

**INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM
POSITION MANUAL**

**FIREFIGHTER INCIDENT SAFETY AND
ACCOUNTABILITY GUIDELINES**

ICS-910

FIRESCOPE

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This document contains information relative to the Incident Command System (ICS) component of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). This is the same Incident Command System developed by FIRESCOPE.

Additional information and documentation can be obtained from the following sources:

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most important issues facing the Incident Commander is personnel accountability at the scene of emergencies. These Firefighter Incident Safety and Accountability Guidelines incorporate additional firefighter safety measures and personnel accountability into the Incident Command System (ICS) to ensure compliance with NFPA standards and the NIMS document.

On February 28, 2003, the President issued the Homeland Security Presidential Directive HSPD-5, which directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and administer a National Incident Management System (NIMS). According to HSPD-5 this system will provide a consistent nationwide approach for Federal, State, and Local government to work effectively and efficiently together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents regardless of cause, size, or complexity. In some instances, incidents that begin with a single response discipline within a single jurisdiction may rapidly expand to multi-discipline; multi-jurisdictional incidents requiring additional resources and operational support. The Incident Command System establishes common terminology that allows diverse incident management and support entities to work together across a wide variety of incident management functions and hazard scenarios.

Effective communications, information management, and information and intelligence sharing are critical aspect of domestic incident management. Establishing and maintaining a common operating picture and ensuring accessibility and interoperability are principle goals of communications and information management.

A common operating picture and systems interoperability provide the framework necessary to:

- Formulate and disseminate indications and warnings;
- Formulate, execute and communicate operational decisions at an incident site, as well as between incident management entities across jurisdictions and functional agencies;
- Prepare for potential requirements and requests supporting incident management activities; and
- Develop and maintain overall awareness and understanding of an incident within and across jurisdictions.

A responder in immediate need for assistance shall use “clear text”: in requesting assistance needed. A responder may only have time to communicate a term such as “help” on the radio frequency, but providing their “location,” “identification,” and “situation” is needed for immediate assistance. An agency should have a system in place for any Incident Commander, Operations Section Chief, Branch Director, Division or Group Supervisor, or any officer/responder to declare “emergency traffic” to clear the radio frequency followed by “clear text” to identify the situation. A **responder** in trouble may not have time to declare “emergency traffic” to clear the radio frequency but should provide a “location,” “identification,” and “situation” using “clear text” so assistance can be immediately deployed.

In the NIMS document, it states: “The ability of emergency management/response personnel from different disciplines, jurisdictions, organizations and agencies to work together depends greatly on their ability to communicate with each other. The use of common terminology is about the ability of emergency management/response personnel to communicate clearly with

one another and effectively coordinate activities no matter what the size, location, or complexity of the incident.

The use of plain language (clear text) in emergency management and incident response is a matter of public safety, especially the safety of emergency management/response personnel and those affected by the incident. It is critical that all those involved with an incident know and utilize commonly established operational structures, terminology, policies, and procedures. This will facilitate the achievement of interoperability across agencies/organizations jurisdictions, and disciplines, which is exactly what NIMS is seeking to achieve.

All communications, whether oral or written, between organizational elements during an incident should be in plain language in order to ensure that information dissemination is timely, clear, acknowledged, and understood by all intended recipients. Codes should not be used, and all communications should be confined to essential messages. The use of acronyms should be avoided during incidents requiring the participation of multiple agencies or organizations. Policies and procedures that foster compatibility should be defined to allow information sharing among all emergency management/response personnel and their affiliated organizations to the greatest extent possible.”

NIMS specify that plain language “Clear Text” is to be used when operating at an incident. The use of ten codes varies across the Country and should not be used, and the use of acronyms should be avoided.

