Section

Introduction

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Introduction

This guidance is accompanied by Incident command: Knowledge, skills and competence, which provides further detail and is essential reading for all commanders, operational personnel and fire control personnel.

Operational response is hazardous and varied. Some incidents need only simple actions and procedures to be dealt with effectively and safely, as risks are low. Others are more challenging and may quickly increase in size, complexity and duration.

Fire and rescue authorities must plan for health and safety in the operational environment, in order to fulfil their legislative and regulatory duties. This includes basing their policies on safe person principles. The application of risk assessment and control measures should not prevent fire and rescue service operations from taking place.

There are two other sections of National Operational Guidance that should be considered at all incidents; Environmental protection and Operations.

The Operations guidance contains topics including:

- Fire control room operations
- Getting to an incident
- Health, safety and welfare
- Evacuation and shelter
- Closing an incident
- Investigations

Given the interdependencies in the topics, it is important that this Incident command guidance is read in conjunction with the Operations guidance.

The incident command system and the role of incident commanders

The incident command system is an all-hazards approach, providing a progressive, scalable and flexible system of operational command, control and organisation. The system is designed to help an incident commander manage and fulfil their incident plan. It encourages a controlled and
systematic approach to resolving incidents.

The key components of the incident command system include:

- Clear, defined and visible lines of command
- Manageable spans of control
- A communications infrastructure
- Appropriate responsibility and authority
- Clearly defined and understood roles and responsibilities
- Sectorisation of the incident

It is the role of incident commanders to effectively and safely organise resources to obtain the best resolution to an incident. It is the role of all personnel, who may attend or are involved with an incident, to be familiar with the requirements of the incident command system and know how to operate safely and effectively in it. This applies equally to those who will perform a command role and those who will be operating under the command of others, including the fire control room.

Incident command and support activities start on receipt of the emergency call to the fire control room and continue to the conclusion of the incident.

Operations on the incident ground should be well-organised and controlled. The incident command system provides the incident commander with a clear framework to help them structure, organise and manage an emergency. It can be adapted to all sizes and types of incident and helps incident commanders to deploy and use resources effectively.

The incident command system will only be successful when applied with good command skills. It is not the incident command system that achieves the outcome; it is how the incident commander makes and applies sound operational decisions within it.

The incident command system allows the incident commander to use health and safety arrangements, policies or procedures, which are tailored to the characteristics of an incident and the objectives of the incident plan. This helps to achieve a balance between risk and benefit.

Incident commanders should be aware of becoming overburdened and having too broad a span of control. This can result in ineffective leadership, poor decision-making and poor communications, leading to a failure of situational awareness. Incident commanders should consider the issues of team dynamics to get the best from the resources available to them.

Fire and rescue services have a responsibility to provide their incident commanders with the necessary training, equipment and resources to effectively apply the incident command system to any incident.
Command skills and the role of the incident commander

The use of command skills by incident commanders is as important as the effective implementation of the incident command system, policies and procedures. Command skills complement these technical skills and together are critical for assertive, effective and safe incident command.

In exceptional circumstances, if no policies or procedures exist, or if following them could be a barrier to resolving an incident, a commander should use their command and technical skills to inform their professional judgement and apply operational discretion if appropriate.

Command skills are social, personal and cognitive skills that come under the heading of human factors. They enable commanders to function effectively when in charge of an incident. The safety-critical command skills are:

- Leadership
- Situational awareness
- Decision-making
- Interpersonal communication
- Personal resilience
- Teamwork

The development of a behavioural marker system, suitable for UK fire and rescue service incident commanders, also identifies a set of key command skills in accordance with those listed above.

In a hazardous, fast-moving, emotion-charged and pressurised situation, an incident commander is expected to be able to cope and competently perform their role even if information about the incident is incomplete. To achieve this, they should use their command skills proficiently to gather and interpret information, and to decide on, communicate and implement a plan. If an incident commander omits or performs a command skill poorly, this may lead to dangerous consequences.

Fire and rescue services should recognise the importance of incident commanders having effective command skills. Without good command skills, a commander will lack the ability to successfully implement their technical knowledge to command an incident. A failure to effectively use a command skill may expose personnel or others to unacceptable risks and cause harm, but when performed well contribute to safe and effective operations.

For example, if a commander fails to demonstrate assertive, effective and safe leadership this may result in others not trusting their judgement or competence. This may adversely affect the communication, co-ordination and co-operation of personnel or members of other agencies; in
Incident commanders should have a range of qualities, and effectively use command skills, to deal with the wide-ranging nature of incidents. Assertive and effective incident commanders:

- Are confident and self-aware
- Are well-trained and competent
- Have sound situational awareness
- Are able to lead, direct and instruct others
- Can communicate effectively
- Are able to plan and implement
- Can apply sound judgement and effective decision-making
- Are able to adapt to changing and challenging situations
- Are calm and controlled

An incident commander should possess the technical knowledge and command skills to underpin their judgements, decisions and behaviours. Incident command: Knowledge, skills and competence provides detailed information for the role, based on research and incident ground observations.

The application of these skills on the incident ground is key to incident ground safety and the implementation of an effective operational plan. Services should have safe systems of work to support incident commander decision-making at incidents to reduce the risk of human factors affecting safety.

