

By MARK EMERY

# The Ten Comma

## Command-ment II: Thou Shall Maintain Teams of at Least Two Personnel



**To achieve strategic benefits, a competent incident commander assigns tactical and support objectives to companies and teams. Under the direction of team leaders, teams complete the tactical work that solves strategic problems. Command-ment II identifies and describes the fundamental role and responsibility of a competent team leader.**

**Y**ou are the Engine 34 company officer and team leader. Life is good – Engine 34 is staffed with four personnel: you, a driver and two firefighters. As team leader:

1. What is your responsibility?
2. What is your radio designator?
3. To whom do you report?
4. How do you manage team member risk?
5. What are the elements of a team status (progress) report?

If your fire department doesn't have a specific answer to each question, your fireground procedures could benefit from some fine-tuning. This article will provide answers to each question.

### Company or Team?

First of all, Engine 34 is staffed and responds as a “company” (apparatus and personnel together). Once on scene, Engine 34 personnel leave the apparatus (with the possible exception of the driver) and function as a team (or crew, if you prefer). Distinguishing between company and team may appear to be splitting hairs, but the distinction is important. In the spirit of words meaning something, consider the following:

“Engine 34, report to Division C.”

Do the members of Engine 34 drive to Division C with their apparatus or leave their apparatus and walk to Division C, their hands filled with tools and spare air cylinders? To know for certain, Engine 34's team leader would have to clarify with the Division C supervisor.

Now, consider:

“Engine 34 company, report to Division C.”

This assignment means that Engine 34 – personnel with apparatus – will drive to side C and report to the Division C supervisor. (You can't simply say “Company 34 to Division C” because there may be other 34-designated apparatus at the incident.

“Engine 34 team, report to Division C.”

This means that Engine 34 personnel grab tools and spare air cylinders, leave their apparatus, walk to side C and report to the Division C supervisor.

A key element for clear, concise and disciplined radio communication is to reduce the number of words needed to convey a clear and concise radio message. Consider the following radio transmissions:

“Engine 34, I need you guys to move your rig to the rear of the building and report to the Division C supervisor for assignment.” Because it is conversational – and uses 23 words – this is not clear, concise and disciplined radio communication.

“Engine 34, report to Division C with your apparatus.” Better, but uses seven words.

Both radio transmissions contain the same basic message, but they are adorned with unnecessary words that can distract from the core message. In addition, more words mean more time with the radio microphone keyed and jaw flapping. During the course of an incident, the net benefit of trimming conversational radio “fat” can be a significant reduction in radio traffic. Now consider the concise version described previously:

“Engine 34 company, report to Division C.” Clear, concise and trimmed of conversa-

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# Commandments

## Of Intelligent & Safe Fireground Operations

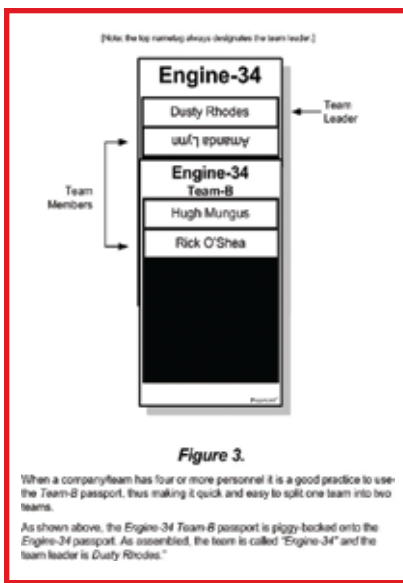
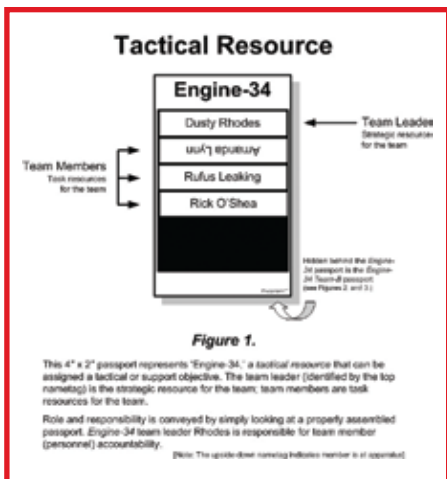
tional fat, this transmission conveys only essential information and uses just five words. Of course, this will only work if everybody knows what the words mean.

