

## The two most important words on the fireground:

# "FROM" and "ON"

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Now that your people know how to communicate on the fireground (using the 4-C Communication Model), the next step for fixing communication problems begins with the 'stuff' of communication: *Words*. On the fireground *words* should mean something; often a single word can be used instead of a conversational narration.

Simple words, such as *from* and *on*, can add meaning and significance to your fireground communications and to your fireground operations.

### From and On

I believe the two most important words uttered on the fireground are 'from' and 'on.' These two unassuming words are crucial components for:

1. a competent fireground sizeup,
2. establishing the fireground operational mode, and
3. assigning fireground tactical objectives.

I'll cut to the chase: If you do not incorporate 'from' and 'on' into the communication of your fireground sizeup, the fireground operational mode, and the assignment of tactical objectives, your communications are deficient.

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### The Fundamental "From"

First of all, before discussion of how to use both words, *from* and *on*, you must first be using the word 'from' during rudimentary radio communication. In other words, when one radio connects with another radio **do not** use the word 'to'—always use 'from.'

**Example:** Truck-31 is going to connect and communicate with the Division-A Supervisor.

**Bad:** "Truck 31 to Division-A".

**Good:** "Division-A from Truck-31."

**Discussion:** Suppose that you are the Division-A Supervisor. Throughout the course of a fireground operation there is a lot of radio traffic. Most of this radio traffic is not directed at *you*. You are monitoring this background chatter but not giving it your focused attention. Amid this radio traffic you are listening for your designator: in this case your designator is “*Division-A*.” Suddenly, amid the ongoing radio banter, you hear “*Division-A*.” Because you are listening for your designator (Division-A) you only hear ‘*Division-A*,’ you likely did not hear ‘*Truck-31 to*’ Thus your response will likely be: “*Radio traffic for Division-A?*”

However, by always using *from* instead of *to*, you will know who is trying to get your attention. First you will hear your designator: “*Division-A...*” This grabs your attention; now you are listening. Next you will hear: “*...from Truck-31.*” Because Truck-31 grabbed your attention *up front* you are much less likely to key your radio to ask: “*Radio traffic for Division-A?*”

Okay, now that you are convinced — you are convinced, right? — that the use of ‘from’ is a fundamental component for good fireground communication, we will now transition to the strategic use of the two most important words on the fireground: *from* and *on*. Used in tandem, and filling in the blanks before each word, you will experience a renaissance of meaningful communication, strategic congruence, and fireground safety.

*From* and *on*; these two humble words have the power to transform the strategic competence of your fireground operations.

## Fireground Sizeup

*From* and *On* must be used routinely as part of a complete—and meaningful— fireground sizeup. Consider your arrival at a two-story house fire. Through the windshield you see smoke and fire venting *from* an upstairs window. Your initial (windshield) sizeup of fire conditions would sound like this:

“Fire venting from side-A on floor-2.”

Notice the incorporation of *from* and *on* into this initial sizeup. This is much more meaningful than simply announcing “fire showing” or “we have a fire.” Your complete *initial* sizeup would sound something like this:

“Engine-66 on-scene, large two-story house, no exposure,  
fire venting from side-A on floor-2, *also*.”

[The ‘also’ tells everybody listening that you have additional information to communicate but are pausing so that Dispatch will repeat this sound-bite before continuing your report. ‘Also’ serves as a radio communication *comma*,—not a *period*.

### “INVESTIGATING”

The word ‘investigating’ means that you are exiting the apparatus to complete your *secondary* sizeup. The purpose of your secondary sizeup is to:

- (1) determine the status of life safety, and
- (2) identify the most significant problem.

You don’t know what to do until secondary sizeup has been completed. Because you know what all the problems are, investigating is typically the initial operating mode.

After Dispatch repeats your sizeup sound-bite you continue...]

“Second engine bring a hydrant, Engine-66 investigating, initiating command, update to follow.”

### **Fireground Operational Mode**

After completing your investigation you determine that the status of life safety is *unknown if occupied*. In addition to the fire venting from the Side-A window you determine that:

1. there is not a basement,
2. floor-1 is clear and stable,
3. exposures are not threatened,
4. floor-2 is charged with smoke,
5. there is light smoke in the attic.

