

<b>Title:</b>	Incident Command
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<b>Synopsis:</b>	This guidance supports the work of fire and rescue services to put in place a system for an all-hazards approach to incident command. It is an essential guide to the safe systems of work needed at an incident and is aimed at policy writers in all fire and rescue services.
<b>Published:</b>	15/11/2016
<b>Next Review Date:</b>	15/11/2019
<b>Status:</b>	Approved
<b>Version:</b>	First edition version two
<b>Latest Position:</b>	<p>First edition version one published 14/07/2015</p> <p>First edition version two published 23/12/2015. Improved text formatting and clearer diagrams. There are no operational changes to consider.</p> <p>Second edition version one published 15/11/2016. Addition of tactical actions. Refer to the configuration log to see the differences between first edition version two and second edition version one.</p>

*National Operational Guidance – Incident command second edition version one (ARCHIVED on 20-09-2017)*

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## **Introduction**

The guidance supports fire and rescue services to put in place a system for an all-hazards approach to incident command. It is an essential guide to the safe systems of work needed at an incident and is aimed at policy writers in each fire and rescue service to support them in producing their local guidance and procedures. This policy guidance is accompanied by The Foundation for Incident Command, which provides further detail and is essential reading for all fire and rescue service incident commanders and other personnel, including firefighters and fire control room operators.

Other emergency agencies will base their expectation of the fire and rescue service response to multi-agency incidents on the incident command system contained in this guidance. For this reason, fire and rescue services are expected to adopt this guidance. The guidance is likely to be considered as national best practice in any review or enquiry following a significant incident.

The guidance provides details of specific hazard and control measures that have been developed following a literature review. The control measures support a fire and rescue service in delivering assertive, effective and safe incident command.

The incident command system provides the incident commander with a clear framework to structure, organise and manage an incident. It can be adapted to all sizes and types of incident and will help them deploy and use resources in an efficient and safe way. The incident command system allows the incident commander to use health and safety arrangements, including operational guidance tailored to the characteristics of an emergency. Fire and rescue services should therefore ensure their policies and procedures are based on it. This helps the incident commander to achieve an appropriate balance between the benefit of undertaking planned actions and the risks associated with them.

National Operational Guidance: Operations gives guidance on operational planning and the storage and dissemination of risk information to the incident ground. Fire and rescue services should also refer to that guidance when preparing policies and procedures relating to the command of incidents.

Operational response is hazardous and firefighters respond to thousands of incidents each year. Some incidents need only simple actions and procedures to be dealt with effectively and safely, as risks are low. Others are more challenging and may quickly increase in size, complexity and duration. The Health, safety and welfare framework for the operational environment (the Framework) provides guidance to fire and rescue authorities to assist with planning the delivery of their health and safety responsibilities. It contains the safe person principles on which fire and rescue services should base their policies. The Framework and the application of risk assessment and control measures should not prevent fire and rescue service operations from taking place.

Commanding operational situations is different to managing controlled and defined situations or workplace scenarios. Commanders need a range of qualities together with command skills to deal with the wide-ranging nature of emergencies. Therefore, fire and rescue services must provide their incident commanders with the necessary training, equipment and resources to effectively apply the incident command system to any incident.

Assertive and effective commanders:

- Are confident and self-aware
- Are well-trained and competent
- Have sound situational awareness
- Are able to lead, direct and instruct others
- Can communicate effectively
- Are able to plan and implement
- Can apply sound judgement and effective decision-making
- Are able to adapt to changing situations
- Are calm and controlled

Fire and rescue services must have selection processes that ensure personnel who are responsible for performing command functions are capable of doing so. They should appoint incident commanders that are able to demonstrate clear potential to deal with stressful situations where there is sustained pressure. Once appointed they should periodically be required to demonstrate competence in their role.

Fire and rescue services must ensure they appropriately train and assess their incident commanders. They should ensure incident commanders understand and have sufficient time and facilities to practice the skills they need for command. Fire and rescue services must equip them with the operational knowledge and understanding needed to resolve the full range of reasonably foreseeable incidents and enable them to adapt to those that are not.

More details can be found in the CFA Command Training, Assessment and Qualifications Fire and Rescue Service Guidance and the National Occupational Standards for Fire and Rescue Services.

### **Fire and rescue authority and service responsibilities**

Fire and rescue services are responsible, under legislation and regulations, for developing policies and procedures and to provide information, instruction, training and supervision to their personnel about foreseeable hazards and the control measures used to reduce the risks arising from them

This guidance sets out to provide fire and rescue services with sufficient knowledge about the potential hazards their personnel could encounter when attending incidents. Fire and rescue services should ensure their policies, procedures and training cover all of the hazards and control measures contained in this guidance.

A fire and rescue authority's responsibilities are set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, or equivalent legislation in devolved administrations. Some of these duties are classified as core duties. These duties should be read with other relevant legislation, specifically the Health and Safety at Work Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations.

The Fire and Rescue Services Act, or equivalent, requires each authority to make provision for the purpose of extinguishing fires and carrying out rescues in its area, including the provision of personnel, equipment and training.

The Health and Safety at Work Act includes a requirement for employers to provide information, instruction, training and – critical for this guidance on incident command – the provision of

supervision as is necessary to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its employees.

Further sections of the Health and Safety at Work Act place a duty on employers to conduct undertakings in such a way as to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, people not employed by them, who may be affected thereby, are not exposed to risk. [Note: in this context a risk has to be created or made worse by the service].

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations places a duty on the employer to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of their employees and to record the significant findings of the assessment.

The Health and Safety Executive set out how they will apply health and safety legislation to the fire and rescue service in 'Striking the balance between operational and health and safety duties in the Fire and Rescue Service'.

Foundation guidance for fire and rescue service legislation will be published on the National Operational Guidance website in due course.

### **Risk management plan**

Each fire and rescue authority must develop their strategic direction through their risk management plan. To determine the extent of their firefighting capability, strategic managers will consider their statutory duties and the foreseeable risk within their area. Work to identify risk and prepare operational plans should consider all stakeholders, including local emergency planning groups and the fire and rescue service risk management plan.

As part of their risk management plan each fire and rescue service should consider the resources they need to mobilise to an incident to support effective incident command at operational events. Their plans should be developed with regard to the guidance in this document.

For incident command the risk management plan should include:

- The role and level at which incidents will be commanded, for example, Level 1 incident, crew manager and watch manager
- The types of equipment to provide command support functions, such as command boards and control units, and the size of incidents at which each will be used
- The arrangements for command teams and any support vehicles
- The need for competent and skilled officers to be available for command support and functional or support sectors, such as water, foam or inter-agency liaison

### **Intraoperability and interoperability**

#### **Intraoperability**

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England says: "Each fire and rescue authority must produce an integrated risk management plan that identifies and assesses all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect its community, including those of a cross- border, multi-

authority and/or national nature. The plan must have regard to the Community Risk Registers produced by Local Resilience Forums and any other risk analyses as appropriate”.

This should include the intraoperability of resources and assets in individual and bordering fire and rescue services as well as National Resilience assets available through the National Co-ordination and Advisory Framework (NCAF) arrangements.

### **Interoperability**

Interoperability is linked to the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) doctrine. Fire and rescue services should be aware of the aspects of interoperability that exist when identifying, assessing and preplanning for all incident types and eventualities they may attend.

In addition to the community risk register, firefighters retain a wealth of local knowledge of risks or potential scenarios within station areas that would benefit from a multi-agency response and that may not be captured in the broader community risk register. This information may be contained in Site-Specific Risk Information (SSRI) or similar formats.

It is essential that all components of fire and rescue services, including fire control staff, operational planning departments and incident commanders, identify and liaise with relevant partner agencies. This ensures that in the event that they are required to respond to different incident types, all agencies are fully aware of the assistance available to maximise effectiveness in saving lives and reducing harm.

### **Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP)**

The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) Joint Doctrine: The Interoperability Framework advocates the use of the METHANE mnemonic for information gathering and sharing between emergency responders, their control rooms and other agencies.

This mnemonic should be used when passing information between emergency responders, their control rooms and other agencies so that shared situational awareness can be established:

- Major incident declared?
- Exact location
- Type of incident e.g. explosion or building collapse
- Hazards present, potential or suspected
- Access – routes that are safe to use
- Number, type and severity of casualties
- Emergency services now present and those required

The broader principles of intraoperability and interoperability at the pre-incident stage are captured above, and the principles will be augmented by the on-scene interoperability information contained in the JESIP doctrine.

### **Hazard and control statement**

Hazard	Control measures
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Failure to comply with relevant legislation	Understand legal responsibilities and duties
Failure to select effective incident commanders	Effective selection process Consider operational competence
Failure to develop effective incident commanders	Command skills Leadership Situational awareness Command decision-making Operational discretion Incident commander communication Personal resilience
Ineffective organisation of the incident ground	Clearly defined command roles and responsibilities, incorporating multi-agency arrangements Have a communication strategy Structuring an incident Establish appropriate cordon controls Arrangements to deal with firefighter emergencies
Ineffective safety management	Positive safety culture Risk assessment at an incident Incident ground safety management Carry out post incident investigations Carry out debriefing/post-incident reviews

### Hazard – Failure to comply with relevant legislation

Hazard	Control measure
Failure to comply with relevant legislation	Understand legal responsibilities and duties

## **Hazard knowledge**

The operational environment is governed by a number of diverse pieces of legislation and regulations. These set out duties that fire authorities, fire and rescue services and individual employees must carry out. Some also lay out powers that may be exercised in certain circumstances. Other aspects may enable regulations to be made.

Legislation may apply to all parts of the United Kingdom or there may be individual acts that apply to specific countries.

The list below includes the majority of those acts and regulations that apply to the operational environment.

- The Fire and Rescue Services Act (2004), the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, and the Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006
- The Civil Contingencies Act (2004)
- The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) Regulations 2005
- Emergency Services (Obstruction) Act 2006, Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006
- The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.
- The Human Rights Act (1998)
- Water Resources Act (1991), Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011, Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006
- Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989

## **Control measure – Understand legal responsibilities and duties**

### *Control measure knowledge*

Fire and rescue authorities and services should consider the legislation and policies relevant to incident command. A Fire and rescue authority, as the employer, holds the legal duties for the provision of a safe and effective Fire and Rescue Service. The incident commander is the fire and rescue authority's representative on an incident ground and is responsible for implementing safe systems of work.

Fire related legislation contains both duties and powers. Duties are actions or activities which must be carried out to comply with the law whereas powers are actions or activities that may be carried out and that the relevant Act gives legal authority to do so.

An example of a duty is to provide a fire and rescue service, as in Section 7 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. An example of a power is the ability to respond to other eventualities, as in section 11. This power is limited to eventualities that may cause one or more people to not survive or suffer harm, or may cause harm to the environment.

### Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Have a good understanding of their legal duties to ensure they comply with all relevant legislation. It is imperative that fire and rescue authorities have appropriate and relevant procedures and policies to ensure incident command can be conducted assertively, effectively and safely
- Consider the various acts and regulations when developing their policies and procedures. They should ensure they fully prepare incident commanders to be able to carry out any duties or exercise any powers whilst representing the fire authority at an incident
- Consider obtaining legal advice to ensure they interpret legislative requirements appropriately when formulating policy and procedures
- Ensure that incident commanders understand relevant legal duties and powers in relation to operational actions

### Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Ensure that operational actions are in accordance with relevant legal powers and duties

## Hazard – Failure to select effective incident commanders

Hazard	Control measures
Failure to select effective incident commanders	Effective selection process Consider operational competence

### Hazard knowledge

Incident commanders need to possess cognitive and interpersonal qualities, as well as technical knowledge. Together these are critical for assertive, effective and safe incident command. Robust selection processes are necessary to identify suitable personnel to be developed for the role of incident commander.

### Control measure - Effective selection process

#### Control measure knowledge

Fire and rescue services must identify the knowledge and skills that they require in an incident commander and should consider the most appropriate way of selecting personnel for incident command roles.



### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services should:

- Identify the knowledge and skills that they require in an incident commander
- Have suitable and sufficient systems to identify individuals for command roles, which should include a practical assessment of their command skills

### **Control measure - Consider operational competence**

#### *Control measure knowledge*

Competence is the ability to achieve and repeat the necessary level of workplace performance. It links to the National Occupational Standards for Fire and Rescue Services in an individual's role map. National Occupational Standards (NOS) provide a structure that enables fire and rescue services to design and deliver a consistent level of training to a common standard, across all levels of command.

There are four levels of command underpinned by command qualifications that apply to the fire and rescue service. The CFOA Command Training, Assessment and Qualifications Fire and Rescue Service Guidance provides further information.

Commanding operational situations is different to managing controlled and defined situations or workplace scenarios. Commanders need a range of qualities, technical and non-technical skills to deal with the wide-ranging nature of emergencies.

Fire and rescue services should be confident that their selection processes ensure that people who perform command functions are capable of doing so under the expected pressures of emergency incidents. They should demonstrate the potential to deal with situations where there is sustained pressure and stress.

Fire and rescue services should ensure they train and assess their incident commanders. They should ensure incident commanders understand and have practised the skills they need for command. They should also equip them with the operational knowledge needed to resolve the full range of incidents.

Incident commanders should have adequate technical knowledge of incident command and operational procedures. They should also know the health and safety requirements and other relevant legislation. A fire and rescue authority or incident commander can face prosecution for not complying with a legal duty or requirement.

Relevant control measures include:

- Simple and straightforward policies and procedures that identify legal considerations
- Consistent and reliable selection processes that assess technical skills
- Appropriate training and development
- A system for gaining and maintaining technical knowledge

See:

- Fire and Rescue Authorities, Health, safety and welfare framework for the operational environment
- Striking the Balance
- Heroism in the fire and rescue service
- The Fire and Rescue Services Act (2004), the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, and the Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.
- Skills for Fire and Rescue: Operational Competence and Command Competence

#### Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Design and put in place a framework of competence for their incident commanders
- Have methods of assessing how effective their incident commanders are performing

### Hazard – Failure to develop effective incident commanders

Hazard	Control measures
Failure to develop effective incident commanders	Command skills Leadership Situational awareness Command decision making Operational discretion Incident commander communication Personal resilience

#### Hazard knowledge

An incident commander should possess the technical knowledge and command skills to underpin their judgements, decisions and behaviours. This section draws on research and incident ground observations that have helped identify the command skills necessary for incident commanders. Further information can be found in The Foundation for Incident Command.

The application of these skills on the incident ground is key to the implementation of a safe and effective operational plan. Services should have safe systems of work to support incident commander decision making at operational incidents to reduce the risk of human factors affecting safety.

## Control measure – Command skills

### *Control measure knowledge*

To deliver assertive, effective and safe incident command, incident commanders should be competent and able to understand the situation as it unfolds. They should be able to:

- Identify and prioritise problems and develop a plan to resolve the incident
- Communicate this plan to others
- Co-ordinate and control activity in line with their plan
- Display the leadership needed to resolve the incident and operate effectively under the pressures of an incident

These qualities are known as command skills. These skills are outlined in detail in The Foundation for Incident Command.

An incident commander will need to practice their role. This will help them to apply their leadership skills, knowledge and understanding to be assertive, effective and safe.

Command competence is made up of a number of components. An individual's personal qualities and attributes are as important as their knowledge and understanding. Fire and rescue services should design and put in place a framework of competence for their incident commanders. This framework should equip incident commanders with:

- Behaviours
- Skills
- Knowledge of policies and standard operational procedures
- Understanding of their responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of others

It is accepted that knowledge and skills will fade when not in regular use and this may affect competence. This process is known as skills decay. Fire and rescue services should have an established maintenance of competence system that clearly identifies when and how an area of competence is to be maintained. This maintenance of competence can be achieved through the use of continuation training.

The training frequency identified by a fire and rescue service to maintain competence should take account of each individual's ability to acquire and maintain skills, and the fire and rescue authority's risk profile to ensure their risk management plans are effectively delivered. This is done to minimise skills decay and ensure personnel are competent to undertake their role safely and effectively.

Fire and rescue services should have methods of measuring and monitoring how effectively their incident commanders are performing. Incident commanders should also take personal responsibility to identify, develop and maintain their command skills.

Fire and rescue services should provide operational assurance during an incident and should consider the most suitable ways of doing so. This active monitoring should help identify when the incident commander performed well, or did not act as expected or in line with training and guidance. It can provide support for them at the incident if they need it.

As part of the incident or training debrief process, the incident commander should seek feedback on their performance in resolving the incident. This allows them to identify best practice and where they can make improvements in the future.

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services should:

- Select, prepare and develop incident commanders to ensure they can use command skills effectively when commanding an incident
- Provide appropriate opportunity for practice under realistic pressures; command skills are complex in nature and can be developed with understanding and practice
- Foster an operational learning and development ethos where personnel are trained in and regularly practice command. To do this, the service should encourage a culture of empowerment and acceptance of responsibility
- Ensure all operational policies, procedures and training materials are consistent with the service's approach to incident command. The service should understand and clearly articulate its command ethos to help ensure incident commanders are aware of the service's expectations
- Recognise the importance of incident commanders having effective command skills. They should ensure that these skills form the basis for all command development programmes. Without good command skills, the commander will not be able to effectively put in place the technical aspects of incident command
- Have systems and processes to develop command skills at all levels and to actively monitor performance and behaviour of incident commanders at operational incidents
- Consider holding a personal review at the conclusion of an incident. Taking the time to reflect can help individuals to review the way they acted and the decisions they made. This will allow them to recognise and act to address any development they would benefit from.

### *Tactical actions*

Incident commanders should:

- Apply assertive, effective and safe command skills at all operational incidents
- Undertake a post-incident process of self-reflection on their performance in resolving an incident as part of the operational debrief process

## **Control measure – Leadership**

### *Control measure knowledge*

Leadership is an essential element of an incident commander's role in resolving incidents. At an emergency, personnel in the fire and rescue service, people from other organisations and members of the public will look to the incident commander to lead and resolve the incident. They expect the commander to be calm, confident, decisive and professional. Commanders should be able to apply the most appropriate leadership behaviours, technical knowledge and command skills to resolve an incident.

The incident commander is responsible for leading the incident to a successful conclusion but they cannot be responsible for making all decisions or supervising every detail of an incident. For this reason, incidents are often divided into sectors and functions. Each person who commands one of these functions will also need to show competent leadership skills.

For a commander to show effective leadership, others should be willing to trust and accept their influence. It is a process that relies on interactions between people. In the context of incident command, effective leadership is more than exercising authority and power. The way in which a leader behaves will influence how other people respond. A positive relationship between the commander as a leader and crews will improve the performance of the team and contribute to improved safety. Effective leaders have interpersonal qualities which make them more likely to get the best from their teams. Some key areas are outlined in the sections below, and further information can be found in *The Foundation for Incident Command*.

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services should:

- Ensure that their incident command policies recognise leadership behaviours and the responses they elicit
- Ensure that they adequately prepare incident commanders to undertake their role. The incident commander's success in delivering a successful resolution is heavily influenced by their leadership knowledge, skills and attributes.
- Ensure that their leaders:
  - Are self-aware
  - Display and instil confidence
  - Demonstrate and foster trust
  - Foster two-way communication
  - Understand the use of authority
  - Set expectations and standards
- Be aware that the culture of their organisation can influence behaviours on and off the incident ground. This may affect the way in which incident commanders lead the incident to a resolution and the way in which crews respond.
- Consider their organisational culture and its influence on incident command; the leadership relationship begins before attending an incident

### *Tactical actions*

Incident commanders should:

- Demonstrate leadership behaviours that instil confidence, foster trust and promote two-way communication
- Apply the most appropriate leadership behaviours, technical knowledge and command skills to resolve an incident

- Be prepared to adopt a leadership role at multi-agency incidents

## **Control measure – Situational awareness**

### *Control measure knowledge*

Situational awareness is a person's perception and understanding of the situation they face. It includes their anticipation of what the situation may become, including the impact of their actions. For an incident commander, it is their perspective of the scene of operations.

A commander's situational awareness of an incident is made up of many sources of information that are interpreted into a coherent picture in a way that makes sense to them.

The incident commander's situational awareness forms a basis for:

- Assessing risk and making decisions
- Identifying and prioritising objectives
- Developing an incident plan
- Anticipating how an incident will develop
- Predicting the consequences of actions

Insufficient situational awareness may lead to incident commanders potentially overlooking information when they make decisions. It is important to consider the relationship between the information that was reasonably available and how the working conditions at an incident may affect their ability to process information. Post-incident evaluations of operational decisions should take this relationship into account.

The three stages of situational awareness are:

- Information gathering
- Understanding information
- Anticipation

### **Information gathering**

Incident commanders will gather information from a variety of sources to gain accurate situational awareness. Fire and rescue services should ensure that incident commanders have access to all the available and necessary information, such as risk information, to assist this process.

Sources to inform situational awareness may include:

- Fire control: Information gathered from callers and other systems
- Local knowledge: Communication with crews including previous incident history
- Site-Specific Risk Information (SSRI): Where available this should be accessed, the accuracy of information confirmed and used to inform decision making
- Weather conditions: Influence on incident development and safety of crews
- Time of day: Effect on persons and environment
- 360° Survey: Reconnaissance of the scene to gain information using sight, sound, smell and touch

- Communication: With the responsible person, other responders and witnesses to gain an understanding of the history of the incident development including numbers and locations of persons missing or unaccounted for
- On-site information: Building, emergency or evacuation via mobile data terminals

### **Understanding information**

After a commander gathers information, they will process it and extract the meaning. As a result, they will form an understanding of the incident. Experience, context and assumptions can supplement or distort the incident commander's interpretation of the scene.

