

## Incident commander

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New policy number: **431**  
Old instruction number: **OPS:A090:a2**  
Issue date: **10 May 2006**  
Reviewed as current: **18 November 2014**  
Owner: **Head of Incident Command Policy and Operations Review Team**  
Responsible work team: **Incident Command Policy and Operations Review Team**

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## Key point summary

### Appointment

- The incident commander (IC) is defined as the nominated competent person on the incident ground. This may not be the most senior officer present. This arrangement allows the more senior officer to perform a monitoring role, however the most senior officer has a moral and organisational responsibility within Incident Command that cannot be divested.
- The appliance commander of the first attendance at an incident is responsible for command and is therefore designated as the IC unless relieved by a manager of a higher level.
- Watch managers, irrespective of whether they are in an A or B role, will assume responsibility for fire service resources as ICs. Therefore the watch manager on whose ground the incident occurs will assume command. In circumstances where a temporary and a substantive watch manager are in attendance at the same incident the substantive watch manager will assume command.
- Should the watch manager from the station's ground not be in attendance then it will be the first watch manager in attendance who should take command.
- At incidents that attract a watch manager as incident commander, the 'Stop' message should not be transmitted until the watch manager has attended and completed an assessment of the incident in line with Policy Number 341 - Decision making model (DMM).

### Role

The primary purposes of operational incident command is:

- To save life
- To prevent further spread/loss/risk of injury
- To mitigate damage
- To mitigate environmental damage
- Minimise disruption to the community

### Responsibilities

- On arrival at an incident the IC will wear the white 'Incident Commander' tabard.
- Assess the incident, establish priorities and decide upon an overall operational plan using the DMM.
- Undertake an initial Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA) and subsequent reviews of that DRA. Following the DRA a Tactical Mode must be declared. This process will be continuous throughout the incident.
- Ensure that personnel are aware of the Tactical Mode at all times.
- Develop an effective organisational incident command structure and communications network.
- Decide on the appropriate safe systems of work that are to be employed on the incident ground.
- All briefings should be based on the DMM.

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy details the role and responsibilities of the IC at operational incidents. It has been written in conjunction with the Fire Service Manual, Volume 2, Fire Service Operations, Incident Command.
- 1.2 The IC is defined as the nominated competent person on the incident ground. This may not be the most senior officer present. This arrangement allows the more senior officer to perform a monitoring role, however the most senior officer has a moral and organisational responsibility within Incident Command that cannot be divested.
- 1.3 An incident commander may be a temporary crew manager in charge of a single appliance attendance or a principal officer at the scene of a larger incident.
- 1.4 The appliance commander of the first attendance at an incident is responsible for command and is therefore designated as the IC unless relieved by a manager of a higher level.

## 2 Appointment

- 2.1 Watch managers, irrespective of whether they are in an A or B role, receive the same level of incident command training; consequently they will assume the same level of responsibility for fire service resources as ICs.
- 2.2 The watch manager on whose ground the incident occurs will assume command, unless a watch manager of equal rank is in attendance prior to their arrival.
- 2.3 In circumstances where a temporary and a substantive watch manager are in attendance at the same incident the substantive watch manager will assume command.
- 2.4 Where land appliances and the fireboat form the initial attendance, operational command will be the responsibility of the most senior land-based appliance commander.
- 2.5 At incidents that attract a watch manager as incident commander, the 'Stop' message should not be transmitted until the watch manager has attended and completed an assessment of the incident in line with Policy Number 341 - Decision making model.
- 2.6 There is no differentiation in authority levels for middle, senior or principle officers e.g. a substantive station manager is not senior to a station manager who is temporary or on development.
- 2.7 Officers attending in a support/specialist capacity e.g. rapid response team, command unit, fire rescue unit, fire investigation unit and tactical advisors will not normally take command but have a specific responsibility within their role referenced in Policy number 162 - Officer responsibilities at incidents. They will only take command if there are immediate concerns over safety or the incident appears to be beyond the capability of the incident commander and no other officer is available.

## 3 Incident command

- 3.1 The appliance commander of the first appliance to arrive at an incident is responsible for command of the incident unless relieved by an officer of higher role.
- 3.2 The IC will be clearly identified by the white "INCIDENT COMMANDER" tabard.

