

# Command Continuity

## Size-Up Considerations for the Incoming Incident Commander During Sustained Operations

by Deputy Assistant Chief Ronald R. Spadafora

When you are summoned as the Incident Commander (IC) to an ongoing, sustained operation, much information must be gathered prior to and during notification by the Borough Communications Office. This type of scenario usually occurs during the change of tours, but also can happen within your tour of duty.

Events of long duration where a transfer of command is commonplace include, but are not limited to, large and complex building fires; train derailments; expansive brush fires; airplane and helicopter crashes; ship fires; building collapses; watch line activities; major utility emergencies; pier and waterfront fires; and hazardous material incidents. Note that many aspects of this article are applicable to a standard, developing incident on transmittal of a 10-75 (notification of a fire or emergency), *All Hands*, 10-76 (high-rise fire), 10-60 (major emergency), 10-80 (hazardous material incident) or similar signal requiring a Chief Officer response.

### In quarters

Monitor the firehouse scanner radio for all transmissions concerning the incident.

Question the borough dispatcher about pertinent size-up information (type of incident, alarm status, vital building information, surrounding properties, number and type of units on the scene, outside agencies involved, etc.). If you are relieving the Battalion or Division in which you are working during the change of tours, use a Division messenger van for transportation to the scene of the incident. This will allow the FDNY to maintain command continuity throughout the change of Commanders.

The Computer Assisted Dispatch System (CADS) should be employed to obtain a Borough Status Report. This printout indicates the status of every unit in a given borough at a given time.

The report will supply a rundown of all units currently active at the incident. It also will contain information concerning units that are relocated, unavailable and out of service. Check the Chief Officers Schedule to ascertain the names of all Chief Officers at the scene and/or responding to the incident.

### En route

Utilize your vehicle's Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) to obtain an incident history printout (chronological record of the receipt and transmission of the alarm, units dispatched and information received by the dispatcher from units on the scene). Also, obtain an

Incident Summary that will provide a concise listing of units that have responded to the incident, as well as current information, including addresses, locations and CIDS information. You can use this data in conjunction with the Borough Status Report to develop a clear picture of the resources available on your arrival.

If unable to obtain an incident history/summary, secure the needed information from the borough dispatcher via cellular phone or your car radio. Ask the dispatcher if there are any special instructions to follow (travel directions, equipment needs, precautionary behavior, etc.) while proceeding to the site.

Is it a unified or single command incident? Ascertain the location of the Incident Command Post (ICP) and the designation of the FDNY Incident Commander. If a staging area has been established, record its location, because you will want to account for all units on your arrival. Review how many Chief Officers are assigned and note their designations.

If responding to a fire, ask the dispatcher if the IC is employing an interior (offensive) or exterior (defensive) attack strategy. What is the status of the searches? Is the fire *Under Control*? Determine the incident's time of duration. Ask the dispatcher if there are any reports of water problems at the incident.

Question if Command channel(s), Secondary Tactical channel, 800MHz radio, building/vehicular radio repeater or Interoperability channel(s) have been activated. Identify what SOC

**In Quarters**

- Monitor Department scanner radio
- Dispatcher
- CADS (Borough Status Report)
- Chief Officers Schedule



In quarters--The Computer Assisted Dispatch System (CADS) should be used to obtain a Borough Status Report.

photo by FDNY Photo Unit



Command continuity is vital for comprehensive decision-making.

photo by FF Jeff Ray

### En Route

- MDT (Incident History/Incident Summary)
- CIDS
- Dispatcher
- Cellular phone (IC)
- Monitor car radio transmissions
- Monitor handie-talkie transmissions



photo by FDNY Photo Unit

En route--Use your vehicle's mobile data terminal (MDT) to obtain Incident History and Incident Summary reports.

the IC activate his/her cellular phone. Throughout your response to the incident, monitor the car radio for status reports and up-to-the-minute information. Ensure that handie-talkies are on and set to the frequencies being used at the incident.

