The Foundation for Incident Command is designed to complement and support the National Operational Guidance: Incident Command which is intended to assist policy writers in fire and rescue services in producing their local policies or guidance for incident command. This accompanying foundation material is aimed at all fire and rescue service personnel to provide the detail required for assertive, effective and safe incident command to be practised and applied.

This foundation guidance supports fire and rescue services to put in place a robust emergency response for incident command. It is an essential guide for safe systems of work required at incidents and provides essential reading for all fire and rescue service operational personnel, including firefighters and control room operators.

Fire and rescue services must make suitable and sufficient arrangements to ensure that they have systems and processes in place to prepare incident commanders at all levels to understand, interpret and apply the incident command system appropriately to every incident. This foundation guidance describes the requirements of an incident commander.

The incident command system provides the incident commander with a clear framework to structure, organise and manage an incident. It can be adapted to all sizes and types of incident and will help them deploy and use resources in an efficient and safe way. The incident command system allows the incident commander to use health and safety arrangements, including standard operating procedures, tailored to the characteristics of an emergency. This helps the incident commander to achieve an appropriate balance between the benefit of undertaking planned actions and the risks associated with them.

Operational response is hazardous and firefighters respond to thousands of incidents each year. Some incidents may need only simple actions and procedures to deal with them effectively and safely as risks are low. Others are more challenging and may quickly increase in size, complexity and duration.

"At every incident, the greater the potential benefit of fire and rescue actions, the greater the risk that is accepted by commanders and firefighters. Activities that present a high risk to safety are limited to those that have the potential to save life or to prevent rapid and significant escalation of the incident."

This is the Firefighter Safety Maxim.

Commanding operational situations is different to managing controlled and defined situations or workplace scenarios. Commanders need a range of qualities together with command skills to deal
with the wide-ranging nature of emergencies.

Assertive and effective 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 situations
- Are calm and controlled

Fire and rescue services must be confident that their selection processes ensure that personnel who are responsible for performing command functions are capable of doing so. They should be able to demonstrate clear potential to deal with stressful situations where there is sustained pressure. Once appointed they should periodically be required to demonstrate competence in their role.

Fire and rescue services must ensure that they appropriately train and assess their incident commanders. They should ensure that incident commanders understand and have sufficient time and facilities to practise the skills they need for command. They must equip them with the operational knowledge and understanding needed to resolve the full range of reasonably foreseeable incidents and enable them to adapt to those that are not.

More details can be found in the document CFOA Command Training, Assessment and Qualifications Fire and Rescue Service Guidance and the National Occupational Standards for Fire and Rescue Services.

Fire and rescue service responsibilities

A fire and rescue authority’s responsibilities are set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, or equivalent legislation in devolved administrations. Some of these duties are classified as core duties. Those which relate to incident command are in sections 7, 8 and 9 of the Act. These duties should be read with other relevant legislation, specifically the Health and Safety at Work Act, the Health and Safety at Work Order, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and the Management of Health and Safety at Work (Amendment) Regulations.

The Fire and Rescue Services Act requires each authority to make provision for the purpose of
extinguishing fires, carrying out rescues and attending other emergencies in its area, including the provision of personnel, equipment and training.

The Health and Safety at Work Act includes a requirement on employers to provide information, instruction, training and, -critical for this guidance on incident command- the provision of supervision as is necessary to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its employees.

Other sections of the Health and Safety at Work Act place a duty on employers to conduct undertakings in such a way as to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, people not employed by them, who may be affected thereby, are not exposed to risk. [Note: in this context a risk has to be created or made worse by the service].

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations places a duty on the employer to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of their employees and to record the significant findings of the assessment.

The Health and Safety Executive sets out how it will apply health and safety legislation to the fire and rescue service in the document Striking the balance between operational and health and safety duties in the Fire and Rescue Service.

Foundation guidance for fire service legislation will be published on the National Operational Guidance website in due course.