### **Anticipation**

Fire and rescue services should ensure that incident commanders use their understanding of the situation to anticipate what is likely to happen next; for example, how the situation might develop and the consequences of their actions. This means it is vital that their interpretation reflects the actual situation, which will allow the incident commander to effectively plan their operational activities.

### **Effective situational awareness**

Effective situational awareness ensures that the interpretation reflects the actual situation. This is critical for making appropriate decisions and predicting the likely effects of activities.

The following may assist effective situational awareness:

- Clear briefing
- Minimising distractions during critical tasks
- Appropriate spans of control
- Regular review
- Self-awareness of stress and fatigue

### **Factors that affect situational awareness**

Fire and rescue services should ensure incident commanders are aware of the factors that can affect situational awareness. Incident commanders should understand how to put in place the means to monitor the operational environment to detect changes and maintain an accurate understanding of the situation. For example, by using an appropriate command structure and communication network, together with operational assurance/active monitoring arrangements.

Forming an accurate understanding of the situation is risk-critical. Incident commanders should be aware of the factors likely to affect their situational awareness.

New information about risks may come to light as crews work on their tasks. As the incident commander may not be aware of this information, they rely on each person to complete their own risk assessment. New information may affect the incident plan and the safety of people operating in that area, so it is important that personnel are aware of their responsibilities for identifying hazards and assessing risks to influence their actions. Relevant information should also be relayed to the incident commander as appropriate.

Further information can be found in The Foundation for Incident Command

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services must:

- Provide effective training and development programmes to ensure incident commanders are able to develop and practice the skill of situational awareness. Assessment processes and exercises should assess the effectiveness of an individual's ability to gain situational awareness and provide constructive feedback to allow learning.

Fire and rescue services should:

- Ensure incident commanders are aware of the factors that can affect situational awareness
- Ensure that incident commanders are trained to use their understanding of the situation to anticipate what is likely to happen next (for example, how the situation might develop and the consequences of their actions)

### *Tactical actions*

Fire control operators should:

- Ensure that all relevant incident information is relayed to the incident commander

Incident commanders should:

- Gather information from a variety of sources to gain accurate situational awareness and understanding
- Ensure that a full 360° survey is carried out at the earliest opportunity to gain sensory perception of the current situation and hazards present
- Liaise with the responsible person, other responders and witnesses to gain an understanding of the incident
- Anticipate the likely development of the incident and evaluate the potential consequences of a range of actions
- Maintain situational awareness and identify changes during the incident through active monitoring and regular briefings

## **Control measure – Command decision making**

### *Control measure knowledge*

Decision making is a fundamental command skill which can have far-reaching consequences. Decision making, like any complex skill, needs practice and understanding. Fire and rescue services should ensure they prepare incident commanders. They should be given ample opportunity to practice and develop this critical skill.

The ability to make sound decisions based on the elements that make up an incident, as well as an accurate overall interpretation of the incident is a fundamental building block. It leads to assertive, effective and safe incident command.



There are a number of processes that incident commanders may use to reach decisions. They can be broadly grouped into two main categories. These are:

- Intuitive decision-making, which may include conditioned processes and recognition primed decision-making
- Analytical decision-making, which may include rule selection, option comparison and creating new solutions

Further information can be found in The Foundation for Incident Command.

Analytical decision-making takes more time and mental effort than intuitive processes and can be more susceptible to the effects of excessive pressures that reduce the capacity for mental processing.

### **Decision traps**

A decision trap can be described as a thought process that can lead to an incorrect decision being made, which may result in the situation becoming worse.

There are a number of decision traps that may make decisions in the operational context less effective. Decision makers should be aware of these and should apply decision controls to guard against unintended consequences. Further information can be found in The Foundation for Incident Command.

It is the responsibility of fire and rescue services to ensure that they adequately train, develop and support incident commanders in their decision-making processes and capabilities.

Incident commanders make decisions throughout an incident. The decisions they make involve:

- Identifying problems
- Assessing risk
- Identifying and prioritising objectives
- Deciding tactical priorities
- Developing and communicating a plan
- Actively monitoring

These processes apply to all decision makers on the incident ground. They have equal relevance from a firefighter wearing breathing apparatus to an incident commander developing their plan. It is critical that everybody is aware of the processes that drive their decision-making. Fire and rescue services should ensure that decision makers understand the factors that influence which process they are likely to adopt and the pitfalls associated with each.

### **Decision Control Process (DCP)**

The Decision Control Process provides a method to support decision-making at an incident. This aims to take account of the natural decision processes a person might employ in an operational context. It seeks to support decision makers in a practical way to avoid unintended consequences arising from decision traps.

The Decision Control Process is scalable. It can be applied to basic decisions made on the incident ground for a task or problem. It can also scale up for use in planning the resolution of an entire incident. It complements the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) Joint Decision Model for multi-agency decision-making, particularly for assessing risk and developing a working strategy.

This process consists of four stages. These are:

- Situation
- Plan
- Decision controls
- Action

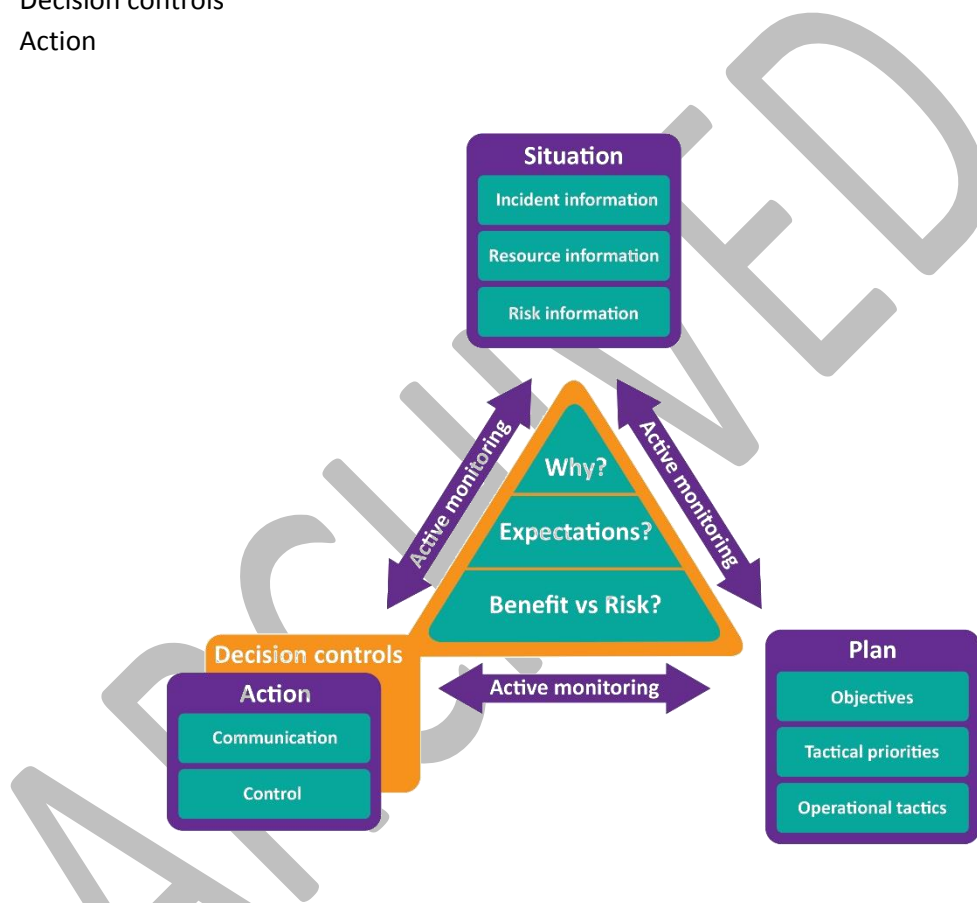


Figure 1: Decision control process

For an animated version of this diagram, [click here](#).

### Situation

Commanders base their decisions on the way they interpret a situation. Good situational awareness is key to understanding the situation in a coherent way. It helps to predict likely developments. By assessing the situation, a decision maker can understand the current characteristics and details of an incident and consider the desired end state.

Decision makers should continually be assessing the situation to support an accurate awareness. They should gather relevant information whilst making the best use of the time available. Though this list is not exhaustive, they should consider:

- Incident information
- Resource information
- Risk information

## **Resources**

Incident commanders should identify the resources currently available and those likely to be required to deliver a safe and effective incident plan. Appropriate internal and external resources should be requested via fire control in a timely way; fire control should be regularly updated on availability and predicted length of deployment. The time from request to arrival should be considered when developing incident plans and available resources should be deployed effectively at all times.

When requesting resources, the following should be considered:

- Personnel
- Appliances
- Equipment
- Specialist skills and expertise
- Tactical and specialist advisers
- Police, ambulance and other category 1 and 2 responders
- Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre (FRSNCC)
- Relief crews
- Voluntary sector groups

## **Plan**

After assessing the situation, the decision maker should form a plan. They should understand the current situation and their desired outcome. From this they can identify their objectives and develop an incident plan.

This list is not exhaustive but the plan may consider:

- What are the incident objectives and goals?
- What are the tactical priorities?
- What are the operational tactics?

## **Decision controls**

Decision controls are designed to help guard against decision traps that might occur as a result of the type of decision process people naturally adopt. Before moving to the action phase, decision makers should use decision controls as a rapid mental check and as part of their briefing to crews.

Decision controls are a rapid mental check that asks:

- Why am I doing this?
  - To what goals does this link?
  - What is my rationale?

- What do I think will happen?
  - Anticipate the likely outcome of the action, in particular the impact on the objective and other activities
  - How will the incident change as a result of these actions, what cues do I expect to see?
- Is the benefit proportional to the risk?
  - Consider whether the benefits of proposed actions justify the risks that would be accepted

### **Action**

This involves implementing the decisions that have been made. Wherever feasible, decision controls should be applied before this phase, or as soon as possible afterwards. This applies whether decision makers move to *Action* from *Plan* or directly from *Situation assessment*. The two elements of this phase are:

- Communicate the outcomes of the decision effectively by issuing instructions and sharing risk-critical information. It may also involve the provision of updates on the situation, on progress, or other information about what is happening at an incident
- Control how the activities are implemented to achieve the desired outcomes. Consider delegating responsibility where this will help increase or maintain control.

### **Active monitoring**

The commander should be actively monitoring and evaluating the situation, including progress being achieved against that expected. This ensures that their situational awareness remains accurate. They should consider whether their tactics or incident plans are suitable, sufficient and safe; they should consider and question any areas of uncertainty, especially where they have made assumptions. Operational assurance arrangements can aid commanders in maintaining accurate situational awareness.

### **Joint decision-making**

The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) Joint Decision Model is a process that blue light responders have agreed to use at multi-agency incidents, as illustrated below.