The effective practice of these skills is enhanced within a learning culture that encourages empowerment and the acceptance of responsibility and accountability. This includes systems and processes to actively monitor the performance of command skills by incident commanders in training and at operational incidents.

Post-incident reviews and safety event investigations should examine the use of command skills by incident commanders to highlight the impact of human factors on operational outcomes. Similarly, a service's operational policies and procedures should be consistent with its approach to incident command. Its command ethos should be clearly articulated to help ensure incident commanders are aware of the service's expectations.
Fire and rescue services should establish robust selection processes to identify suitable personnel to be developed for the role of incident commander. The processes should ensure that people who perform incident command functions are capable of doing so under the expected pressures of incidents and can deal with situations where there is sustained pressure and stress.

Fire and rescue services should ensure they appropriately train, assess and revalidate their incident commanders, to ensure they understand, have practised and revalidate the skills they need for command. Fire and rescue services should also equip incident commanders with the operational knowledge that is required to resolve the full range of foreseeable incidents.

Incident command: Knowledge, skills and competence provides detailed information on these topics, including:

- Selection of effective incident commanders
- Training for incident commanders
- Command competence
- Validation and revalidation of commanders

### Legislation

Fire and rescue services should assure themselves that all relevant legislation and regulations for their area are considered when developing policies, procedures and training. For further information on this topic refer to National Operational Guidance: Legislation.

Legislation and regulations may affect operational decisions; some of the key pieces for incident command include:

- Fire and Rescue Services Act
- Fire (Scotland) Act
- Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order
- Civil Contingencies Act
- Civil Contingencies Act (Contingency Planning) Regulations
- Emergency Services (Obstruction) Act
- Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act
Each fire and rescue authority must develop their strategic direction through their risk management plan. To determine the extent of their firefighting capability, strategic managers will consider their statutory duties and the foreseeable risk within their area.

Work to identify risk and prepare operational plans should consider all stakeholders, including local emergency planning groups and the fire and rescue service risk management plan.

As part of their risk management plan each fire and rescue service should consider the resources they need to mobilise to an incident to support effective incident command at operational events.

For incident command the risk management plan should include:

- The role and level at which incidents will be commanded, for example, Level 1 incident, crew manager and watch manager
- The types of equipment to provide command support functions, such as command boards and control units, and the size of incidents at which each will be used
- The arrangements for command teams and any support vehicles
• The need for competent and skilled officers to be available for command support and functional or support sectors, such as water, foam or inter-agency liaison

Responsibility of fire and rescue services

Fire and rescue services are responsible, under legislation and regulations, for developing policies and procedures and to provide information, instruction, training and supervision to their personnel about foreseeable hazards and the control measures used to reduce the risks arising from those hazards.

This guidance sets out to provide fire and rescue services with sufficient knowledge about the potential hazards their personnel could encounter when attending incidents. Fire and rescue services should ensure their policies, procedures and training cover all of the hazards and control measures contained within this guidance.

Intraoperability and interoperability

Other agencies should base their expectation of the fire and rescue service response to multi-agency incidents on the incident command system contained in this guidance. Therefore, adoption of this guidance will support intraoperability and interoperability.

Using common language and components will ensure fire and rescue services can more effectively resolve local, cross-border and national incidents.

Intraoperability

Clearly defined roles, particularly the specialist roles performed by personnel from dedicated departments such as fire control or hazardous materials, will support intraoperability and the establishment of effective command teams.

Risk management plans, and other pre-planning, should consider incidents that may involve working with the resources or assets of other fire and rescue services, or the National Resilience capabilities.

Interoperability
Interoperability is delivered through the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) doctrine. Fire and rescue services should be aware of the aspects of interoperability that exist when identifying, assessing and preplanning for all incident types and eventualities they may attend.

In addition to the community risk register, personnel have a wealth of local knowledge of risks or potential scenarios areas that would benefit from a multi-agency response. This information may be contained in Site-Specific Risk Information (SSRI) or similar formats.

It is essential that all components of fire and rescue services, including fire control personnel, operational planning departments and incident commanders, identify and liaise with relevant partner agencies. This ensures that in the event that they are required to respond to different incident types, all agencies are fully aware of the assistance available to maximise effectiveness in saving lives and reducing harm.

It is possible that other agencies who attend an incident will have risk-critical information. Incident commanders should request risk-critical information in the joint agency briefing as well as sharing any information they have. They should ensure this information flows throughout the incident.

As well as the common agreed principles contained within JESIP, there is a legal framework to share information between responders in an emergency situation. This will generally come from common law for the saving of life or property, the Crime and Disorder Act or the Civil Contingencies Act. There may also be formal information sharing agreements (ISAs) between agencies.

Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP)

The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) Joint Doctrine: The Interoperability Framework advocates the use of the M/ETHANE mnemonic for information gathering and sharing between emergency responders, their control rooms and other agencies.

This mnemonic should be used when passing information between emergency responders, their control rooms and other agencies so that shared situational awareness can be established:

- Major incident declared?
- Exact location
- Type of incident e.g. explosion or building collapse
- Hazards present, potential or suspected
- Access - routes that are safe to use
- Number, type and severity of casualties
- Emergency services now present and those required

The broader principles of intraoperability and interoperability at the pre-incident stage are captured above, and the principles will be augmented by the on-scene interoperability information contained in the JESIP doctrine.