

How Do You Do Accountability? There's an app for that! Chief Bob Ruff

As time marches on and we put years . . . then decades behind us, it seems like every other week someone bounces into training with “the next big thing.” They come with new tools, new tactics, new policies, and of course, new fireground accountability methods. I’ve worked through the days of freelancing, helmet tags, helmet tags tossed onto the floorboard of the engine, clipboards, and clipboards with rings, dry erase boards, dry erase boards with rings, magnet boards, tactical worksheets, and most recently, big dry erase boards with Velcro strips attached. Every new accountability concept that has come down the pike, has served as proof positive that our beloved fire service has taken on a new culture. SAFETY.

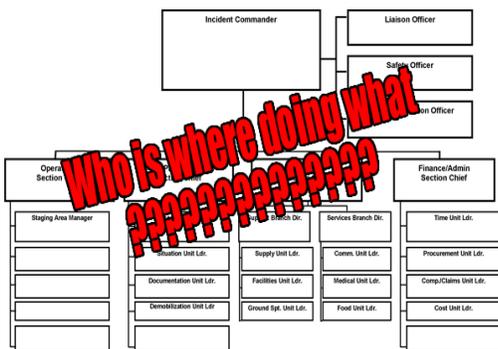
So there I stood, running command at 3 story hotel fire. Radios hanging out of every pocket. My red helmet cocked to the side, just a little, so I look cool, like the FDNY guys on TV. And a big dry erase / Velcro command board in my hands. As I ordered companies to move around the job, I moved their company tags around my board. I knew where everyone was located, as long as I stood under the street light, so I could see my board. At the end of the day, we put the fire out and no one got hurt. A radio or two bounced off

the pavement along the way, and I the Velcro may have torn off the back of a few of those company tags, but that’s just the cost of doing business.

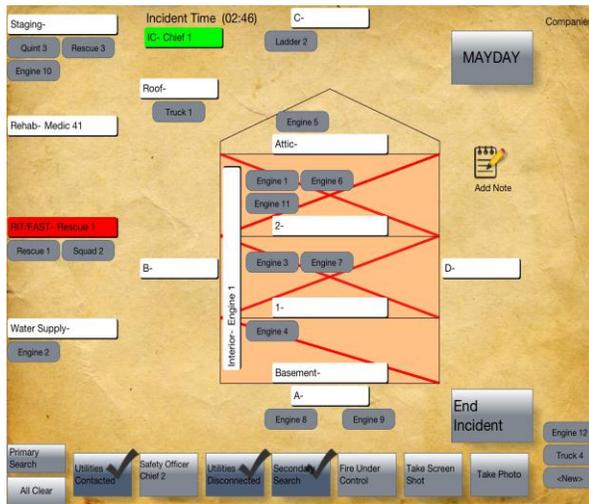
After returning to the station, polishing up the engine, embellishing war stories and inputting the report, I finally sat down to do some important work on my iPad. So there I am working on an exceptionally difficult level of Angry Birds, when it occurred to me. There should be an app for accountability. Someone should take that big, clumsy board and make an app out of it. I searched the app store and found nothing. Bummer, I thought. Then I started to think about the tools on our rigs. Who designed them all? Firefighters. We don’t sit around and wait for some suit to build us new tools. If we need a sledge hammer combined with a pry bar, pike pole and an axe, we make one! That moment was the birth of the Fire Accountability app.

I have read some books, made some calls, did some web research, and finally, a year later, I put pencil to paper. I designed the app, hired a programmer to work with me, and on April 8, 2013, Fire Accountability went live on the App Store and Google Play. Five months later, the Fire Accountability app is being used by firefighters in all 50 states and 11 different countries. So what is Fire Accountability?

Fire Accountability is a simple to use, single screen, and fully customizable personnel accountability app. The basics behind it come from our classis command boards. The app uses simple drag and drop technology to move companies around fire scenes. Users begin the process by entering the Setup Screen. There you will enter up to 50 custom companies. This simple step allows the app to be improvised to fit any size system. Large, metro departments enter their engine, truck and rescue companies.