Figure 2: JESIP Joint Decision Model

The diagram below shows how the Decision Control Process supports the JESIP Joint Decision Model; in particular, the element of 'assessing risk and developing a working strategy'. It helps to feed plans into the Joint Decision Model and can be used as a process to plan and implement activities to achieve the fire and rescue objectives that have been agreed collectively using the Joint Decision Model.

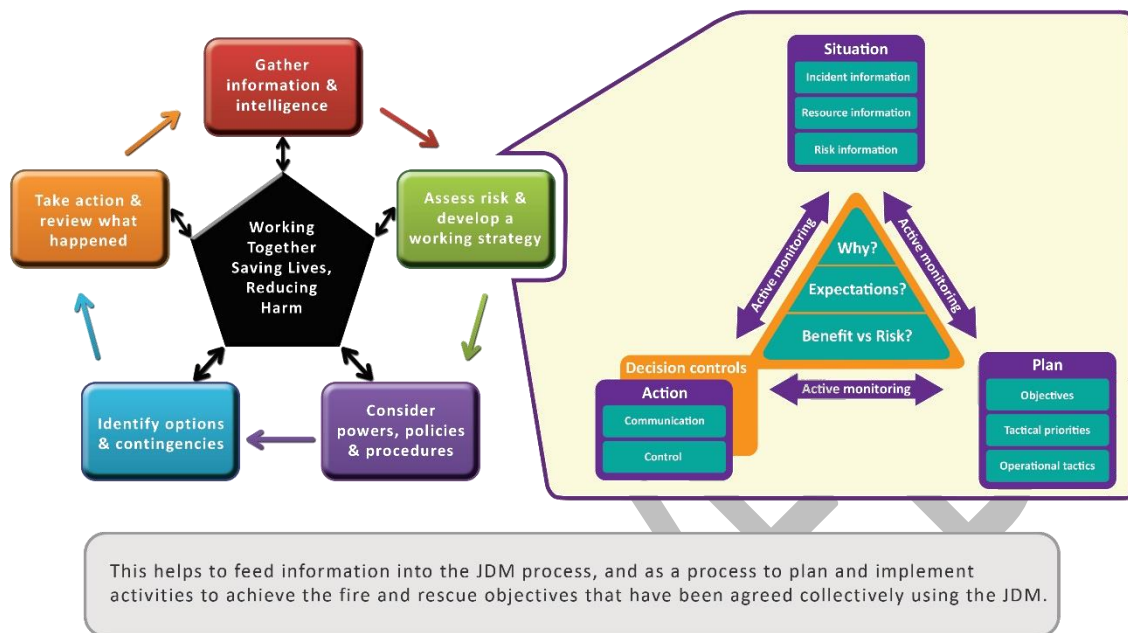


Figure 3: How the Decision Control Process supports the JESIP Joint Decision Model

For an animated version of this diagram, [click here](#).

### Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Prepare incident commanders to operate in a complex decision-making environment. This environment is uncertain, with competing demands and problems that can affect many aspects of the scene
- Have mechanisms to request local, regional, national and international assistance and support at operational incidents

### Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Select appropriate actions by applying the Decision Control Process to the information gathered avoiding decision traps
- Develop an incident plan considering contingencies arrangements
- Identify and communicate objectives, priorities and tactics to be adopted in resolving the incident
- Regularly review and update incident plan in response to active monitoring of the situation against expected outcomes

- Use the Joint Decision Model to co-ordinate an effective response at multi-agency incidents
- Identify the resources currently available to take immediate action and request those likely to be needed to deliver a full incident plan
- Instigate appropriate local, regional, national and international arrangements for assistance and support

## **Control measure – Operational discretion**

### *Control measure knowledge*

Most situations that incident commanders are faced with are not unique and are foreseeable. In resolving an incident, commanders use their own experience and knowledge of guidance, together with that of the command team and crew members. However, incident commanders may occasionally be presented with a situation that is extremely unusual and not reasonably foreseeable. In this circumstance they may have to make decisions using their professional judgement.

Operational discretion relates to rare or exceptional circumstances where strictly following an operational procedure would be a barrier to resolving an incident, or where there is no procedure that adequately deals with the incident. Incident commanders need to be sufficiently aware of procedures, the skills and qualities of crew members and the capability of resources available.

Policies and procedures should be written in such a way as to give incident commanders a safe system of work for all foreseeable situations. This is best achieved by avoiding the use of rigid procedures. The ability to apply flexible policies relies on the training of personnel and commanders in the application of safe systems of work and the ability to identify hazards and select suitable control measures. For further information regarding the planning of safe operational response refer to the Health, Safety and welfare framework for the operational environment.

Outcomes which would justify applying operational discretion include:

- Saving human life
- Taking decisive action to prevent an incident escalating
- Incidents where taking no action may lead others to put themselves in danger

The overarching principle should be that in the opinion of the incident commander the benefit of taking unusual, unorthodox or innovative action justifies the risk. See Decision controls.

Any decision to apply operational discretion should be the minimum necessary and only until the objective is achieved. Some areas of operational policies and procedures have to be written in a prescriptive way. In other cases, it should be written in a more flexible way with appropriate information to allow commanders and crew members to resolve an incident effectively.

Further information can be found in The Foundation for Incident Command.

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services should

- Refer to the following when developing new or reviewing existing operational policies and procedures:
  - Legislative requirements
  - National guidance and good practice
  - The service assessment of operational risk
  - The equipment and training provided for their personnel
  - Have procedures for incident commanders to record the reasons that support their decisions. The extent of the record should match the severity and/or complexity of the incident.
  - Have a process to consider whether it is appropriate to review operational policy, procedure and guidance following the application of operational discretion by an incident commander

#### *Tactical actions*

Incident commanders should:

- Consider applying operational discretion where outcomes would justify unusual, unorthodox or innovative action
- Return to operational procedures when the objective has been achieved
- Contemporaneously record rationale for the decision to use operational discretion
- Where appropriate instigate a review of existing guidance as part of the debrief process following the use of operational discretion

#### *Control measure knowledge*

Effective communication is fundamental to achieving successful and safe resolution of incidents. It provides the incident commander with knowledge about the situation and progress of tasks. Obtaining accurate and timely information is crucial to underpin situational awareness and subsequent decision-making. It helps the incident commander perform the role in a confident and determined manner and thereby assert their leadership and authority.

Communication also plays a vital role in co-ordinating activities, completing tasks and handover of command. Sharing accurate and timely information is also critical for helping others to have a common understanding of the situation, what is happening and what needs to happen next. Even the most effective plans will only work if the people putting them into practice understand them.

As well as exchanging information, good communication helps to build relationships between people. These relationships are important so that people are effective when they carry out their tasks to resolve the incident. Incident commanders should be aware that effective communication is essential for good leadership and makes it easier for people to follow instructions, understand briefings and have confidence in what is being stated.

Effective communication should:

- Provide information that is:
  - Clear



- Relevant and concise
- Timely
- Be easily understood
- Be delivered confidently
- Include active listening
- Ensure verbal and non-verbal communications are aligned
- Ensure assumptions are questioned

Further information can be found in The Foundation for Incident Command

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services should:

- Ensure that they have appropriate communications systems in place at incidents and adequately prepare personnel for communicating with others effectively in an operational environment
- Ensure there is resilience in all their communication strategies and aligned equipment used on the incident ground
- Ensure appropriate control measures are in place to support reinstating operational communication across all aspects of operational incident command in the event of equipment and strategy failure
- Develop robust systems that ensure that the handover of command is structured and does not compromise the safe management of the incident

### *Tactical actions*

*Incident commanders should:*

- Deliver clear, concise and timely briefings to crews, command support functions and other agencies, allowing for assumptions to be questioned and understanding confirmed
- Communicate the incident situation to other responders via fire control using the METHANE message protocol
- Debrief crews that have withdrawn from a working area during an incident to gain operational intelligence
- Provide a structured brief when handing over command

Fire control room operators should:

- Maintain an accurate record of information received from the incident ground
- Communicate the contents of any METHANE message transmitted to all responders

## **Control measure – Personal resilience**

### *Control measure knowledge*

An incident can be a challenging environment to work in. The location, tasks and uncertainty of what might happen puts pressure on incident commanders and crews. An appropriate level of pressure

can have a positive effect by increasing alertness. However, excessive pressure can cause stress, which may limit the ability to think, communicate and operate effectively.

Stress occurs when an individual experiences a difference between the demands placed on them and their ability to cope. Working in demanding or challenging environments may also lead to physical and mental fatigue.

Incident commanders and the teams they lead should be able to function while being aware of stress and fatigue. They need to communicate, make critical decisions and process varying pieces of information. They should be able to understand how both stress and fatigue affect these processes. See National Operational Guidance: Operations and The Foundation for Incident Command.

#### Types of pressure

The kind of pressure that can lead to stress will differ between individuals. Some typical demands that may cause stress include:

Incident environment	Task	Uncertainty
Noise	Time pressure	Multiple goals
Heat	Hazards and risk	Conflicting goals
Emotional reactions from public	Performance anxiety	Incomplete information
Moral pressure	Workload	Unexpected event
Upsetting scenes	Spans of control	Unfamiliar or ambiguous scenario
Conflict	Consequences of failure	Failed plan or control action
Fatigue	Life risk	

People differ in the way stress can affect them. Some effects can be subtle changes from normal behaviour. There is no definitive list of behavioural indicators and the effects can differ between individuals. Stress can affect incident command. It may lead to:

- Impaired situational awareness
- Impaired decision-making
- Impaired communication
- Impaired teamwork
- Impaired performance
- Impaired leadership

#### Effects of stress on teams

When team members experience stress it can impair how the team functions. Stress can cause teams to communicate less effectively, which can affect team situational awareness and lead to errors.

#### Coping with fatigue

Fatigue is a physical and/or mental state of feeling tired and weak. Physical fatigue results in an inability to continue functioning at normal levels of physical ability. Mental fatigue affects concentration and thought processes. Although mental and physical fatigue are different, they often occur at the same time. Physical work and extremes such as temperature and weather can have an impact on crews.

For further information, refer to the Health, Safety and welfare framework for the operational environment.

#### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services should:

- Ensure that people working under stressful conditions are aware of the effects and symptoms of stress. They should prepare them to be able to operate in stressful environments. There should be adequate training and support processes to prepare personnel for the pressures of incident command
- Ensure incident commanders are able to recognise the effects of stress in both themselves and others, and understand how stress may affect their ability to command an incident.
- Consider the effects of fatigue on incident commanders and other operational personnel involved at an incident, ensuring options are available to manage the effects of fatigue. These include:
  - Rotating crews
  - Arranging welfare
  - Providing reliefs
- The right time for these arrangements will depend on the type of incident and its duration. Procedures should include the actions incident commanders should take before fatigue begins to reduce performance

#### *Tactical actions*

- Incident commanders should:
- Recognise the negative effects that stress and fatigue can have on themselves and others
- Consider relief and welfare arrangements to reduce the effects of stress and fatigue on themselves and others

### **Hazard – Ineffective organisation of the incident ground**

<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Control measure</b>
Ineffective organisation of the incident ground	Clearly defined command roles and responsibilities, incorporating multi-agency arrangements  Have a communication strategy

	Structuring an incident Establish appropriate cordon controls Arrangements to deal with firefighter emergencies
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## Hazard knowledge

It is the responsibility of fire and rescue services to ensure that incident commanders are sufficiently trained, capable and knowledgeable to be able to effectively and safely organise resources to obtain the best resolution to an incident. It is the role of all personnel, who may attend or are involved with an incident, to ensure that they are familiar with the requirements of the incident command system and that they can operate safely and effectively in it. This applies to those who will perform a command role and equally to those who will be operating under the command of others, including the fire control room.

Incident command and support activities start on receipt of the emergency call to the fire control room and continue to the conclusion of the incident. See National Operational Guidance: Operations

Operations on the incident ground should be well-organised and controlled. The incident command system provides the incident commander with a clear framework to help structure, organise and manage an emergency. It can be adapted to all sizes and types of incident and helps incident commanders to deploy and use resources effectively.

The incident commander at an incident is the nominated competent and responsible person. However, the most senior officer present holds organisational accountability, even when they have not taken the role of incident commander. This cannot be passed to another person. This arrangement allows a senior officer to take a variety of other roles, including providing tactical advice, mentoring and monitoring.

The fire and rescue service incident command system is an all-hazards approach, providing a progressive, scalable and flexible system of operational command, control and organisation. The incident command system is designed to help an incident commander manage and fulfil their incident plan. It encourages a controlled and systematic approach to resolving incidents.

The key components of the incident command system include:

- Clear, defined and visible lines of command
- Manageable spans of control
- A communications infrastructure
- Appropriate responsibility and authority
- Clearly defined and understood roles and responsibilities
- Sectorisation of the incident

Using common language and components will ensure fire and rescue services can effectively resolve local, cross-border and national incidents.

Understanding the *span of control* concept is important when managing a large amount of activity and information. Dividing an incident into sectors provides a clear reporting structure.

The incident command system will only be successful when applied with good command skills. It is not the incident command system that achieves the outcome; it is how the incident commander makes and applies sound operational decisions within it.

The incident command system allows the incident commander to use health and safety arrangements, including operational guidance and/or procedures tailored to the characteristics of an incident and the objectives of the incident plan. This helps to achieve a balance between risk and benefit.

At a more challenging incident it may be appropriate for a senior officer to assume command. However, it may be more important to maintain continuity of command, rather than automatically hand over on the arrival of a more senior officer.

Incident commanders should be aware of becoming over-burdened and having too broad a span of control. This can lead to ineffective leadership, poor decision-making and poor communications, leading to a failure of situational awareness. Incident commanders should consider the issues of team dynamics to get the best from the resources available to them. See Situational awareness.

Incident commanders and the command team are accountable for the decisions they make. They should be able to provide reasoned justification for what they did and why. Appropriate records should be kept at incidents to log key events, critical decisions and the thinking behind the actions incident commanders take, including contemporaneous records for low level incidents, escalating to the addition of decision logs being recorded as the scale of operations become more complex.

The declaration of a major incident may instigate the requirement for additional resources from multiple agencies and hence additional strategic management which would be established both on-scene and at remote locations.

For further information, see National Operational Guidance: Major incidents (To follow)

### **Control measure – Clearly defined command roles and responsibilities, incorporating multi-agency arrangements**

*Control measure knowledge*

#### **Levels of command**

Fire and rescue services should ensure that commanders at all levels achieve and maintain appropriate command competence. The CFA Command Training, Assessment and Qualifications Fire and Rescue Service Guidance provides further information about the four nationally agreed levels of command qualification for fire and rescue service operations:

- Level 1: Initial. Command and control operations at a task-focused supervisory level, or a more senior level, at a serious escalating incident.

- Level 2: Intermediate. Command and control operations at a tactical middle manager level, or a more senior level, for large or significant incidents.
- Level 3: Advanced. Tactical command at the largest and most serious incidents, either at the scene or at a remote location.
- Level 4: Strategic. Strategic command associated with commanding in a Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG), or its equivalent in devolved administrations.

Agencies may use one of three levels of command and control at a multi-agency incident:

- Operational (Bronze)
- Tactical (Silver)
- Strategic (Gold)

These levels are role related and the titles may not reflect seniority of rank. Instead, they show the function carried out by that particular person or group.

### **Interoperability and intraoperability**

Multi-agency interoperability is essential for incidents of all sizes. The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles Joint Doctrine aims to promote greater consistency across blue light services. This includes the use of key terms and common terminology. There is no legislation that states the primacy of one agency over another. The Joint Doctrine gives further guidance on co-ordination between emergency services.

The key principles of effective joint working are:

- Co-location
- Communication
- Co-ordination
- Joint understanding of risks
- Shared situational awareness

A number of commercial or industrial sites will have their own fire and rescue services, for example, airports or oil refineries. Fire and rescue services should develop local arrangements that define the roles and responsibilities of each agency attending an emergency, for example, transfer of command.

For the incident command system to work, the incident commander and other roles should be clearly identifiable. A system for identifying command roles visually is outlined in in The Foundation for Incident Command.

The incident command system provides a structure that ensures a competent person is responsible for command and control at operational, tactical and strategic levels. Crews, sectors and functions should be appropriately supervised to achieve the incident plan. The system should be flexible enough to meet the demands of each type of incident.

The transfer of command should be a formal handover process that is acknowledged and communicated. This is equally important when an incident escalates or scales down.

Everyone in the command structure should be informed of changes of incident commander. This includes the fire control room, who can advise others. This should be appropriately recorded at the incident, as well as by the fire control room. There should be no doubt as to who is in command.

It is important that fire and rescue services can provide an effective response to local, cross-border and national incidents. The national frameworks support the principles of national resilience. Fire and rescue services need an understanding of resources and capabilities available to them.

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services should:

- Have policies which clearly define the levels of command and the skills required to fulfil them. These policies should identify roles suitable for the four levels of command competence in the fire and rescue service, together with the three levels of multi-agency command. These policies should reflect the national occupational standards.
- Develop local arrangements with neighbouring fire and rescue services and other agencies that define their roles and expectations. Where appropriate, those arrangements may assign lead responsibilities and/or primacy to an agency. They might base this on the nature of the incident or other relevant factors. This may need to change to reflect the changing phases of an incident.
- Have a policy for clear briefings and handover of information to ensure that all personnel have a good understanding of their part in the incident command system
- Have regular contact with neighbouring services to ensure that appropriate cross-border plans are in place. They should test these plans under realistic conditions. Joint training is also valuable and will help to find differences in policy or procedure to avoid confusion at incidents.
- Ensure that JESIP principles have been adopted and embedded in service procedures
- Periodically test cross border and multi-agency arrangements under realistic conditions and amend inaccurate assumptions to improve future performance

### *Tactical actions*

Incident commanders should:

- Establish an incident command structure appropriate to the likely size and complexity of the incident considering sectors, functions, command support and tactical advisers
- Ensure all personnel are aware of the incident command structure and communication strategy
- Consider the principles of JESIP at incidents involving multi-agency or cross border operations
- Keep appropriate contemporaneous records and/or decision logs to capture key events, critical decisions and rationale

## **Control measure – Have a communication strategy**

### *Control measure knowledge*

The aim at every incident is to integrate communications and decision making between the incident commander and operational personnel.

The purpose of communication is to provide another person with information. This typically involves three factors:

- The meaning of the message from the sender
- The actual message passed
- The meaning of the message as understood by the recipient.

An incident commander should be aware that messages are not always understood in the way they are intended. Problems with messages arise because the sender often assumes the person receiving their communication has the same understanding. Sometimes this is not the case because the person receiving the message extracts meaning in a way that makes sense to them. Incident commanders should check the other person's understanding of important messages.

The incident commander should be aware of both their own assumptions and those of the person with whom they are communicating. They should test assumptions and make information clear. They should make sure the other person has accurately understood the message.

Communication at an incident may be:

- One-way communication: there are times when direct one-way communication may be appropriate. The sender will deliver a message with no opportunity for feedback. This form of communication is rapid and puts the sender in control of the message. But the lack of feedback from the recipient means that they cannot confirm their understanding
- Two-way communication: this offers the receiver the opportunity to feedback to the sender. Information flows between them. Whilst this often takes longer than one-way communication it can be more accurate because it provides an opportunity to confirm the intended meaning

Communication at incidents can occur in different forms: verbal, non-verbal (mobile data terminals, internet, for example) and written (e.g. SSRI, tactical fire plans, standard operating procedures).

The incident commander should consider how people will perceive non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is important when briefing crews or liaising with other agencies. They should consider it carefully when they interact with members of the public in an emergency situation as these people may be highly sensitive to the emotional states of others. The incident commander's non-verbal behaviour should match their message.

It is important to maintain open and effective communications. There may be many lines of communication and they are a major aid to control. Examples include direct or indirect reports from individuals, crews or sectors.



Other parties will also be communicating: Emergency services, assisting agencies and fire control rooms. When assessing the span of control, they should consider how to manage communications, taking into account the pressure this may put on an incident commander. It is critical to share communications in a way that will support a common picture of the incident.

The commander should be able to cope with the flow of information. It is important to limit both direct communication and information flows to manageable levels. Failure to keep communication manageable can have a negative effect at an incident. It could result in poor communication of risk-critical information or overlooking it.

It is best to keep the span of control for tactical roles as narrow as possible. They should not give individuals so many aspects that they cannot give them enough attention.

### **Effective communication**

Some qualities of effective communication include:

- Information is received and confirmed as being from a reliable and credible source before being acted on
- Information is clear, avoiding ambiguity by using commonly understood terms. This is especially important when working with other agencies. For other agencies some terms might have different meanings
- Information is relevant, appropriate and concise. Incorrect information can overload the receiver and the meaning can be lost
- Information exchange is timely. To avoid distractions from critical tasks, commanders should consider how urgent the information is and the receiver's current tasks
- Understanding is confirmed, preventing misunderstanding and differences in shared situation awareness
- Assumptions are questioned. Senders and receivers of information may have assumptions about the information. Incident commanders should question and clear up assumptions. This will help to make sure what they say is what the other person hears and understands
- There is a clear benefit to being assertive to clarify meaning and test assumptions. Both confidence and status can affect the ability to be assertive under pressure
- The environment at an incident can make it harder to communicate. Noise, adverse weather conditions and heightened levels of activity can be distracting and make listening difficult. Pre-conceptions about the status of the person who is communicating may also affect listening
- Words and behaviours are matched. People are constantly communicating, even when not using words. When verbal and non-verbal messages match, it helps people to make sense of the message. For example, a calm approach reinforces a reassuring message

When establishing an effective communication strategy incident commanders should consider key principles. Because of differing sizes, types and locations of incidents, the format of a communication structure and strategy will undoubtedly differ, but key questions should be considered:

- Is the communication structure and strategy to be applied, appropriate for the incident, effective and resilient?
- Is the information received in support of the incident accurate, appropriate and timely?
- Is the information from a reliable credible source?
- Is there a security requirement of the information received and what is the appropriate method for the communication and maintenance of this?
- Who needs to be informed of the information, and how?
- What is the relevance of the information?