The NFPA 1500 and 1561 Standards contain the following specific requirements regarding accountability of members that include but are not limited to the following:

Emergencies

In compliance with NFPA, Incident Commanders shall acknowledge the person in trouble declaring “EMERGENCY TRAFFIC” to clear radio traffic. Clear text shall be used to identify the **situation** of emergency: “OFFICER SHOT,” “RESPONDER ELECTROCUTED,” “RESPONDER DOWN,” “RESPONDER MISSING,” or “RESPONDER TRAPPED,” to notify all on-scene personnel. Also, the “location” needs to be communicated and could be as simple as “second floor rear of building,” along with the “identification” such as “F/F Smith.” This is especially important when multi-agencies or multi-jurisdictions are operating on the same incident, thus, appropriate action can be initiated in “Clear Text”. When Firefighters or response personnel are faced with life threatening emergencies, they may call for help using a variety of terms that may include the use of “Mayday,” help,” or “responder down.” The acronym “Mayday” is used by some fire agencies as a distress signal (hailing call) indicating a firefighter is in trouble. The use of the hailing signal “Mayday” does not describe the “location,” “identification,” or “situation”. Any Emergency Service Organization (ESO) that allows the use of the hailing call “Mayday” for responders needs to have a system in place to immediately address this call for assistance and use “clear text” for the “location”, “identification,” and “situation” of the “Mayday” emergency. The use of “clear text” is very important in determining the actual situation. This is especially critical when multi-agencies or multi-jurisdictions are operating on the same incident, thus, appropriate action can be initiated in “clear text.” The term “Mayday” should not be used by an ESO that routinely responds to maritime or wildland incidents, in that, this distress signal could cause confusion at these types of incidents. Remember that if an Emergency Service Organization (ESO) allows the use of this hailing

signal by their response personnel, they need to have a procedure in place to immediately address this call for assistance using “clear text.”

Other NFPA 1500 guidelines for “EMERGENCY TRAFFIC” include the Dispatch Center transmitting a distinctive “EMERGENCY TRAFFIC” tone on designated channel(s) followed by clear text verbal message that identifies the emergency situation, i.e., “OFFICER SHOT,” “RESPONDER ELECTROCUTED,” “RESPONDER DOWN,” “RESPONDER MISSING,” or “RESPONDER TRAPPED.” In addition the “identification” and “location” needs to be provided. At the conclusion of the emergency situation, an “all clear” should be broadcast on the radio channels.

Rapid Intervention Crew/Company (RIC) Members

According to NFPA 1500, in the initial stages of an incident where only one team is operating in the hazardous area at a working structural fire, a minimum of four individuals is required, consisting of two individuals working as a team in the hazard area and two individuals present outside this hazard area for assistance or rescue at emergency operations where entry into the danger area is required. The standby members shall be responsible for maintaining a constant awareness of the number and identity of members operating in the hazardous area, their location and function, and time of entry. The standby members shall remain in radio, visual, voice or signal-line communications with the team.

Members that arrive on the scene of a working structural fire prior to the assembling of four persons can initiate exterior actions in preparation for an interior attack.

Initial attack operations shall be organized to ensure that, if upon arrival at the emergency scene, initial attack personnel find an imminent life-threatening situation which immediate action could prevent the loss of life or serious injury, such action shall be permitted with less than four personnel when conducted in accordance with NFPA 1500. No exception shall be permitted when there is no possibility to save lives. Any such actions taken in accordance with this section shall be thoroughly investigated by the fire department with a written report submitted to the fire chief (NFPA 1500).

In the initial stages of an incident, the IC supervises the RIC. As the incident grows in complexity, this supervision can be assigned to the Operations Section Chief or even to individual Divisions to ensure the most rapid and effective deployment on a rescue.

When sufficient personnel are on-scene, the rapid intervention capability for the incident should be raised from the two-in, two-out minimum to include an entire crew or company. In some instances, such as multiple and/or remote entrance points, multiple RIC elements should be assigned and a Rapid Intervention Group Supervisor activated to supervise positioning and deployment of these Crews/Companies.

In high-rise fire incidents, the RIC should typically be located at Staging. This will allow for RIC's to be deployed in a timely manner. Consider multiple RIC's if multiple floors are involved with positioning based on the assigned floor.

