

By MARK EMERY



The Ten Commandments

Command-ment X: Thou shall evaluate the situation, mode and plan every TEN minutes.

The master craftsman incident commander relies on a structured, systematic, strategic process to manage strategy, resources and risk. This structured, systematic process will serve reliably during most square-foot fireground operations. However, because the fireground is dynamic, not static, this strategic framework must be flexible so that the incident commander can quickly adapt to changing conditions.

The principles in “Ten Command-ments” and the *Integrated Tactical Accountability* methodology have been crafted to provide a reliable, yet nimble structured, systematic process. A strategic framework was assembled with Command-ments I through IX. Prior to Command-ment I, you were introduced to “13 Fireground Indiscretions” (*Firehouse*®, April 2006) that have caused hundreds of firefighter deaths

and injuries, as well and thousands of unreported close calls.

The “Ten Command-ments” have been crafted to help ensure that none of the “13 Fireground Indiscretions” are transgressed on your fireground. In addition, you will serve your community with a high degree of strategic professionalism. Rather than include the lack of a competent incident commander as one of the “13 Fireground Indiscretions,” they provide evidence that a competent, proactive command presence was absent.

Proactive strategists are not born, they are developed and they play by the rules of engagement. It requires hard-work, preparation, discipline and diligence to become an informed, proactive command presence. It also requires poise and confidence; poise and confidence are also not genetic, poise and confidence are a byproduct of hard-work, preparation, discipline and reliance on a structured, systematic process.

Command-ment X will provide final pieces to your strategic framework; these final pieces will help ensure that you are a proactive strategist rather than a reactive tactician. Command-ment X will offer guidelines that will help you manage an effective command post during a square-foot fireground operation. If you are willing to work-hard, prepare and trust the structured systematic process, if you routinely address each of the “Ten Command-ments” and you ensure that none of the 13 Fireground Indiscretions are transgressed, you can be referred to as a master craftsman fire officer.

Guidelines for managing an effective command post during a square-foot fireground operation.

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nd-ments

Of Intelligent & Safe Fireground Operations

The 10-Minute Clock

A key component of Command-ment X – as well as a crucial component of competent incident management – is clock management. Two National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, specifically NFPA 1500 and NFPA 1561, require dispatchers to provide 10-minute notifications to the incident commander:

NFPA 1500

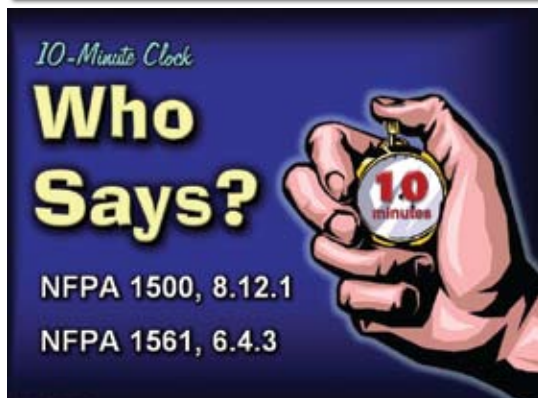
8.2.4 – The fire department communications center shall start an incident clock when the first-arriving unit is on-scene of a working structure fire or hazardous materials incident, or when other conditions appear to be time sensitive or dangerous.

8.2.4.1 – The dispatch center shall notify the incident commander at every 10-minute increment with the time that resources have been on the incident until the fire is knocked down or the incident becomes static.

8.2.4.2 – The incident commander shall be permitted to cancel the incident clock notification through the fire department communications center based on the incident conditions.

THE TEN COMMAND-MENTS

- I. Thou shall have ONE competent incident commander.
- II. Thou shall maintain teams of at least TWO personnel.
- III. Thou shall recognize THREE situations that kill firefighters.
- IV. Thou shall ensure that FOUR sides are seen and compared.
- V. Thou shall not exceed a span-of-control of FIVE.
- VI. Thou shall operate within one of SIX operational modes.
- VII. Thou shall perform the SEVEN-step action plan process.
- VIII. Thou shall make EIGHT assignments early.
- IX. Thou shall address three strategic priorities with NINE tactical objectives.
- X. Thou shall evaluate the situation, mode and plan every **TEN minutes.**



NFPA 1561

4.3.16 – The incident commander shall be provided with reports of elapsed time-on-scene at emergency incidents in **10-minute intervals** (bold emphasis by NFPA) from the ESO Communications Center, until reports are terminated by the incident commander.

A.8.2.4.1 – Common procedure is for the dispatch center to announce “incident clock is 10 minutes,” “incident clock is 20 minutes,” “incident clock is 30 minutes,” and so forth. (Author’s note: I prefer “Main Street Command, you are at 20 minutes” or simply “Main Street Command at 20 minutes.”)