Establish effective arrangements for communication. A good flow of information is one of the most important assets on the incident ground. An incident commander should make sure that they can:

- Gather information
- Issue orders to personnel
- Receive situation reports from all areas, including sector commanders
- Assess and provide for the needs of other agencies
- Carry out a risk assessment and add this to the briefing on arrival. Crews will be briefed about the tasks they need to perform and the hazards and risks they face. Briefing crews thoroughly is essential to share any safety critical information.

Incident commanders may also hold briefings on the way to an incident. The extent of the briefing will depend on an incident's type and scale. For example, the pre-briefing for small fires may be straightforward. Where crews have little experience or there is high risk then a comprehensive brief may be needed.

Debrief crews that have withdrawn from a working area during an incident – debriefs are a good source of safety information and this should not be overlooked.

Incident commanders should also:

- Gather information, issue orders and receive situation reports
- Assess the needs of other agencies and plan to meet them
- Establish suitable arrangements for communications (usually the role of command support, under guidance of the incident commander):
  - Establish communication links with fire and rescue service control
  - Ensure they correctly assign radio channels and call signs
  - Establish communications with other agencies
  - Establish communications with sector commanders and other command support functions to receive regular situation reports
  - Ensure sector commanders can communicate between themselves
  - Use local systems; some new and complex buildings and structures, including those extending underground, have communication systems installed for use by emergency services

### **Failure of communication**

Communication can fail when information is not shared at the right time or is not understood by the receiver. This can lead to:

- Incorrect or inappropriate information being used to assess a situation, resulting in poor individual situational awareness. This can lead to inconsistent shared situational awareness
- Incorrect or inappropriate information leading to a faulty perception of events unfolding. This may result in the wrong decisions being taken for the actual situation
- Failure to co-ordinate team activities, causing task conflicts between fire and rescue service teams or with other agencies
- 'Freelancing' because of a breakdown in leadership and followership
- Increased risk of accidents because risk-critical information is not shared or understood

Throughout all aspects of communication, fire and rescue services and their employees need to be aware of the potential for misuse of information and mindful of the legal requirements placed on them in by the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

See:

JESIP joint doctrine

#### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue service should:

- Ensure there is resilience in all their communication strategies and aligned equipment used on the incident ground
- Test the compatibility of communications equipment, systems and processes with neighbouring fire and rescue services and other agencies
- Ensure appropriate control measures are in place to support reinstating operational communication across all aspects of operational incident command in the event of equipment and strategy failure

#### *Tactical actions*

Incident commanders should:

- Establish an appropriate incident ground communication strategy having consideration for other agencies and remote resources
- Pass information to fire control rooms in a timely way
- Provide regular situation updates to all responders

### **Control measure – Structuring an incident**

#### *Control measure knowledge*

Managing and supervising crews on the incident ground is an essential part of the safe system of work used by the fire and rescue service.

The incident command system is a framework that assists with the management of resources at an incident. The incident commander may devolve authority for some of the operations. It allows the incident commander to delegate responsibility of tasks and functions, but does not absolve them of ultimate accountability.

Understanding and effectively applying the incident command system enables spans of control to be maintained at manageable levels and improves control and communications. Taking these steps will prevent the incident commander from becoming overloaded with information, which supports effective situational awareness and decision-making. This way the incident commander can maintain control under conditions of high pressure and rapid change.

The incident commander should anticipate the likely scale and complexity of the escalating incident and develop the necessary command structure at the earliest opportunity.

### **Command team**

Fire and rescue services may take different approaches towards deciding which roles and functions form part of the command team. However, the main aim is to enable effective decision-making and clear communication between the incident commander and those performing operational tasks.

The command team includes the incident commander and any other personnel that are operating in a commanding role, for example, command support, operations commander and sector commanders.

It is important to maintain spans of control at a manageable level. Individuals should not be responsible for so many lines of communication that they cannot give each sufficient attention. The incident command system provides the means by which a commander controls the activities associated with their role.

The command team will involve personnel who carry out a variety of roles. It is important to make sure they can be easily identified using a commonly understood method. This is particularly important at incidents that cross borders and at large incidents, where commanders who may not know each other work together.

### **Command support**

Command support and its related support sectors are critical to resolving incidents. An incident commander cannot manage a complex and rapidly developing incident alone. Effective and structured support systems that can vary with the size and demands of an incident need to be implemented.

Fire and rescue services will have different approaches to the roles and functions that make up the command support team. The aim at every incident is to ensure clear communications and decision-making between the incident commander and operational personnel. Some of the command support functions may be at locations remote from the incident. This is particularly the case at major and multi-agency incidents, or where multiple incidents are occurring (e.g. wide-scale flooding).

Where crews are working on technical or widespread operations, specialist teams may assist them within the incident command system. Examples of technical or widespread operations include high volume pumping, mass decontamination or urban search and rescue. Such specialisms should work under the control of the relevant incident or sector commander.

A specialist tactical adviser (TacAd) may be deployed to assist the incident or sector commander. They can be used at a range of incidents regardless of size. At more complex incidents, several advisers may be used by the blue light services. More details can be found in the *National Co-ordination and Advisory Framework*. The commander remains in charge, with the responsibility for decision making and the incident plan.

It is important that everyone understands the different roles and responsibilities in the command support function. This helps maintain common expectations which feed into shared situational awareness. See *Command skills*.

The command support function will generally be responsible for recording significant decisions. It is important to record enough information about the reasoning behind each significant decision. This will help those who examine the decision-making process in the future. A decision log is meant to record actions which influence the incident plan. If there is uncertainty over how important a decision might turn out to be, then it should be recorded.

### **Sectors**

An incident commander may be able to effectively control small incidents without the need to implement additional command arrangements. As the scale of operations grows, the incident commander should consider appointing sector commanders to supervise crews and command areas of operations. Sectors should only be used where and when necessary, to reduce the possibility of barriers to the flow of information between crews and the incident commander.

Once an incident has become more complex with a growing number of sectors in use, the incident commander may choose to appoint an operations commander. This is to manage the sectors and reduce the span of control for the incident commander. If the number of sectors grows, they may need to group the sectors under more than one operations commander. The all-hazards command approach is able to scale up to any situation as required.

Even when tasks are delegated, the incident commander remains responsible at all times for overall incident management. They should remain focused on command and control, the use of resources, incident planning and the co-ordination of sector operations.

Sectors can apply to a defined area of a building, the vertical features, such as in high rise buildings or geographical features. Sectorisation at transport incidents can be more complex to define. Sectors can also be used to control functional areas, such as a safety sector. Examples of sectorisation in a range of applications can be seen in *The Foundation for Incident Command*.

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services should:

- Have policies which outline the roles likely to be performed in the command team. These will include the level of skills and appropriate responsibilities for each command role and function. There should be policies that identify the various command team roles and functions that are recognisable to fire and rescue service personnel, both in the host service and other assisting fire and rescue services. It is important to take steps to ensure that they are also understood by other agencies.
- Have procedures for the effective control of communications at incidents of all sizes. These procedures should be scalable to allow for incidents that develop in size and complexity and take into account that other agencies will also be communicating at the incident.
- Have policies to provide command support at an incident. Each service will need to decide what to provide and how to achieve this.
- Have appropriate means of recording information at command points and in sectors. This will include the tactical mode and number of personnel working in the area. It will also record key hazards and risks. Information recording may be happening at multiple locations and care needs to be taken to ensure critical information is recorded and retained.
- Consider the need to provide specific training for personnel who provide command support arrangements and for those who may fulfil the role of command support officer.
- Have policies for recording decisions and significant events at the incident ground.
- Have procedures to allow defined areas on the incident ground to be identified and understood by all personnel. This is generally referred to as sectorisation.
- Have policies for limiting access of personnel to the hazardous areas of an incident ground and for briefing and identification of those involved. This policy should include any equipment and procedural guidance necessary to implement it safely.
- Establish joint working protocols with neighbouring fire and rescue services and other agencies to ensure the policy can be safely implemented and effectively controlled.
- Make arrangements to mobilise suitable resources and equipment to provide command support teams and functions such as command boards and control units

#### *Tactical actions*

- Incident commander should:
- Establish an incident command structure appropriate to the likely size and complexity of the incident considering sectors, functions, command support and tactical advisers

#### **Control measure – Establish appropriate cordon controls**

##### *Control measure knowledge*

Incident commanders must consider the safety of firefighters, members of other agencies and the public. They have a duty, so far as reasonably practicable in the context of operational requirements, to ensure that people are not put at risk by fire and rescue service activities and that anybody exposed to serious and imminent danger is informed of the hazards and the control measures necessary to protect them.

The fire service has the power to restrict the access of persons to premises or a place in an emergency and establishing cordons is an effective way of maintaining safety and controlling resources.

Where practical, the police will establish and maintain cordons at appropriate distances to allow the emergency services and other responding agencies to save life, protect the public and property, and care for survivors.

In some areas the police will have agreements enabling the fire and rescue services to manage gateways into the inner cordon, establish who should be granted access and keep a record of people entering and exiting.

Cordons can be divided into distinct areas:

### **Outer cordon**

An outer cordon may be established around the vicinity of the incident to control access to a wide area. This will allow the emergency services and other agencies to work unhindered and in privacy. Access through the outer cordon for essential non-emergency service personnel should be by way of an access control point.

The police will usually control outer cordons, and may also establish traffic cordons to prevent unauthorised vehicular access. The police will identify safe routes in and out of the cordon for emergency vehicles and other agencies. Rendezvous points and marshalling areas will usually be located within the outer cordon.



*Figure 4: Where practical the outer cordon should be identified by using blue and white barrier tape.*

### **Inner cordon**

The inner cordon controls access to the immediate scene of operations and provides an increased measure of protection for personnel working in that area. Incident commanders should restrict access to the lowest numbers needed for safe and effective operational activity. At small incidents this could be an existing physical barrier or a safety officer briefed to restrict access.

At incidents where a higher degree of control is required, those entering the inner cordon should report to a designated scene access control point and register their arrival. This ensures that they can be safely accounted for should there be any escalation of the incident, and affords an opportunity for briefing about the hazards, control measures, emergency arrangements and other issues. Nobody should be permitted to enter the inner cordon without an appropriate level of personal protective equipment (PPE). It is necessary to ensure that those leaving the inner cordon register their departure.

The fire and rescue service will be responsible for safety management within the inner cordon until responsibility for the scene is transferred to another body. Overall responsibility for the health and safety of personnel working within the inner cordon remains with individual agencies. Such agencies should ensure that personnel arrive at the scene with appropriate PPE and are adequately trained and briefed for the work they are to undertake within the cordon.

At certain incident types, for example hazardous materials, working near water and Marauding Terrorist Firearms Attack (MTFA), there may be a need to divide cordons into hot, warm and cold zones. This will depend on the level of risk faced by emergency service responders and the range of corresponding control measures identified and implemented.



Figure 5: Where practical the inner cordon should be identified with the use of red and white barrier tape

#### Exclusion zone

Some hazards may present such a significant danger to the safety to firefighters, other agencies and the public that no control measures will adequately reduce the risk. Incident commanders should consider establishing an exclusion zone within the inner cordon to which access is denied to all personnel, including emergency services.



Figure 6: Where practical exclusion zones should be identified with the use of black and yellow barrier tape

Further information on cordons can be found in the Cabinet Office document [Emergency Response and Recovery](#).

#### Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Have a policy for limiting access of personnel to the highest risk areas of an incident ground and for briefing and identification of those involved. This policy should include any procedural guidance and such equipment/resources necessary to implement it safely
- Agree roles and responsibilities for establishing and controlling access to cordons with partner agencies
- Agree with partner organisations appropriate procedures for briefing other agencies working within inner cordons under the safety management of the fire service



### *Tactical actions*

Incident commanders should:

- Ensure that appropriate inner and outer cordons are established, identified and communicated following an assessment of risk to crews, other agencies and the public
- Control access to the inner cordon using methods proportionate to the size and complexity of the incident
- Establish a scene access control point to log all persons operating within the inner cordon when appropriate
- Implement exclusion zones where intolerable risks to safety are identified
- Request the police to establish a traffic cordon where necessary
- Consider requesting an air exclusion zone where appropriate

### **Control measure – Arrangements to deal with firefighter emergencies**

#### *Control measure knowledge*

The rescue and recovery of firefighters is challenging. Difficult decisions may need to be made. The situation calls for clear judgement, often while struggling to keep emotions under control.

If the incident commander and other commanders fail to maintain control, it may lead to an outcome with serious health and safety consequences. Crews are likely to place themselves at considerable risk to rescue or recover colleagues.

A situation where a firefighter needs rescuing is very likely to lead to fire and rescue service personnel and others experiencing increased stress. This can affect the way people make decisions and process information. See Personal resilience.

The incident commander's resilience and ability to manage pressure in this situation is critical to maintain control. Other important factors are maintaining good situational awareness and sharing accurate information such as last known locations and tasks they were undertaking.

After an incident there may be a requirement to investigate its cause. This may be part of a fire and rescue service review to identify the cause of the incident or to look at how effective fire safety measures were. Additionally, it may be part of a criminal investigation by the police. Other agencies may also have a legal requirement to investigate, for example, the Air Accident Investigation Branch, Marine Accident Investigation Branch, Rail Accident Investigation Branch or the Health and Safety Executive.

From the start of an investigation, fire and rescue service personnel should make sure that evidence is not destroyed or disturbed. They should also make observations and notes to help investigators.

The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on best practice for the investigation of accidents in the work place. These include the Work Related Deaths Protocol.

Further information is available. See CFA guide Death in the Workplace: Guidance for United Kingdom fire and rescue services.

### Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services must:

- Have policies for firefighter emergencies which incorporate communications, investigation and welfare.

Fire and rescue services should:

- Consider developing procedures for critical incident welfare of affected personnel

### Tactical actions

- Incident commanders should:
- Establish emergency arrangements appropriate to the size and complexity of the incident
- Maintain effective command and control in an emergency situation and review incident priorities, tactics and resources
- In a firefighter emergency preserve the scene to inform future internal and external investigations

## Hazard – Ineffective safety management

Hazard	Control measures
Ineffective safety management	Positive safety culture Risk assessment at an incident Incident ground safety management Carry out post incident investigations Carry out debriefing/post incident reviews

### Hazard knowledge

The fire and rescue service may work in adverse and dangerous environments involving significant risks. The priorities for an incident commander are the safety of the public, people under their control and anyone affected by their actions. There is a balance that needs to be achieved between maintaining firefighter safety and carrying out the emergency role of the fire and rescue service.

The Health, Safety and welfare framework for the operational environment contains detailed strategic guidance on the planning and delivery of health and safety policies relating to operational activity. This guidance details the safe person principles and the risk assessment methodologies that would be considered best practice.

The firefighter safety maxim set out in the document The Foundation for Incident Command describes this balance and is as follows:

At every incident the greater the potential benefit of fire and rescue actions, the greater the risk that is accepted by commanders and firefighters. Activities that present a high risk to safety are limited to those that have the potential to save life or to prevent rapid and significant escalation of the incident.

This acknowledges that firefighters operate in hazardous environments.

### **Control measure – Positive safety culture**

#### *Control measure knowledge*

The fire and rescue service has developed a strong culture of safety through policies which support the application of health and safety law and regulations to the incident ground. This has been achieved in consultation with, and the assistance of, the Health and Safety Executive.

A culture that encourages incident commanders to act in accordance with the intentions of the HSE's publication 'Striking the balance between operational and health and safety duties in the Fire and Rescue Service' should be promoted. Fire and rescue services should be aware this can be undermined by the introduction of procedures that have restrictive elements that prevent the incident commander from being able to apply their professional judgement.

To promote a positive operational safety culture, fire and rescue service operational risk principles have been developed. The principles below can be considered as a guide to making and managing risk-critical decisions at incidents:

**Principle 1:** A willingness to make decisions in conditions of uncertainty is a core need for all members of the fire and rescue service.

**Principle 2:** The primary consideration for making decisions is the safety of individuals and communities.

**Principle 3:** Risk acceptance involves judgment and balance, with decision-makers required to consider the value and likelihood of the possible benefits of a particular decision against the seriousness and likelihood of the possible harm.

**Principle 4:** Harm can never be totally prevented. Risk-critical decisions should therefore be judged by the quality of the decision-making, not by the outcome.

**Principle 5:** To reduce risk aversion, improve decision-making and avoid decision traps, a culture is required that learns from successes and failures. Good application of risk management which allows for positive operational outcomes should be identified, celebrated and shared, preferably through operational learning and debrief outcomes.

Members of the fire and rescue service who make decisions consistent with these principles should receive the encouragement, approval and support of their organisation.

In writing its policies and procedures, fire and rescue services should recognise that every incident will present its own challenges. Its commanders and command teams will need to be able to use their knowledge and skills to bring the incident to a safe conclusion.

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services must:

- Have policies based on good health and safety practice that describe the means by which they intend their incident commanders to safeguard the safety and welfare of their personnel on the incident ground.
- Have a training strategy to ensure all personnel responsible for the management of health, safety and welfare are aware of their responsibilities and the means for discharging them.

### *Tactical actions*

Incident commanders should:

- Promote a positive safety culture on the incident ground through safe systems of work, adequate supervision and effective communication
- Apply the firefighter safety maxim and risk principles at operational incidents

## **Control measure – Risk assessment at an incident**

### *Control measure knowledge*

An incident ground is an operational workplace and the law requires fire and rescue services to assess and reduce the risk to personnel as far as is reasonably practicable. As well as this duty of care to fire and rescue personnel, there is also a duty to safeguard others.

An incident commander's objective is to resolve the incident with minimal impact to the community, to prevent or minimise harm to people and the environment. Incident commanders must establish a safe working area as soon as is practicable.

To ensure a safe working environment they will need to:

- Select the most appropriate control measures
- Consider the benefits of proceeding with actions taking account of the risk
- Take into account any time constraints

Safe systems of work must be put in place. Firefighters must ensure they develop, maintain and review these systems throughout the incident. To perform an effective risk assessment, incident commanders should understand the following concepts:

- **Hazard:** An event or situation with the potential to cause death or physical or psychological harm, damage or losses to property, and/or disruption to the environment and/or to economic, social and political structures
- **Risk:** Measure of the significance of potential harm in terms of its assessed likelihood and impact
- **Control measure:** Measures to reduce the likelihood of exposure to a hazard from a given risk, and/or reduce the impacts of that exposure. The HSE hierarchy of risk control measures gives further examples of how control measures can be applied at an incident

Risk assessment at incidents breaks down into a number of parts.

### **Dynamic risk assessment**

The term dynamic risk assessment (DRA) describes the assessment of risk in a rapidly changing environment at an incident where decisions are sometimes made in fast-moving situations, with incomplete or inaccurate information. It is a process not a control measure.

The outcome of the dynamic risk assessment will contribute to the incident commander's operational plan. It helps to inform whether crews should be operating in the risk area. This in turn determines the tactical mode.

### **Analytical risk assessment**

As the incident progresses or becomes more complex it requires a more detailed and formal record of the significant findings of the risk assessment. The fire and rescue service call this analytical risk assessment (ARA).

### **Personal (or individual) risk assessment**

Personal (or individual) risk assessment helps firefighters remain safe when working unsupervised, which is derived from the document Health, safety and welfare framework for the operational environment.

### **Tactical modes**

Communication of the tactical mode is a way of recording a decision by the incident commander on the completion of their risk assessment and determination of the incident plan. It indicates the decision by the commander whether to deploy crews in the hazard area or not. All incidents require tactical modes to be declared at the earliest opportunity following arrival at an incident and at regular intervals thereafter. Where sectors are in place, a tactical mode for each sector is required.

The hazard area is an area in which significant hazards have been identified by the relevant commanders. The hazard area may extend beyond the boundaries of the immediate scene of operations and in some cases can move or change during the incident.

Declaration of the tactical mode at any given point of the incident describes the current level of risk exposure to operational personnel. There are two tactical modes of operation; offensive and defensive.

- Offensive mode: Crews are in the designated hazard area and thereby exposed to greater risk
- Defensive mode: Crews are outside of the designated hazard area

There is no default tactical mode. The incident commander should decide their incident plan and associated operational tactics following their risk assessment and application of the Decision Control Process. The selection of a tactical mode is a conscious decision underpinned by a clear rationale. This is key to assertive, effective and safe incident command delivered by competent incident commanders, and the avoidance of risk aversion and decision inertia.

Incident commanders should make sure everyone on the incident ground is aware of the tactical mode. They should communicate this at regular intervals and when it changes. It is also essential that fire control rooms are informed of the current mode to ensure it is recorded. All messages should include sufficient information regarding the findings of the risk assessment. See The Foundation for Incident Command.

### **Offensive mode**

This is where fire service personnel are working in the hazard area and exposed to greater risk, because the incident commander has decided it is appropriate following their risk assessment. This may apply to an individual sector or to the whole incident when every sector is in offensive mode.

Offensive mode is likely to be the common mode of operation.

