

Initial Incident Command

By Christopher Huston

Department type and structure creates variables in how companies are dispatched, arrive and establish Incident Command. The initial IC could range from a Firefighter to a Chief. Ensuring all members understand and are able to implement, even the most basic form of ICS on arrival, is crucial. Many Line of Duty Death reports list poor command and accountability as contributing factors. These error traps can be eliminated by establishing incident command when the first unit arrives then building from there. When we create a routine for all incidents, we reinforce the process that is vital on larger incidents. Having casual command on the small, everyday incidents will only create doubt and uncertainty for the ones where it matters most. Rehearsal of organizing, assigning, and tracking resources, leads to proficiency and excellence on the fire ground.

#1) Tabletop – This exercise sets the stage for basic incident size up, radio reports and assigning initial actions. Tabletop exercises allow for discussion and outlining best practices. Photos and simple sketches can be used to outline the type of incident you have. The Officer or senior firefighter should give the factors surrounding the incident. Give each member the opportunity to be the initial IC. Have the other personnel role play as companies, reporting to the IC throughout the scenario.

#2) On the street – Go out into your district and stop somewhere. Take turns giving your initial radio report and front seat size up. The officer in charge should prompt the scenario with indicators or clues as to what the initial IC has in front of him or her. These clues can easily be written on index cards, which are then handed to the member. Keep them simple, to the point and indicative of incidents you may respond to.

Examples include “nothing showing”, “smoke showing”, “working fire”, and “fire showing from rear.” You can also get creative with possible reports from neighbors and people passing by. Once again keep these cues simple so the member running the scenario can build confidence over time. Run this drill slightly more advanced than the tabletop.



#3) Scenarios – The final evolution used in building the foundation is creating real time scenarios. Depending on what you have available, *training tower, burn building and structures close to the firehouse*, your scenarios can be simple to complex. Run these just as an incident would occur. Act out the tones dropping and members boarding the apparatus to travel to the address (may be imaginary for the scenario.) When the apparatus arrives the member who will be the initial IC runs the scene. The other crew members “act out” their assigned task. If lines, tools, and equipment can be deployed, take advantage of this. Radios should be used to reinforce actual communication methods. Follow department standards for assigning crews, accountability (tracking method) and transfer of command. Give each member the chance to play the initial IC.

Incident Command is built from the bottom up. A frontline firefighter is usually first on scene. Ensure all members can perform this vital role.