### On arrival

Report in to the Command Post. Then, within reason, take some time to walk around the perimeter of the incident, performing an exterior, visual size-up of the affected area (fire building) and surrounding properties. Have your Battalion/Division Firefighter accompany you when performing this size-up. This Firefighter can be used as an additional set of eyes (binoculars, if needed) and ears (monitoring additional radio frequencies, if being utilized).

Are radio transmissions to and from the Command Post being conducted in an orderly and professional manner? Attempt to better understand the operation by gathering information as an observer. Check surrounding properties to see if nearby civilians and structures may be endangered. Has an aerial reconnaissance been conducted? Would an aerial perspective provide valuable information?

At large-scale and complex fires, note unique features (trusses, lightweight construction elements, parapet walls, marquees, signs, roof fixtures, etc.) that could lead to structural collapse of the building(s) involved. Note fire and smoke conditions to determine where additional resources may be required.

Observe the positioning of engine and ladder company apparatus. Count the number of hose-lines stretched and in operation. Are more hose-lines required? Do any hose-lines already in place need to be re-positioned? Where are large-caliber streams (LCS) positioned and how many are in operation? Are enough ladders raised and in operation? Ascertain the presence of satellite engines. Are they connected to positive water supplies? Note the position of satellite engines in relation to tower ladders. Are these engines readily able to supply them?

Additionally, ascertain the status and position of the satellite manifold. Is it being employed? If so, what engine company is

Chiefs and special units remain on the scene and what unit(s) has/have been designated the FAST unit and/or CFR-D engine. Ensure that your cellular phone is on and readily available for use.

The information being supplied by the dispatcher also can be obtained directly from the on-site IC via cellular phone. If you are unable to contact the Incident Commander, instruct the dispatcher to have

### On Arrival

- Exterior size-up (fire/smoke conditions, collapse indicators, exposure problems, air recon, etc.)
- Battalion/Division Firefighter
- Monitor handie-talkie transmissions
- Apparatus, ladder, hose-line/LCS positioning
- Special units and equipment
- Water supply

supplying it? Is there a manifold in use? What engines are supplying them? Could a fireboat be used to augment water requirements? Is there a need for foam? Are foam apparatus on-scene?

### Meeting with the Incident Commander

There is a plethora of information to be gathered from the on-scene IC. Don't be afraid to ask questions. What are the goals and objectives? Are primary and secondary searches completed?

What other components of the Incident Command System have been established? What strategy is being employed to bring the incident (fire) under control? Where are the Sector Chiefs positioned and what tactics are they using?

How are special units (Rescue, Squad, Haz-Mat, Marine, etc.) being deployed? Who has been designated the Water Resource Officer and where is he/she located? Use the command board to help visualize operational procedures and Sector Chief/unit placement.



On arrival--Walk the perimeter of the incident and perform an exterior, visual size-up. photo by Vic Nicastro

### Meeting with the Incident Commander

- Goals and objectives
- Strategy and tactics
- Status of searches
- ICS
- Command board
- Safety issues
- Communication frequencies in use
- Sector Chief assignments and positioning
- Status of operational resources
- Status of EMS resources
- Site security
- Outside agencies
- FDOC



Meeting with the Incident Commander--There is much information to be gathered from the on-scene Incident Commander. photo by FDNY Photo Unit

What strategy and tactics were used prior to your arrival? Were they successful? If not, why? Have operational strategy and tactics changed? Are the Safety Battalion and Safety Coordinator Chiefs working together to attain the same goals? Has the fire been deemed suspicious? If so, have the Fire Marshals been notified to respond? Is a Public Information Officer (PIO) needed at the incident to assist you in dealing with the news media?

Seek out information concerning the EMS command. Ascertain who is the highest-ranking EMS Officer on the scene and ensure his/her presence at the Command Post. Determine the number of standard ALS/BLS units on hand, as well as the type and number of special units--Haz-Tac ambulances, Logistical Support units (LSUs), Mobile Respiratory Treatment units (MRTUs), Major Emergency Response vehicles (MERVs). Has EMS established Forward Triage and Medical Staging Areas?

