Control measure - Structuring an incident

Control measure knowledge

Managing and supervising crews on the incident ground is an essential part of the safe system of work used by the fire and rescue service.

The incident command system is a framework that assists with the management of resources at an incident. The incident commander may devolve authority for some of the operations. It allows the incident commander to delegate responsibility of tasks and functions, but does not absolve them of ultimate accountability.

Understanding and effectively applying the incident command system enables spans of control to be maintained at manageable levels and improves control and communications. Taking these steps will prevent the incident commander from becoming overloaded with information, which supports effective situational awareness and decision-making. This way the incident commander can maintain control under conditions of high pressure and rapid change.

The incident commander should anticipate the likely scale and complexity of the escalating incident and develop the necessary command structure at the earliest opportunity.

Command team

Fire and rescue services may take different approaches towards deciding which roles and functions form part of the command team. However, the main aim is to enable effective decision-making and clear communication between the incident commander and those performing operational tasks.

The command team includes the incident commander and any other personnel that are operating in a commanding role, for example, command support, operations commander and sector commanders.

It is important to maintain spans of control at a manageable level. Individuals should not be responsible for so many lines of communication that they cannot give each sufficient attention. The incident command system provides the means by which a commander controls the activities associated with their role.

The command team will involve personnel who carry out a variety of roles. It is important to make sure they can be easily identified using a commonly understood method. This is particularly important at incidents that cross borders and at large incidents, where commanders who may not know each other work together.

Command support

Command support and its related support sectors are critical to resolving incidents. An incident commander cannot manage a complex and rapidly developing incident alone. Effective and structured support systems that can vary with the size and demands of an incident need to be implemented.

Fire and rescue services will have different approaches to the roles and functions that make up the command support team. The aim at every incident is to ensure clear communications and decision-making between the incident commander and operational personnel. Some of the command support functions may be at locations remote from the incident. This is particularly the case at major and multi-agency incidents, or where multiple incidents are occurring (e.g. wide-scale flooding).

Where crews are working on technical or widespread operations, specialist teams may assist them within the incident command system. Examples of technical or widespread operations include high volume pumping, mass decontamination or urban search and rescue. Such specialisms should work under the control of the relevant incident or sector commander.

A specialist tactical adviser (TacAd) may be deployed to assist the incident or sector commander. They can be used at a range of incidents regardless of size. At more complex incidents, several advisers may be used by the blue light services. More details can be found in the National Co-ordination and Advisory Framework. The commander remains in charge, with the responsibility for decision making and the incident plan.

It is important that everyone understands the different roles and responsibilities in the command support function. This helps maintain common expectations which feed into shared situational awareness. See Command skills.

The command support function will generally be responsible for recording significant decisions. It is important to record enough information about the reasoning behind each significant decision. This will help those who examine the decision-making process in the future. A decision log is meant to record actions which influence the incident plan. If there is uncertainty over how important a decision might turn out to be, then it should be recorded.

Sectors

An incident commander may be able to effectively control small incidents without the need to implement additional command arrangements. As the scale of operations grows, the incident commander should consider appointing sector commanders to supervise crews and command areas of operations. Sectors should only be used where and when necessary, to reduce the possibility of barriers to the flow of information between crews and the incident commander.

Once an incident has become more complex with a growing number of sectors in use, the incident commander may choose to appoint an operations commander. This is to manage the sectors and reduce the span of control for the incident commander. If the number of sectors grows, they may need to group the sectors under more than one operations commander. The all-hazards command

approach is able to scale up to any situation as required.

Even when tasks are delegated, the incident commander remains responsible at all times for overall incident management. They should remain focused on command and control, the use of resources, incident planning and the co-ordination of sector operations.

Sectors can apply to a defined area of a building, the vertical features, such as in high rise buildings or geographical features. Sectorisation at transport incidents can be more complex to define. Sectors can also be used to control functional areas, such as a safety sector. Examples of sectorisation in a range of applications can be seen in [The Foundation for Incident Command](#).

Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Have policies which outline the roles likely to be performed in the command team. These will include the level of skills and appropriate responsibilities for each command role and function. There should be policies that identify the various command team roles and functions that are recognisable to fire and rescue service personnel, both in the host service and other assisting fire and rescue services. It is important to take steps to ensure that they are also understood by other agencies.
- Have procedures for the effective control of communications at incidents of all sizes. These procedures should be scalable to allow for incidents that develop in size and complexity and take into account that other agencies will also be communicating at the incident.
- Have policies to provide command support at an incident. Each service will need to decide what to provide and how to achieve this.
- Have appropriate means of recording information at command points and in sectors. This will include the tactical mode and number of personnel working in the area. It will also record key hazards and risks. Information recording may be happening at multiple locations and care needs to be taken to ensure critical information is recorded and retained.
- Consider the need to provide specific training for personnel who provide command support arrangements and for those who may fulfil the role of command support officer.
- Have policies for recording decisions and significant events at the incident ground.
- Have procedures to allow defined areas on the incident ground to be identified and understood by all personnel. This is generally referred to as sectorisation.
- Have policies for limiting access of personnel to the hazardous areas of an incident ground and for briefing and identification of those involved. This policy should include any equipment and procedural guidance necessary to implement it safely.
- Establish joint working protocols with neighbouring fire and rescue services and other agencies to ensure the policy can be safely implemented and effectively controlled.
- Make arrangements to mobilise suitable resources and equipment to provide command support teams and functions such as command boards and control units

Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Establish an incident command structure appropriate to the likely size and complexity of the incident

- Consider establishing a forward control point

- Consider the use of command support systems and equipment where required

- Ensure all personnel are aware of the incident command structure and communication strategy

- Keep a record of all personnel operating in a sector and carry out regular roll calls