The 10-minute clock addresses Fireground Indiscretion 8: Nobody watching the clock. While the 10-minute clock is an essential piece of the structured, systematic strategic framework, what the incident commander does with each 10-minute notification differentiates the proactive strategist from the reactive tactician. At each 10-

“13 FIREGROUND INDISCRETIONS”

1. Lack of knowledge and information
2. Problems not identified and/or factored
3. Inappropriate operational mode
4. No plan formulated or communicated
5. Insufficient resources (especially people)
6. No tactical accountability
7. Random, undisciplined communication
8. Nobody watching the clock
9. Poor fire-growth management
10. Span of control out of control
11. Insufficient gpm for Btu
12. Officers at task-level (especially while firefighters watch)
13. No ongoing, periodic, situation reassessment

minute notification, I recommend the following:

1. The incident commander acknowledges each notification and affirms or changes the operational mode. Examples:

“Main Street Command, copy 10 minutes, Main Street Command still offensive from side A on floor 2.”

“Main Street Command, copy 20 minutes, Main Street Command now defensive, repeat, Main Street Command now defensive.”

As the notifications pass – 20 minutes becomes 30 minutes, 30 minutes becomes 40 minutes, etc. – it will become harder and harder to broadcast “still offensive.” If after 40 minutes they’re still asking for more ventilation and additional hoselines, it could be time to punt and get the defense on the field.

2. Incident safety officers perform a fireground safety survey. This survey dovetails with Command-ment III, Thou shall identify, factor and monitor THREE situations that kill firefighters.

Any negative changes, problems or hazards are immediately communicated to the command post. Rather than add to the radio chatter, these notifications should be conducted face to face at the command post. (That is, unless the hazard is urgent and immediate action is required.)

3. The incident commander updates the Value-Time-Size assessment. Determining value, time and size are critical elements of an intelligent and safe fireground strategy.

• **Value** – Is there still value? *Who* has the most value? *What* has the most value? *Where* is the most value? Once you have determined your firefighters have the most value, *do the right thing*.

• **Time** – Do you have time to protect and preserve what you have determined has value? This involves factors such as time, distance and Btu. For example, during a high-rise operation, time and distance and Btu may make it impossible to confine a fire to the floor that is now burning. That floor no longer has

value...no value, no time...move your strategic focus to the floors above.

• **Size** – If you determine that there is still *value*, and you determine that there is *time* to preserve and protect that value, your next strategic consideration is the *size* of the operation it will require. Operational *size* includes two key resource components: *personnel* and *water*. Do you have enough personnel to start and finish the operation? Do you have enough water to start and finish the operation? If you don’t have enough personnel, water – or both – then shift your strategic focus to value that can be preserved and protected with the size of operation you can sustain from start to finish.

Another key component of *size* is how much *time* it will take to muster the resources that are necessary to preserve and protect the *value* you have identified. Sometimes, a city council or a board of fire commissioners will make your strategic decisions years before the fire happens.

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phase in progress, Division A with five.”

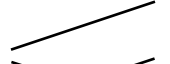
“Primary phase in progress” conveys that all objectives assigned to Division A are still in progress. “Division A with five” conveys that the division supervisor has accounted for five teams. (Recall that division and group supervisors are responsible for tactical accountability of assigned teams, team leaders are responsible for personnel accountability of team members.)

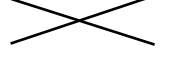
LIFE SAFETY Objectives	STABILIZATION Objectives	PROPERTY Objectives	SUPPORT Objectives
Rescue	Evacuate	Primary Salvage	Water Supply
Search & Rescue	Exposure (s)		Access/Entry
Primary Search	Confine		FDC Support
	Ventilate		RIT-SB+BU
	Extinguish		Utilities
			Standpipe Support
			Egress/Ladders
			Extension
			Traffic Control
			Lighting
			(add your own)

Competent	Incompetent
Proactive Strategist	Reactive Tactician
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed • Strategy First • Mode clear • One action plan • Play-assignments • Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uninformed • Tactics First • Mode unclear • Variety of plans • Pre-assignments • Freelancing

Legend

 = Don't forget; not yet assigned

 = In progress

 = Complete

The incident commander must also provide status reports. I refer to command post status reports as *strategic benchmarks*. It is imperative that these strategic benchmarks are recorded on tape. Thus it is imperative that command post benchmarks are conveyed through a dispatcher. For example: “Dispatch from Main Street Command, primary search all clear.” If the dispatcher repeats (*clarifies* from the 4-C communication model) the benchmark, then you are assured it has been recorded and time-stamped. There are three reasons why you want to have command post strategic benchmarks recorded:

1. **Legal** – If there is any question about if or when an action or event took place, the time-stamped recording will provide evidence.
2. **Training** – Recorded, time-stamped benchmarks provide valuable time-line information for conducting an after-action/post-incident review session.
3. **Redundancy** – If anybody missed your benchmark announcement, they'll likely hear the dispatcher's clarification.