## 4 Changes of command

- 4.1 Whenever the command at an incident changes it is the duty of the officer who is being relieved to inform the relieving officer of all relevant information concerning the incident, following guidance in Policy Number 238 – Incident command procedures and Policy Number 341 – Decision making model. Guidelines for briefings are appended to this policy.
- 4.2 It is the duty of an officer of higher role to communicate to the IC formally when taking over command by using the statement "I am taking over". Similarly, an IC relinquishing command must inform the officer taking over that they are leaving and hand over all relevant information. Thereafter the relieving officer will assume command.
- 4.3 At all incidents the new IC must communicate to both Brigade Control and the incident ground that they are taking over.

## 5 Role

- 5.1 The IC will have the overall accountability and responsibility for the discharge of Fire Service functions at any incident.
- 5.2 The IC will implement safe systems of work on the incident ground to promote the safe and effective resolution of events through the deliberate allocation and direction of resources.
- 5.3 The IC will at all times ensure that actions being taken complement the primary purposes of operational incident command:
  - To save life
  - To prevent further spread/loss/risk of injury
  - To mitigate damage
  - To mitigate environmental damage
  - Minimise disruption to the community.

## 6 Responsibilities

- 6.1 Assess the incident, establish priorities and decide upon an overall operational plan using the DMM.
- 6.2 Undertake an initial DRA and subsequent reviews of that DRA. Following the DRA a Tactical Mode must be declared. This process will be continuous throughout the incident.
- 6.3 Ensure that personnel are aware of the tactical mode at all times.
- 6.4 Decide on the appropriate safe systems of work that are to be employed on the incident ground.
- 6.5 Assess and request additional resources. Should the IC be in any doubt as to the amount of additional resources required, it is better to over estimate in the early stages of an incident.
- 6.6 When specialist appliances form part of the 'make up' and are not required, inform Brigade mobilising control.
- 6.7 Designate duties including the setting-up of the appropriate level of command support.
- 6.8 Develop an effective organisational incident command structure and communications network.
- 6.9 Allocate resources to sectors and specific tasks.
- 6.10 Receive and act upon incoming information, revising and developing the operational plan.

- 6.11 Ensure that all necessary actions/investigations in the event of legislative infringement, suspicious circumstances or injuries to personnel are immediately undertaken. Requesting additional and specialist personnel/assistance in order to undertake such duties.
- 6.12 Before closing an incident and withdrawing all fire service resources, the IC should inform the person having on going responsibility for health and safety on the incident ground, or their agents, that fire service operations have closed down and indicate all hazards and risks still present. The IC must ensure that the responsible person fully understands the hazards and risks and accepts responsibility for ensuring health and safety on the site; this may include the control of potential environmental hazards caused by fire service operations.
- 6.13 During the closing stages of an incident the IC should commence gathering information for any post incident review and the completion of the appropriate documentation, see [Policy Number 541 - Command support at incidents](#). The IC may wish to nominate another officer to gather the necessary information. The IC should ensure that this is complete, accurate and can be made available promptly.

## 7 Communications

- 7.1 The IC will establish and maintain clear lines of communications throughout the incident, using the most appropriate communication methods available.
- 7.2 The IC will ensure that communications are maintained between the incident and the Brigade's mobilising control.
- 7.3 The IC should establish and maintain effective communications with all other services and agencies that can contribute both to resolving an incident and the effective co-ordination of activities.
- 7.4 The IC will maintain effective communications with the media in order that appropriate and accurate information is made available.
- 7.5 ICs should be fully aware of their span of control at any given time during an incident. The span of control is the number of lines of relatively constant communication that should be maintained. The direct lines of communication and areas of involvement of any officer need to be limited to enable the individual to deal effectively with those areas and cope with the information flow.
- 7.6 The span of control for any tactical role at an incident should ideally be limited to five lines of direct communications, to ensure that commanders do not become overburdened.
- 7.7 In order to manage the span of control effectively at larger or more complex incidents it will be necessary for the IC to delegate responsibility and devolve authority for some operations to other officers.

## Appendix 1 – Decision making model, briefing guidance for handing and taking over

An IC should be prepared to brief a more senior officer at anytime so that they can make a decision whether or not to assume command. When the senior officer decides to take command, they are to inform the current IC by stating "I am taking over". Having assumed command the senior officer may elect to retain the previous commander in the command structure to give assistance.