### What Is a "Team"?

A "team" is comprised of at least two personnel: a team leader and a team member. It doesn't matter if the team is staffed with two, three, four or more; the team leader will keep the team together (this is known as "team integrity"). On the fire-

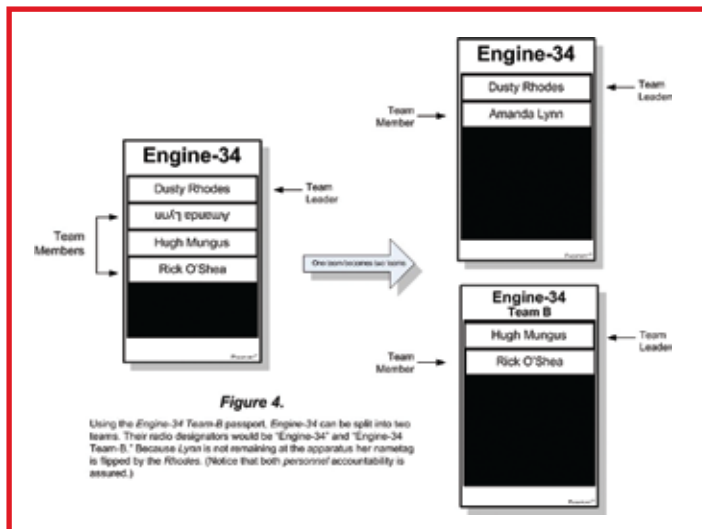
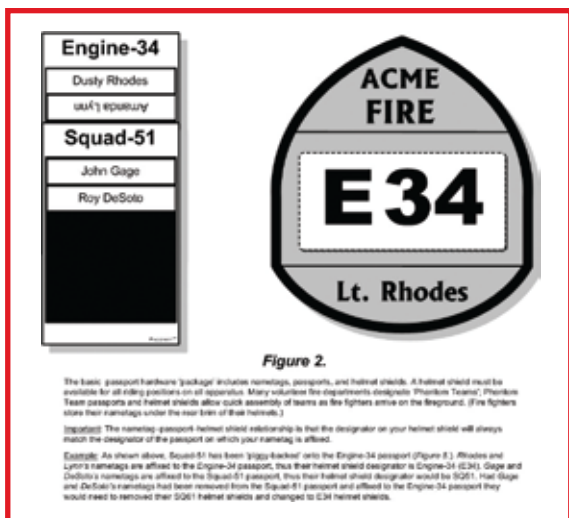
## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- 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.



ground, a company/team is represented by a passport; individual team members are represented by nametags attached to the passport (Figure 1). Figure 2 shows the relationship between individual nametags, passports and helmet shields. A large team (four or more members) should use the Team B passport. Should the need arise, this allows for quick separation into two two-person teams (Figure 3).

By proactively setting up the Team B passport, the four-member team shown in Figure 3 can quickly be separated into two two-person teams as shown in Figure 4. The passports of two separate teams, each with a team leader and a radio designator, can be "piggy-backed" to create one large team with one team leader and one radio designator (Figure 5).



Passports are ideal fire-ground accountability devices: they're not heavy, they don't require batteries, they're not toxic, there are no sharp edges and they are just about impossible to break.