Smaller, rural departments enter team / company numbers, or even firefighters' names. Next, select a benchmark time, enter a default email address, and you're ready to command an incident.



To create an incident, select one of dozens of incident types and configurations. Currently the app includes six different residential templates, strip malls from 3-6 units, high rises from 4-10 stories, a big box template, "multiplex", wildfire, and a dive rescue template. When the user selects a template, they will be taken the Accountability Screen. This is where you will stay for the duration of your incident. You will find a visual representation of the incident you selected, divided into divisions in the center of the screen. Your pre-loaded companies are their waiting to be dragged and dropped into divisions. Simple and in the palm of your hand, you now have the ability to know where every firefighter is located, on every fire scene, all the time, every time. This is the basic premise behind Fire Accountability, but tracking locations is just the beginning.

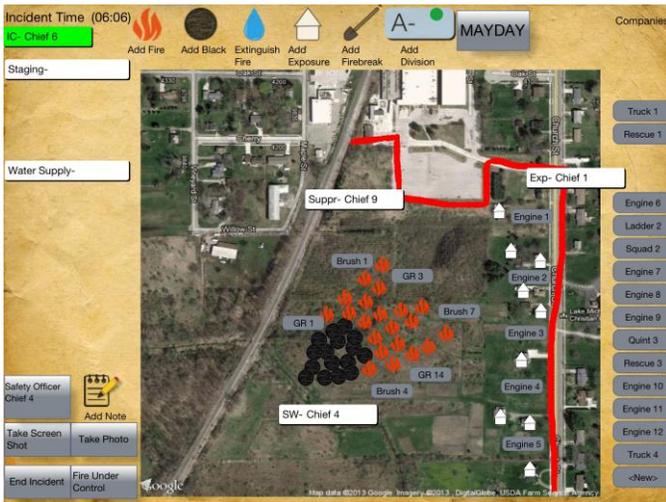
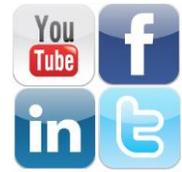
Along with the basic tracking function, I added tons of other features to the app to make our job as Incident Commanders easier and more effective. Every screen is equipped with tactical buttons. When a task is completed, the buttons are tapped and a large check mark appears. At a glance, you can see where your people are, what's been done and what needs to be done. I also added several alerts and reminders. For example, if you've been on scene for five minutes and you haven't tapped the "Contact Utilities" button, the app will alarm and remind you to complete the task. The same is true for assigning a Safety Officer, hooking up to an FDC at a high rise, etc. As you search a structure, the app will place a slash across floors as they are being searched and an X on the floors after obtaining an "all clear." MAYDAYS are indicated by red and orange flashing of the distressed company. A new feature is the "under roof" timer. Once a company has been inside of a building for 20 minutes, their icon will begin flashing blue and white. Companies camping out in rehab? After 30 minutes their icons will turn green. The app also, allows the user to take photos of the incident, as well as screenshots. Add notes, and track divers' times under water.

These features add an entirely new level of efficiency to incident management, and more importantly they make it possible for the IC to effectively track their firefighters without distracting their attention from the fire scene in front of them. The app even alarms at your pre-selected benchmark times to remind the IC to reassess the scene. When the incident is over, Fire Accountability is just getting started.



FIRE TRAINING TOOLBOX

Incident Command Systems Fire Accountability



After tapping End Incident, users will immediately be taken to an email containing a time stamped incident log. Every move that you made during the incident is time stamped. Also included in the log, you'll find the photos, screenshots and notes that you created during the incident. The default email address that was entered in setup is already loaded into the address line. Just tap send, and your report will be waiting for you back at the station.

I truly believe that the Fire Accountability app is a game changer. The best part of developing it has been all the contacts that I've made from around the world. I receive emails several times a day, from firefighters with feedback and great ideas. I am always working on updates and improvements, and input from fellow firefighters is always welcome. If you have ideas that you would like to share or would like to schedule a training, please visit www.fireseminars.com to contact me.