Command Post strategic benchmarks include:

- Name and location of the command post (when establishing or assuming command)
- Water supply established
- The operational mode
- Apparatus park or base

- Personnel report to staging (temporary at the command post or location of formal staging area; recall that rehab is co-located with staging)
- Utilities stabilized
- Divisions, group or branch established
- 10-minute operational mode updates
- Rapid intervention team or group established (recall that is also means you now have a backup team protecting egress)
- Primary search in progress
- Safety officer established
- Rescue (or search and rescue) in progress
- Rescue (or search and rescue) complete
- Primary search “all clear”
- Evacuation in progress/complete
- Exposures stabilized
- Primary phase in progress
- Primary phase complete
- Secondary phase in progress
- Secondary phase complete

The Action Plan Template

On page 90, you will find my one-page Incident Action Plan Template (APT) for a square-foot (building) fire-ground operation. This template will work for the majority of square-foot firegrounds (building fires) that you

respond to. I prefer to use a laminated APT that has Velcro affixed to the back. I simply pull the appropriate APT and attach it to the command post board at my command rig. I use a grease pencil or a blue (for contrast) permanent marker.

Shown below is an example of a primary phase action plan that is in progress:

(Bold text = standard offensive game plan.)

Circled objectives need to be initiated or assigned. A single diagonal line is placed through an objective when it is in progress. When an objective has been completed, the diagonal line is crossed making an X. At least once every 10 minutes you should glance at the Incident APT to quickly determine how your plan is progressing. If you don't know how things are progressing, obtain status reports. (A good primary phase rule of thumb is to obtain status reports every 10 minutes.)

Think of the APT as the strategic equivalent of the laminated game plan that you see NFL offensive or defensive coordinator using on the sideline during a football game. There's no question that the coordinator knows the playbook, he doesn't need to roam the sideline wrestling with the entire playbook. The laminated game plan, often ledger-size and crammed with information, is used

ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

FIRE

ESTABLISH COMMAND				INCIDENT MANAGEMENT			
Big Six Size-Up (F-S-VO-PO-E-A) Name and locate command post Park (or Base at) Apparatus Temporary Staging at Command Post Declare Operational Mode (Call the Play) Initiate 10-minute clock! Manage Strategy, Resources, & Risk				Strategy	Resources	Risk	
				Transitional Rescue Investigating Preparing Offensive Defensive	Third Alarm Division Group Exchange Teams Aide Staging Area	Fire Above Flashover Fire Below Construction Utilities Egress/ Ladders	
10-minute Status Reports from arrival! Announce operational mode at each 10-minutes update. Reconsider if offensive more than 20-minutes!				V-T-S Occupancy Use/Type Consult Pre-Plan	PIO Branch T-T-T-M Police/Patrol Investigator(s)	Safety Officer Rehab Medic Unit Gross Decon Traffic Control	
General Recall Second Alarm Strike Team Staff Recall Activate EOC Task Force				Gut Feeling			
PRIMARY PHASE				SECONDARY PHASE			
Life Safety	Stabilize	Property	Support	Life Safety	Stabilize	Property	Support
Rescue	Evacuate		Access/Entry	Secondary Search	Overhaul	Secondary Salvage	Rehab Lighting Investigation
S & R	Exposures		SUPPLY	CUSTOMER SUPPORT			
PRIMARY SEARCH	CONFINE	PRIMARY SALVAGE	FDC				
	VENTILATE		RIT=SB•BU				
	EXTINGUISH		UTILITIES				
			Extension	After the Fire Package	Escorted Walk-Through		
			Air Supply	Insurance Assistance	Essentials Assistance		
				Valuable Property ID	Assure Security		
“Primary Phase Complete”				“Secondary Phase Complete”			
Pre-Overhaul Safety Survey				Demobilize & Terminate Command			
PRESS RELEASE & SCHEDULE PIA							



◀◀ INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS



begun. What you do with the information and the methodology described by this series of incident management solutions is up to you, your fire department and perhaps to your region.

My hope is that this series provided a few “nuggets” that

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as a quick reference so that nothing important is overlooked or falls through the cracks during the heat of battle. Same with the APT, you don't want anything important to be overlooked or fall through the cracks during your game. Besides, the stakes are much higher for you than they are for all of the NFL offensive or defensive coordinators combined.

Call to Action

That's it, the “Ten Command-ments” series is finished...or perhaps it has just

will help you manage strategy, resources and risk. If the goal is to become an informed strategist and a master craftsman fire officer, the structured, systematic strategic framework introduced during past year is a good place to start (or at least a good source for sharpening your strategic saw).

Firefighters often represent the most value on the fireground. When you take care of strategy, you take care of your people. Once your firefighters are taken care of strategically, they will take care of “Mrs. Smith” tactically.



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