

Tactical mode procedure

Official – Ops Security | **Official** – Health & Safety

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 Responsible work team: **Incident Command Policy and Operations Review Team**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy gives support and guidance to Incident Commanders (IC) in the formulation and implementation of effective incident command to ensure safe and successful fire service operations at all emergency incidents. Tactical mode procedure is a key element in the implementation of safe systems of work and is to be applied at all incidents.

2 Background to tactical mode procedure

- 2.1 There is a legal requirement on the LFEPA under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1992) to carry out an assessment of risks. At incidents this is achieved through Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA) in conjunction with the Decision Making Model (DMM). This process results in the establishment of safe systems of work, a key element of which is the declaration of a tactical mode. The tactical mode procedure supports and enhances incident command and risk management by:
- Sharing the outcome of the IC's DRA in concise terms to personnel involved with the incident, both locally and remotely;
 - Ensuring that fire service operations carried out by a single crew, or sector, do not have adverse effects on the safety or effectiveness of firefighters in other crews or sectors;
 - Recording the outcome of the Incident Commander's DRA.

3 Tactical modes

- 3.1 There are two tactical modes:
- **Offensive (Oscar)** - when fire and rescue operations are taking place within the identified hazard area.
 - **Defensive (Delta)** - when fire and rescue operations are taking place outside the identified hazard area.
- 3.2 **OFFENSIVE** - applies to a sector and/or an entire incident when every sector is Offensive.
- Offensive mode is appropriate when, after the IC has carried out an Dynamic Risk Assessment and identified risk(s) are managed by additional control measures which ensures a safe system of work. Offensive mode is likely to be the common mode of operation.
- 3.3 **DEFENSIVE** - applies to a sector and/or an entire incident when every sector is Defensive.
- Defensive mode is appropriate when, after the IC has carried out a Dynamic Risk Assessment, the identified risk(s) outweigh the potential benefits and therefore a safe system of work cannot be achieved in an offensive mode. No matter how many additional control measures can be put in place at that particular time, the risk(s) remain too great to commit crews into the hazard area.

4 When to declare tactical mode

- 4.1 On arrival at an incident the Incident Commander will carry out a Dynamic Risk Assessment and decide whether, with the resources and control measures available, it is safe to proceed with offensive operations. With appropriate procedures and control measures in place, 'Offensive mode' can be declared.
- 4.2 If the Incident Commander determines that the hazards & related risk(s) remain too great to commit crews into the hazard area, Defensive mode will be declared. Appropriate resources & tactics must be used until control measures can be implemented that reduce the risk to

acceptable levels, whilst taking account of the benefit to be achieved by committing crews within the identified hazard area.

- 4.3 Conducting a Dynamic Risk Assessment and subsequent declaration of a tactical mode by the Incident Commander is fundamental to the safe management of an incident and should be applied to all incidents.
- 4.4 When an incident has been sectorised and each sector is in Offensive mode, the overall mode of the incident is Offensive (Oscar).
- 4.5 When an incident has been sectorised and each sector is in Defensive mode, the overall mode of the incident is Defensive (Delta).
- 4.6 **Where different modes are in use at the same incident, there is no overall mode for the incident.** When this applies, all informative messages to Brigade Control should detail each sector and the tactical mode it is in. For example "...Sector One – Tactical mode: Oscar, Sector Two – Tactical mode: Oscar, Sector Three – Tactical mode: Delta."
- 4.7 All personnel at an incident must be made aware of the declared tactical mode/s by the IC and be advised of any changes.
- 4.8 When a coded 'Stop' message is sent with no informative message, the incident will be deemed to have been dealt with offensively. The transmission of the coded stop message will form the record of dynamic risk assessment and removes the need to declare the tactical mode but not the need to continue reviewing the risk assessment of activities after the stop message has been sent.
- 4.9 In all other circumstances the first message sent to Brigade Control must include confirmation of the tactical mode in use. The tactical mode is to be stated in **all** further messages, including after the stop message has been sent. An informative message **must** be sent to Brigade Control whenever a change is made to the tactical mode.
- 4.10 All messages other than coded stops will therefore conclude with the following as appropriate:
 - "...Tactical Mode Oscar".
 - "...Tactical Mode Delta".

5 Command responsibilities when determining tactical mode

- 5.1 Incident Commander:
 - To decide appropriate tactical mode following Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA).
 - To inform Brigade Control and advise of any changes to the tactical mode.
 - To confirm the tactical mode within briefings.
 - To authorise changes to the tactical mode in sectors following consultation with the Sector Commander and consideration of the status of any other sectors.
 - Only one tactical mode may be applied within each sector.
 - Note: the Incident Commander may delegate the responsibility for changing tactical mode to an Operations Commander.
- 5.2 Sector Commander:
 - To monitor conditions and operational priorities and assess whether the prevailing tactical mode continues to be appropriate.

Note:

Sector Commanders must not change from Defensive to Offensive tactics without the direct authorisation of the Incident Commander or Operations Commander.

Sector commanders must react immediately to risk critical events which require a change from Offensive to Defensive in their sector, informing the Incident Commander of their actions without delay.

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.