### **Defensive mode**

This is where commanders deal with an incident from a defensive position. In defensive mode, the identified risks are intolerable and outweigh the potential benefits. No matter how many extra control measures could be put in place at that particular time, the risks remain too great to commit crews into the hazard area. It does not indicate that no operational activity is taking place.

Defensive mode indicates that crews are not working in the hazard area.

There will be circumstances where having been in defensive mode, the risk has changed, tactical priorities have been revised or additional control measures are available. This may mean it is acceptable to enter or re-enter the hazard area. In this case, as crews are committed, the tactical mode will change to offensive.

### **Change in tactical mode**

There will be occasions when it is necessary to change the tactical mode following revision and updating of the risk assessment. This change may be on receipt of new information, a change in tactical priorities or a revision of control measures.

When the decision is made to commit crews into the hazard area and defensive operations are in place, the tactical mode for the incident or sector will change to *offensive* as preparations are being made to enter the hazard area.

When it is necessary to change from offensive to defensive mode following the outcome of the risk assessment, the commander should announce and implement the withdrawal of crews or personnel from the hazard area. The use of tactical withdrawal or emergency evacuation should be included in communicating the change in mode to the incident ground and fire control room. The tactical mode does not change until all fire and rescue service personnel have withdrawn from the hazard area.

There are a number of reasons why the change to defensive mode does not take place until after fire and rescue service personnel have left the hazard area. It may be because personnel will still be in the hazard area and it may take some time to withdraw, for example at high rise and large or complex structures. There may also be a need to commit crews to assist with the tactical withdrawal or emergency evacuation, to relay messages, protect escape routes or rescue colleagues.

The terms *tactical withdrawal* or emergency evacuation should be used in the message to fire control to time-stamp the decision of the incident commander's dynamic risk assessment. Radio messages should be timely, without detracting from risk-critical operations, and include sufficient information demonstrating the need to change to *defensive mode*.

At certain incidents, other responders may continue to work in the hazard area, for example at a CBRN (E) incident.

### **Tactical modes in sectors**

When the incident has been divided into sectors the incident commander remains responsible for the tactical mode at all times. There will be occasions when an operations commander has been appointed. Whilst they may determine or approve a change in tactical mode, the incident commander still retains overall responsibility.

When more than one sector is in use:

- When every sector is in offensive mode, the overall mode of the incident is offensive
- When every sector is in defensive mode, the overall mode of the incident will be defensive
- When different modes are in use at the same incident, there is no overall mode for the incident, for example, when two sectors are in offensive mode and one sector is in defensive mode. All messages to fire control room or across the incident ground should list each sector and the mode it is in, for example. "Sector 1 offensive mode, Sector 2 offensive mode, Sector 4 defensive mode."

Where appropriate, incident commanders should confer with sector commanders when making a decision to change the tactical mode. Sector commanders should be confident in recommending changes to the tactical mode to the operations or incident commander. When a change in mode occurs all personnel should be informed.

If a sector commander wishes to commit personnel into the hazard area, i.e. change to offensive mode when the prevailing mode is defensive, they should seek permission from the incident or operations commander. They should not make any change until they have received permission.

Where a rapid change in circumstances occurs, the sector commander should revise the risk assessment. There may be occasions when they need to act first in the interests of safety and then inform the incident commander of their decision.

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services must:

- Have policies and procedures for assessing risk to personnel on the incident ground. These should outline how the risk assessment should be carried out, by whom and the method of recording significant findings.

Fire and rescue services should:

- Have procedures for deciding and implementing tactical modes following a risk assessment.

### *Tactical actions*

Incident commanders must:

- Carry out a dynamic risk assessment, identify hazards, evaluate risk and implement safe systems of work
- Identify the hazard area and establish a safe working area as soon as is practicable
- Continually review the risk assessment using situational awareness gathered from active monitoring as the incident progresses

Incident commanders should:

- Declare the appropriate tactical mode based on the level of risk identified and communicate to all personnel at the incident and fire control
- Review and revise the tactical mode as necessary following active monitoring of the incident and consultation with sector commanders
- Communicate any change in the tactical mode to all personnel
- Instigate a tactical withdrawal of committed personnel where the mode changes from offensive to defensive
- Instigate the completion of an analytical risk assessment and record significant findings as the incident progresses and resources allow
- Sector commanders should:
  - Recommend changes in tactical mode to the operations or incident commander
  - Seek permission from the incident or operations commander before committing personnel into the hazard area

### **Control measure – Incident ground safety management**

#### *Control measure knowledge*

The incident command system is an all-hazards approach that provides the incident commander with a structure they can adapt to every incident. The system helps to achieve a safe and efficient way of organising people and equipment. The incident commander at the scene is the nominated competent person. They can delegate some responsibilities to others; however, they remain responsible for health and safety at an incident.

Providing risk-critical information at an incident is an essential part of the planning process. It has a direct impact on safety. A lack of risk information, or failure to pass it on, can have a critical impact on decisions made by an incident commander. See National Operational Guidance: Operations\_ – Information gathering.

#### **Safety briefings**

It will be necessary to organise safety briefings. As the incident develops or where the risk of injury increases those briefings should be more comprehensive. See Communication.

#### **Safety officer**



The incident commander or sector commander may appoint a safety officer at any time. This person should have suitable competencies for the role. A safety officer at larger incidents may be designated as the safety sector commander from that time they will co-ordinate the role of other safety officers.

### **Safety within sectors**

Sector commanders are responsible for the health and safety of people in their sector. Due to the demands at an incident the sector commander might nominate a safety officer to assist them.

Although each safety officer should report to a sector commander, organisation of the safety officer(s) will be managed by the safety sector commander.

### **Emergency evacuation and tactical withdrawal**

The incident command system provides two formal means of withdrawing personnel from the scene of operations:

- Emergency evacuation
- Tactical withdrawal

At every incident, the incident commander will apply a command structure. They must establish a safe system of work. This should include a plan for emergency evacuation or tactical withdrawal.

The fire and rescue service retains responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of its personnel working in the risk area. It also has a duty to consider the effects of its actions on the safety of other people, including when undertaking emergency evacuation or a tactical withdrawal.

The plans they make should enable emergency evacuation or tactical withdrawal which:

- Evacuates people at highest risk while protecting escape routes
- Removes people from areas where the risk has become too high

Emergency evacuation is the term used to describe the urgent and immediate withdrawal of crews from a risk area.

The incident commander should inform everyone at an incident of the location of the muster point. At a prolonged incident the location of the muster point may change. They should ensure that everyone at an incident knows about this change. See The Foundation for Incident Command.

The evacuation should include a roll call at a suitable location. Additionally, the incident commander should make sure there has been a roll call of non-fire service personnel at the scene. Following an evacuation or an evacuation signal being given, no one should re-enter the hazard area without the permission of, or explicit instruction from the incident commander.

Where personnel remain unaccounted for after an evacuation, the incident commander will need to assess the risks and commence appropriate search and rescue procedures.

Tactical withdrawal is the term used to describe the systematic or staged withdrawal of crews from the risk area.

The incident commander may need to redeploy resources or move people from danger. This is a tactical withdrawal. They may also need to withdraw all or part of a sector. When a tactical withdrawal is taking place, an evacuation signal or full incident roll call may not be required. See The Foundation for Incident Command.

### **Provision of information**

Provision of relevant information is essential to ensure safe operations. Command decision-making can be significantly affected if there is a lack of risk information or where information has not been passed on.

Fire control room operators will often be required to receive and communicate risk-critical information. Where risk-critical information is included on the initial turnout details, it should be easy to identify.

Where specific risk information is available, incident commanders should ensure this is disseminated to all appropriate personnel on the incident ground. This may include provision of information between agencies or organisations.

### *Strategic actions*

Fire and rescue services should:

- Ensure they take into account the need to meet health and safety legislation and regulations when developing their policies and procedures on structuring the incident ground.
- Have procedures for the withdrawal of personnel from the hazard area. These procedures should describe:
  - When each withdrawal type is appropriate
  - The method of implementing the withdrawal
  - The method of carrying out a roll call
  - The communications necessary when withdrawal has been instigated
- Additionally, they should include the actions to be taken when personnel are unaccounted for after the withdrawal, and the procedure for recommencing activity.

### *Tactical actions*

Fire control room operators should:

- Ensure that risk critical information is communicated to the incident commander in a timely manner

Incident commanders should:

- Ensure that everyone on the incident ground is fully briefed on the current hazards, specific risks and control measures including other agencies and organisations
- Appoint suitably competent safety officers to observe specific hazards and/or activities or monitor risks to personnel at the incident

- Instigate a safety sector at large or complex incidents under the control of a safety sector commander
- Establish and communicate the emergency evacuation and tactical withdrawal plan to everyone on the incident ground
- Communicate the tactical withdrawal and emergency evacuation arrangements to all personnel including other agencies
- Inform everyone at an incident of the location of the muster point
- Ensure there has been a roll call of fire service and all other personnel at the scene following an emergency evacuation
- Review situational assessment following an emergency evacuation or tactical withdrawal

### Control measure – Carry out post-incident investigations

See National Operational Guidance: Operations

### Control measure - Carry out debriefing/post-incident reviews

See National Operational

## Glossary

Term	Acronym	Description
Contemporaneous		At the time, or as soon after the event as practicable
Cordon		Naturally delineated or improvised perimeter indicating an area of restricted access
Duty		The responsibility to act according to the law
Emergency Evacuation		The urgent and immediate withdrawal of crews from a risk area
Exclusion zone		Area, usually within the inner cordon, to which access is normally denied to all personnel, including emergency services
	FRSNCC	The Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre
Hazard area		The area in which firefighters are considered to be operating offensively
Inner cordon		Cordon established to secure the immediate scene and provide a measure of protection for personnel working in the area
Interoperability		The extent to which organisations can work together as a

		matter of routine
Intraoperability		The ability of fire and rescue services to work with other fire and rescue services
	METHANE	Major emergency. Exact location. Type of incident. Hazards Access. Number of casualties. Emergency services Specified by JESIP as consistent method of sharing incident information.
National frameworks	NCAF	National Co-ordination and Advisory Framework - England Fire and Rescue National Framework - Wales Fire and Rescue Framework - Scotland Corporate Plan and Annual Business Plan – Northern Ireland
Outer cordon		Cordon established around the vicinity of an incident, and encompassing the inner cordon, to control access to a wider area around the scene, to allow the emergency services and other agencies to work unhindered and in privacy
Power		The right to interpret and apply the law
Scene access control point		Controlled point through which essential personnel may gain access through the inner cordon
Tactical withdrawal		The systematic or staged withdrawal of crews from the risk area
Traffic cordon		Supplementary cordon around the outer cordon to control internal traffic access for emergency and other vehicles

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Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, Section 18 (2) e

Civil Contingencies Act 2004, 2 (1) (g)

Emergency Response and Recovery (Non statutory guidance accompanying the Civil Contingencies Act 2004), 3.2 & 4.4

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