To successfully deal with site security issues, ensure that a police supervisor is present at the Command Post. Is the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) available to help coordinate multi-agency activities? What other Federal, State, local and private agencies are on-scene? What outside agencies, if any, are en route? Contact the Fire Department Operations Center (FDOC) via cellular phone for answers to these questions and more. Get a weather update. Also, confirm through FDOC that all required FDNY notifications have been made and received.

Does the building have any unique construction features? Are hazardous materials present? Have Hot, Warm and Cold Zones been established? Pick the brain of the Incident Commander you are relieving. Take advantage of the knowledge he/she has gathered managing the incident prior to your arrival. Be sure your Battalion/Division Firefighter confers with the outgoing Incident Commander's Firefighter at the Command Post to ascertain additional information regarding unit status and apparatus positioning.

### Assuming command

Seek out the Communications Coordinator (COMCORD) at the Command Post. Is this Chief Officer experiencing any communications problems? Examine the command board. Have your Firefighter copy unit positions from the board onto his/her command control chart. This chart will serve as a back-up control sheet in the event the board is accidentally compromised. Review the Incident Action Plan (IAP), if one has been formulated, to obtain a general overview of the operation. If there is no IAP, determine whether one will be needed and initiate steps to produce it in a timely manner.

Verify the positions of the Sector Chiefs via the COMCORD. Let these Chiefs contact the units under their command to verify positioning and assignments completed. What is the location of the FAST unit and CFR-D engine company? Are these units within voice contact of the Command Post? Has the previous Incident Commander repositioned them?

Note the units being held in reserve. Where are they located? Are there enough units being held in abeyance to control the fire should it increase in magnitude? Is there a need to rotate units to accomplish operational assignments? Should additional units be called for relief purposes? Are any units assigned to the incident still en route? If a Staging Area has been established, contact the Chief Officer in charge of this position for a status update.

Is the Mask Service unit present and, if so, is it located in an area accessible to all units? Where is the Recuperation and Care (RAC) unit stationed? Are additional RAC units needed? Are vol-



photo by FF Ben Colten

Assuming Command--Examine the command board.

unteer canteen organizations (American Red Cross, Salvation Army) on the scene? Is adequate artificial lighting in place at the scene? Will additional lighting be required?

### Conclusion

The intent of this article is to aid Chief Officers to better understand Incident Command continuity. It provides a sequential breakdown of significant actions. The information presented here is vital for comprehensive decision-making. The more questions asked, the more answers you will receive to aid in problem-solving. It is anticipated that the reader will ask additional questions to meet his/her needs at future operations.

Using the traditional fireground 13-point size-up acronym, COAL WAS WEALTH (construction, occupancy, apparatus/personnel, life hazard, water supply, auxiliary appliances, street conditions, weather, exposures, area, location/extent of fire, time and height), also will facilitate information-gathering. An FDNY Incident Commander is constantly evaluating external stimuli and verbal feedback to formulate progressive strategy and direct successful tactics to accomplish objectives. The importance of the Incident Commander asking intelligent questions cannot be overstated. It is an essential characteristic of a great leader.

- Assuming Command*

  - Command Post
  - COMCORD
  - Communication frequencies update
  - Command board/Command control chart
  - Incident Action Plan (IAP)
  - Sector Chief status update
  - FAST unit and CFR-D engine
  - Staging Area resource status
  - Rotation and relief of members

### About the Author...

Deputy Assistant Chief Ronald R. Spadafora is a 27-year veteran of the FDNY. He is assigned to Operations and most recently was the Assistant Chief of Fire Prevention. He holds a Masters degree in Criminal Justice from LIU-C.W. Post Center, a BS degree in Fire Science from CUNY-John Jay College and a BA degree in Health Education from CUNY-Queens College. He is an Editorial Advisor and frequent contributor to WNYF. He has taught Fire Science at John Jay College as an adjunct lecturer and is the senior lecturer for Fire Tech Promotions Inc.