5.3 All personnel:

- To react immediately to risk critical changes and take appropriate action.
- To initiate or react to Emergency Evacuation procedure.

6 Review of risk assessment

- 6.1 Due to the changing nature of the incident ground, the Incident Commander and respective Sector Commanders must review the risk assessment to ensure it still applies. There will be occasions when it is necessary to change the tactical mode, following revision and updating of the risk assessment. This change may take place due to receipt of new information, a change in tactical priorities or a revision of control measures.
- 6.2 Reviewing the risk assessment will confirm if existing control measure(s) and tactical mode(s) are correct. It will also highlight whether the incident requires additional control measures or a change in tactical mode.
- 6.3 Responsibility for carrying out a risk assessment within a sector may be delegated to Sector Commanders. However, the Incident Commander still retains responsibility for determining the tactical mode for the overall incident.
- 6.4 Should there be a change in the tactical mode Brigade Control must be informed immediately in the form of an informative message. These actions ensure a complete log of the risk assessment process is recorded for the entire duration of an incident.

7 Bibliography and further reading

- National Operational Guidance (NOG) – Incident Command – published July 2015
http://hotwire-live/News/News_archive/Pages/Incident-command-guidance-published.aspx
- [Policy number 342](#) - Dynamic risk assessment.
- [Policy number 434](#) - Sectorisation at incidents
- [Policy number 162](#) - Officer responsibilities at incidents
- [Policy number 341](#) - Decision Making Model

Appendix 1 - Key point summary - Tactical mode procedure

Information on task or event

- Location of perceived hazard.
- Location of crews in relation to perceived hazard.

Information about Resources

- Incident Commander.
- Sector Commander.
- Operations Commander.

Information about Risk and Benefit

- Deciding to commit a crew into a relatively hazardous area, supported by appropriate equipment and training, because the potential benefit outweighs the identified risk is an offensive action.
- A defensive approach is when, no matter how many additional control measures are put in place, the risks are unacceptable.

Gathering and thinking

Objectives

- Tactical mode procedure supports and enhances incident command risk management by -
 - Sharing the declaration of IC's DRA.
 - Ensuring that fire service operations being carried out by a single crew or sector, does not have adverse effects on the safety or effectiveness of firefighters in other crews or sectors.
 - Recording of the IC's DRA at Brigade Control.

Communicating

- All personnel at the incident must be made aware of the declared tactical mode by the IC or Sector Commander and be advised of any changes.
- All messages other than coded stops will conclude with the following as appropriate:
 - "Tactical Mode Oscar" (Offensive)
 - "Tactical Mode Delta" (Defensive)

Controlling

- The IC has responsibility for determining the tactical mode of the incident and sectors. At no time can tactics be changed from Defensive to Offensive without the IC's authorisation except where that responsibility has been delegated to an Operations Commander.

Plan

Incident Commanders

- To decide appropriate tactical mode.
- Inform Brigade Control and advise of any changes to tactical mode.
- Confirm tactical mode within briefings.
- Authorise changes in tactical mode within sectors following consultation with the sector commander and consideration of the status of any other sectors.
- Only one tactical mode may be applied within each sector.
- The IC may delegate the responsibility for changing tactical mode to an Operations Commander.

Sector Commanders

- To monitor conditions and operational priorities and make certain the prevailing tactical mode continues to be appropriate.

Note:

Sector Commanders must not change from Defensive to Offensive tactics without direct authorisation from the Incident Commander or Operations Commander.

Sector Commanders must react immediately to risk critical events which require a change from Offensive to Defensive in their sector, informing the IC of their actions without delay.

Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

EIA	29/03/2011	SDIA	29/03/2011	HSWIA		RA	
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Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
All	Reviewed as current no changes made.	22/12/2009
Whole document	Policy reviewed as current. Key point summary added and minor amendments made to document.	12/05/2011
Throughout	This policy has been protectively marked.	20/06/2011
Page 1	Changed owner from Head of Operational Procedures to Head of Operational Assurance.	24/10/2012
Throughout	Road traffic accidents/RTAs updated to road traffic collisions/RTCs as requested by Andy Roe.	11/09/2013
Front page and audit trail Page 6	The word "protect" has been replaced with "official". "Protective marking descriptor" in freedom of information section has been replaced with "security marking classification".	01/05/2014
Throughout	Reviewed as current, no changes made.	25/06/2014
Pages 2 & 6	Removed Key point summary from page 2 and added KPS flowchart as appendix 1.	26/08/2014
Throughout	This policy has been reviewed as current, no changes were made to the content but the subject list on this page was updated. However, it will be reviewed again at the end of March 2015 to allow for the NOG update to be assessed and implemented.	18/11/2015
Page 1	Review date extended.	14/07/2015
Throughout	Reviewed with major changes and amendments throughout. Please read to familiarise yourself with the content.	22/12/2015

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Sector Commander	Decision Making Model (DMM)
Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA)	Flowchart – key point summary (KPS)
Incident Command	Sector Commander
Incident Commander (IC)	

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification
Jim Knighton Operational Procedures	Fully exempt, see FOIA592.1 request.	Official – Ops Security Official – Health & Safety