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| **Original Date:** | **Revision Date:** |
| **ABC Fire Department General Operating Guideline** | | |

**Incident Command – Limited**

***This is a sample of a standard operating guideline (SOG) on this topic. You should review the content, modify as appropriate for your organization, have it reviewed by your leadership team and if appropriate your legal counsel. Once adopted, make sure the SOG is communicated to members, implemented and performance monitored for effective implementation.***

**Purpose:**

All fire personnel should operate under the National Incident Management System

1. Fireground commanders are to announce a fixed command post position when establishing command
2. Fireground commanders are to remain in the command post and not roam around the incident or participate in tactical operations
3. Fireground commanders should utilize fireground functional supervisors to relay operational information in order to maintain effective communications and safe incident management.

**Procedure:**

The basis for this position is deep concern for the safety of firefighters and the knowledge that incident command is still not being used properly or in some instances not being established at any point during an operation. There have been instances where the incident commander has not established a point (location) of command and/or the incident commander roams from one side of a structure to the other and in some cases has actually entered the structure as the incident commander. In fact, the position of incident commander is compromised and becomes ineffective when this occurs. This type of behavior does not comply with recognized incident command protocol and more importantly it compromises the safety of every firefighter on the fire scene.

Historical studies of catastrophic events involving firefighters are rarely attributed to lack of resources or the breakdown of tactical operations. These studies do point toward inadequate incident management as the single most common reason for incidents resulting in multiple firefighter deaths. It is sad to say that history continues to repeat itself and we continue to experience needless tragedies among our ranks because of our lack of commitment to proven methods of effective incident management.

**Basic Principles**

The following comments are offered as an endorsement for utilizing incident command for all fireground commanders to function within the established parameters of incident command. All elements of the ICS should be utilized to the fullest with special emphasis on the basic principles of incident command - identifying the incident commander, identifying the physical location of the command post, manageable span of control, lines of communication, identifying the chain of command, providing for unity of command and the accountability of responders. These basic principles should be established in the earliest stages of all incidents.

The incident commander for the typical incident will and should assume command and announce the location of the command post. The incident commander then remains in charge unless formally relieved providing a single point of contact for individual fireground supervisor’s functional areas. This action allows for the incident commander to manage the total operation providing for a manageable span of control thus creating a safer fireground organizational structure currently available to the fire service.

The following are points of interest taken from the ICS -#300: Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents student manual. These principles clarify reporting relationships and eliminate the confusion caused by multiple, conflicting directives. Incident managers at all levels must be able to command the incident and control the action of all personnel under their supervision:

Manageable Span of Control: Span of control is the key to effective and efficient incident management. Supervisors must be able to adequately supervise and control their subordinates, as well as communicate with and manage all resources under theft supervision. Within the Incident Command System, the span of control of any individual with incident management supervisory responsibility should range from three to seven subordinates:

* Chain of Command: Chain of command refers to the orderly line of authority within the ranks of the incident management organization
* Unity of Command: Every individual has a designated supervisor to whom he or she reports to at the scene of the incident. Each individual involved in incident operations will be assigned to only one supervisor
* Accountability: Effective accountability at all jurisdictional levels and within individual functional areas during incident operations is essential. To that end, the following principles must be adhered to:
  + Check In — All responders, regardless of agency affiliation, must report in to receive an assignment in accordance with the procedures established by the Incident Commander;
  + Incident Action Plan (lAP) — Response operations must be directed and coordinated as outlined by the lAP;
  + Resource Tracking — Supervisors must record and report resource staths changes as they occur.

**Conclusion**

All personnel should be trained and exposed to the principles of incident command. All personnel should be held accountable to follow the incident command system on all emergency incidents.

Emergency operations cannot be managed effectively and personnel cannot be accounted for adequately without an established incident command system. The basic principles should be adhered to on every incident. The use of “roving command post” and “freelancing” on any emergency incident should not be permitted.

The facts reveal that a consistent cause of multiple firefighter deaths on fire scenes is the lack of incident command. We owe our emergency responders the most earnest attention, commitment and dedication to this most important safety issue.

***This is a sample guideline furnished to you by VFIS. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization’s needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm or damage to personnel, property and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your VFIS Risk Control representative.***

**References:**