If a RIC is deployed to provide a rescue of a firefighter, the Incident Commander shall assign an additional RIC as a backup for the RIC that was deployed. Members working in the

immediate area should be notified by the Incident Commander to assist in the rescue if at all possible. The IC must remember to continue to keep sufficient forces engaged in controlling the spread of the fire if threatening the trapped, lost, or injured firefighter.

Additional Rapid Intervention Considerations

When preparing for a firefighter rescue, consider the worst-case scenario. Rapid Intervention Crew/Company (RIC) standard operating guidelines are incident driven.

Officers or members assigned the task of RIC shall not get involved in routine firefighting activities, but remain in a state of readiness keeping company members together and ready for deployment.

Operational Retreat Guidelines

In addition to radio traffic requiring evacuation, the following standardized audible signal can be used to indicate evacuation.

The **EVACUATION SIGNAL** will consist of repeated short blasts of the air horn for approximately ten seconds, followed by ten seconds of silence. This sequence of air horn blasts for ten seconds followed by a ten-second period of silence will be done three times; total air horn evacuation signal including periods of silence will last fifty seconds. This should be done in conjunction with the radio announcement of "EMERGENCY TRAFFIC," with direction for emergency scene personnel to evacuate the hazard area.

The Dispatch Center should continue to advise the Incident Commander of the elapsed time at each additional fifteen-minute interval, or until canceled by the IC, or until the incident is declared under control, i.e., knockdown.

PROCEDURES FOR THE IDENTIFICATION AND MANAGEMENT OF LIFE HAZARD ZONES

INTRODUCTION

Incident Commanders are responsible for the safety of all incident personnel and may have to take action to protect personnel from life threatening conditions that on-scene fire personnel and other responders do not have the capabilities, tools, or training to immediately mitigate. These actions may include:

- Immediate notification of personnel
- Notification for ongoing or long-term life hazards
- Methods to isolate and clearly identify the life hazard with three strands of barrier tape
- Assignment of Lookouts or Assistant Safety Officers when needed
- Identification methods for remote or large area life hazards

The clearly identifiable method to assure that fire personnel and other responders do not enter Life Hazard Zones includes the use of a minimum of three (3) horizontal strands of barrier tape that states "**Do Not Enter**" or "**Do Not Cross**," to prevent entry to the hazardous area. Three

horizontal strands of any Fireline tape or flagging tape between one inch and three inches with the words "Do Not Enter" or "Do Not Cross" securely fixed to stationary supports and in sufficient locations to isolate the hazard will meet the requirement of identifying a Life Hazard Zone.

DEFINITIONS

Life Hazard: The existence of a process or condition that would likely cause serious injury or death to exposed persons.

Life Hazard Zones: A system of barriers surrounding designated areas at the incident scene that is intended to **STOP** fire personnel and other responders from entering a potentially Life Threatening, Hazardous Area.

Life Hazard Lookout: A qualified person in a location where they can safely observe a Life Hazard, monitor resources and personnel in the area, and communicate with resources keeping them a safe distance away. The lookout will also isolate and deny entry to any responders or resources until the life hazard is mitigated and the Incident Commander approves the release of the Life Hazard Zone.

INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES

Whenever a life hazard is present, or an immediate threat to the health and safety of incident personnel is present at an incident, any person who recognized the potential life hazard shall immediately contact the Incident Commander using **EMERGENCY TRAFFIC** to advise of the situation. Included in the Emergency Traffic notification:

- Type/Nature of the hazardous condition (i.e., downed electrical wires, imminent building collapse, etc.)
- Specific location
- Resource needs
- Any Immediate exposure needs or issues

Incident Commander shall request the appropriate resource or agency to respond to the incident to evaluate and mitigate the life hazard (i.e., Utility Company, Structural Engineer, etc.) and assign a lookout or Assistant Safety Officer until Life Hazard Zone(s) is established.