It is the duty of the officer being relieved to give the senior officer all the relevant information they possess concerning the incident. Handover of command to more junior officers as the incident is being reduced in size must be equally as thorough. These briefings are to be based on the DMM and may include the following:

**Information about task or event** - The officer being relieved will ensure that the officer taking on the role of IC is given a full description of the operational situation to include:

- life involvement,
- confirmation of present tactical mode,
- confirmation of present tactical mode of each sector where sectors have been established,
- command structure,
- environmental information,
- external liaison.

**Information about resources**, specifying the resources that are available to them and the deployment of those resources.

**Information about risk and benefit.** The new IC must be made fully aware of all the identified hazards on the incident ground and the persons at risk from those hazards. They must also be made aware of all the controlling measures that have been established to mitigate the effects of the identified risks.

**Objectives** - The outgoing IC will give a full description of the operational situation and the overall objectives for the incident.

**Plan** - A full description of the operational plan and the projected operational strategy must be given, this includes a full description of the command support structure established on the incident ground.

**Communicating** - The method of communication between the IC and the various sector commanders or their operations commander should be detailed. The relevant call signs should also be detailed. Additionally, all messages that have been transmitted from the incident to Brigade Mobilising Control must be made available to the new IC.

**Controlling** - The control measures that have been instigated at the incident to mitigate the identified hazards and to assist in bringing the situation to a satisfactory conclusion.

**Information on progress** - All relevant information on the progress attained and anticipated is to be passed to the new IC to ensure a comprehensive handover is completed.

## Appendix 2 - Considerations for the role of incident commander

The IC should ensure the following:

### Information about task/event

Establish and maintain information regarding:

- Number of casualties involved.
- Development and progress of the operations.
- Effect of the incident and of fire service operations to the surrounding environment.

### Information about resources

Liaise with the operations commander or the sector commanders and establish:

- Turn over of resources at the incident.
- Resources required to maintain the employed safe systems of work.
- Planning for the long-term resource requirements to achieve the identified objectives.

### Information about risk/benefit

- That the risk assessment process is followed and the review of risk assessment is completed.
- That the appropriate Tactical mode is declared for the incident and for each sector when sectors are employed, and that any changes to the modes are communicated to the Brigade Mobilising Control.

### Objectives

That clear objectives are identified to aid the successful conclusion of the incident and that the officers that form the Command Support team are fully aware of those objectives.

### Plan

To formulate an operational plan from the information available to them and ensure that plan is communicated to all relevant personnel on the incident ground.

### Communicating

Establish and maintain clear lines of communications between:-

- Operations commander.
- Sector commanders.
- Other personnel that are within the IC's span of control. This may include non-Brigade personnel.

### Controlling

- Designate duties including the setting-up of the appropriate level of command support.
- Maintain their span of control and agree the span of control of other officers within the Command Support team.
- Decide on the Tactical Mode to be employed on the incident ground.
- To employ recognised safe systems of work.

### **Information on progress**

- That they receive regular updates on all issues that affect the safe working practices employed on the incident ground.
- Ensure that regular updates on the incident progress are received from the operations commander, sector commander and other persons in the IC's span of control. The frequency and method of providing these updates should be agreed during the officers' original briefing.
- That information on progress is communicated to all interested parties on the incident ground.



## Document history

### Assessments

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

EIA	22/03/2011	SDIA	01/10/2010	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
	Reviewed as current and new review date added. No amendments made.	03/11/2009
Whole document	Reviewed as current. Sections 1-4 have been revised and updated to match Fire Service Manual (Vol2), Fire Service Operations, Incident Command. Key point summary added. Section 6 – Identification and Bibliography deleted.	02/09/2011
Section 3	Added to provide guidance for T/WMs and WMs as per Comms email from AC Brown dated 27/01/10.	02/09/2011
Page 3, para 2.7	New paragraph 2.7 added to reflect WM riding IC of FRU.	27/07/2012
Page 1	Changed owner from Head of Operational Procedures to Head of Operational Assurance.	24/10/2012
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.	18/11/2014
Page 1	Review date extended.	14/07/2015

### Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Appliance commander	IC
Incident command	Incident management
Operational roles	Role

### Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification

