co-ordinator.

26. Press, news agencies and other enquiries

At a major disaster there would be pressure for specific and general information from the press, television, news agencies and other organisations as well as from members of the public. Such enquiries may be directed to the Fire Service, particularly in the early stages. Comments or replies should be given only by the Fire Service Officer-in-Charge or his appointed nominee. Great care should be taken not to raise undue alarm or to be pressed into making statements for which there has not been adequate opportunity to consider the possible consequences. As such an incident proceeds it would be desirable for enquiries and statements of this nature to be channelled through the co-ordinating arrangements.

27. Training and Exercises

The general guidance which has been issued to local authorities on major disaster plans includes a recommendation that such plans be kept up to date and tested periodically. In addition therefore to the training and exercising for in-service operations, on which the Fire Service is constantly engaged, opportunity should also be taken from time to time to exercise the fire service part of the County disaster plan.

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