The Incident Commander shall assign a life hazard lookout to prevent any incident personnel from entering the area until such time as the procedures below have been completed.

Identification of Life Hazard Zones

a. The Standard for identification of a LIFE HAZARD ZONE:

1. Deploy barrier tape in the following manner to prevent entry and identify the hazard zone. The optimal tape would be red and white striped or chevron barrier tape that

states “**Life Hazard – Do Not Enter**,” however, existing Fire or Police perimeter tape that includes the words “Do Not Enter” or “Do Not Cross” will meet this standard.

2. The tape shall be configured in **three horizontal strands** approximately 18 to 24 inches apart and securely fixed to stationary supports to establish the LIFE HAZARD ZONE. The LIFE HAZARD ZONE barrier shall be of sufficient size to provide complete isolation, distance and protection from the hazard, and supports shall be capable of supporting the barrier tape throughout the incident.
3. The use of illumination is recommended to enhance nighttime visibility to further identify the LIFE HAZARD ZONE. Examples include orange cones with a flashing strobe light on the ground, or glow sticks securely attached to the barrier tape.

b. The Established Life Hazard Zone:

1. **THE THREE HORIZONTAL STRAND CONFIGURATION OF RED AND WHITE STRIPED OR CHEVRON BARRIER TAPE SHALL ONLY BE USED FOR LIFE HAZARD IDENTIFICATION. WHEN INCIDENT PERSONNEL SEE THE THREE-STRAND CONFIGURATION OR BARRIER TAPE IT SHALL BE RECOGNIZED AS THE STANDARD FOR ISOLATING A LIFE HAZARD, AND INCIDENT PERSONNEL SHALL NOT ENTER THE LIFE HAZARD ZONE.**
2. Ensure the LIFE HAZARD ZONE measures provide visibility to approaching personnel to prevent entry into the area throughout the duration of the incident.
3. Maintain the LIFE HAZARD ZONE for the duration of the incident or hazard. Approval from the IC is required prior to the removal of the Life Hazard Zone barriers.
4. The LIFE HAZARD ZONE identification measures are intended to provide a visual cue to all incident personnel. Life Hazard Lookout(s) or Assistant Safety Officers shall be considered to ensure a physical barrier between personnel and the LIFE HAZARD ZONE through effective communications and notifications.
5. The Incident Commander shall be responsible for ensuring that all incident personnel are notified of the Life Hazard Zone. This may be accomplished through any approved method such as face-to-face, emergency traffic radio messages or the Incident Action Plan.

c. Remote Locations: In cases where the extent of the hazard zone is so large that is not practical to completely isolate the area, such as on large incidents in remote locations, the following will be the minimum standard for these situations:

1. The Incident Commander must approve the use of these minimum standards for each Life Hazard:
 - The Incident Commander shall assign a life hazard lookout at appropriate access points to prevent any incident personnel from entering the area until such time as the procedures below have been completed.

- Three horizontal stripes of red and white Life Hazard tape or barrier tape (as described above) will be affixed to two vertical uprights at appropriate locations along the access route to the Life Hazard area. A description of the hazard, location of the hazard, and distance from the Life Hazard indicator tape to the hazard shall be attached at each location.
2. All personnel working in the area or Division shall be notified of the Life Hazard immediately. Incident personnel may be notified through the routine briefings, emergency traffic radio messages, the Incident Action Plan, and the Incident Map.
 3. The location(s) of the Life Hazard(s) and Placard(s) shall be marked on the Incident Map using standardized symbols. The symbol to mark the Life Hazard Zone on the incident map is a red octagon (Stop Sign) with three white horizontal lines with a description of the hazard noted underneath.



- Personnel shall not breach, alter, or remove any LIFE HAZARD ZONE identification measures until the hazard has been abated and approval granted by the Incident Commander.
- All personnel have a personal responsibility to be aware of LIFE HAZARDS and make proper notifications when they are encountered at an incident.

Remember the slogan: THREE STRIPES, YOU'RE OUT!