The most significant problems are the fire venting *from side-A on* floor-2, the smoke on floor-2, and the evidence of smoke in the attic. Given this scenario, your secondary sizeup investigation report would sound something like this:

“Engine-66 update...unknown if occupied, exposures stable, no basement, floor-1 clear and stable, floor-2 charged with smoke, light smoke from attic, fire venting from side-A on floor-2, *also*...”

After Dispatch repeats your ‘also’ sound-bite you would communicate the fireground operational mode:

“Engine-66 is Offensive from side-A on floor-2.”

The addition of *from* and *on* infuses strategic significance into the operational mode. It is not enough to simply announce that the fireground is ‘offensive.’ By itself, *offensive* merely communicates that you will be operating within the hazard area. The addition of *from* and *on* communicates from what side and on what floor you will operate.

Notice the added strategic value of a succinct yet meaningful investigation report. When you add up all the investigation information (unknown if occupied, no exposures, no basement, floor-1 clear and stable, smoke on floor-2, fire venting from side-A on floor-2, light smoke in the attic), and then establish the operational mode based on this information, you almost trip over the incident action plan.

Your incident action plan evolves from a logical progression of secondary sizeup (investigation), consideration of available resources, and establishment of the fireground operational mode. Action planning does not need to be a mystical undertaking; an action plan is a logical, sequential *mental process* that is based on sizeup information.

## Assigning Tactical Objectives

Based on the identification of fireground problems coupled with an Offensive from side-A on floor-2 operational mode, your action plan emerges:

[Because it addresses each fireground strategic priority, I refer to the following action as a ‘Strategic Priority Action Plan.’]

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY ACTION PLAN

Life Safety Objectives	Stabilization Objectives	Property Objectives	Support Objectives
Primary Search	Confine Ventilate Extinguish	Primary Salvage	Water Supply Utility Stabilization Rapid Intervention
Secondary Search	Overhaul	Secondary Salvage	Backup Staging Rehab SCBA Air Supply Scene Lighting Investigation Customer Support

As you can see, this incident requires the assignment and completion of *eight* tactical objectives and *ten* support objectives. Let’s assign one of these objectives: *Primary Search*.

Just as an ‘offensive’ mode is incomplete without the addition of *from* and *on*, the assignment of a tactical objective is incomplete without the addition of *from* and *on*. The assignment of Primary Search would be made as follows:

“Truck-31, primary search from side-A on floor-2.”

Both you and Truck-31 know *what* they will be doing, *where* they will entering the building, and *where* they will search. Truck-31’s assignment and operational mode are *strategically congruent*.

## Strategic Congruence

A *strategically congruent* fireground emerges when you incorporate the words *from* and *on* into your sizeup, into the operational mode, and into the assignment of objectives.

“*From* side-A” in tandem with “*on* floor-2” establish a strategic thread that dovetails your sizeup to the operational mode and to the assignment of objectives. This strategic thread assures incident managers and fire officers that the fireground is strategically congruent.

## **From. On.**

Neither word looks nor sounds important. However, by incorporating both words into your sizeup, into the fireground operational mode, and into the assignment of objectives, the status of these simple words is elevated.

Together these words add strategic meaning and strategic significance to your fireground.

Together these humble words will make your fireground operations more intelligent and safe.

*From* and *on* are the two most important words on the fireground.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

A fourth generation career fire fighter, BC Mark Emery is a partner with Fire Command Seattle LLC in King County, Washington. BC Emery is a National Fire Academy *Executive Fire Officer* and a National Fire Academy *Instructor Specialist*. He received a BA degree from *California State University at Long Beach*. BC Emery serves as a shift Battalion Chief with *Woodinville Fire & Life Safety District*, a *CFAI Accredited* agency near Seattle.

All that said, Mark believes that what he does for you *today* is exponentially more important than anything stuff he did *yesterday*. Feel free to communicate with Mark at [fci@usa.com](mailto:fci@usa.com).