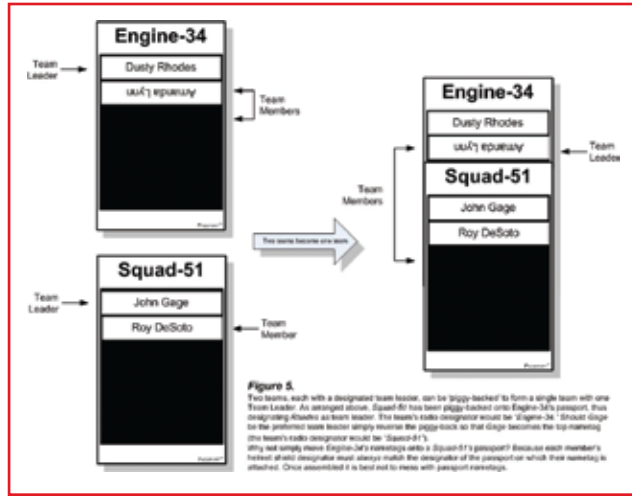
**Problem:** Personnel accountability systems are designed to quickly identify missing and dead firefighters. They are not designed to help you manage an incident.

**Solution:** Integrated tactical accountability. Every accountability system will tell you who is at the incident. A handful of accountability systems are able to tell you where people are at any given moment. Few accountability systems achieve what I call "tactical accountability." Tactical accountability tracks who, what, where, when and why.

Example:

- Who – Engine 34
- What – Primary salvage
- Where – From side A on floor 2
- When – In the hazard area 10 minutes
- Why – Main Street command is offensive from side A on floor 3

Used proactively (and with little effort), passport hardware can provide tactical accountability throughout any incident of any size. Rather than something extra you're required to do (but doesn't help you manage the incident), accountability can be woven seamlessly – inte-



grated – into your incident management system. Passports are versatile, reliable and, if you know how to use them, can become an essential action planning and incident management tool.

### Team Leader Responsibility

Most readers are familiar with the fluffy "TEAM" acronym: Together Everybody Achieves More. On the fireground, the acronym TEAM has a more significant meaning:

- Team Leaders
- Ensure that
- Accountability is
- Maintained

In other words, company/team-level "personnel accountability" is the respon-

sibility of company officers and team leaders. This is precisely where accountability of personnel should be. Hazard-area personnel accountability is NOT the responsibility of the incident commander, an operations section chief, branch directors or division/group supervisors. These individuals are responsible for ensuring that personnel accountability happens, but they should not be tasked with team-level personnel accountability. (after all, the incident commander is responsible for ensuring that the fire is extinguished, but being responsible doesn't mean that he or she should be at the business end of a hoseline).

Any incident command system (ICS) position that should manage span of control – "three to seven, five being ideal" – should not be tracking each and every firefighter operating within the hazard area. Doing so violates this most fundamental caveat of ICS.

So, just in case you missed it the first time: Team leaders are responsible for personnel accountability! If you disagree with this accountability assertion, consider the following:

- Who do team members (firefighters) report to? Team leaders, usually company officers.
- Who do team members talk to?

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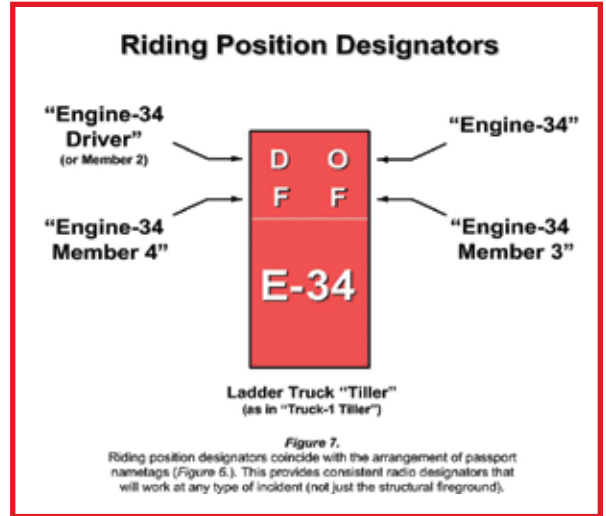
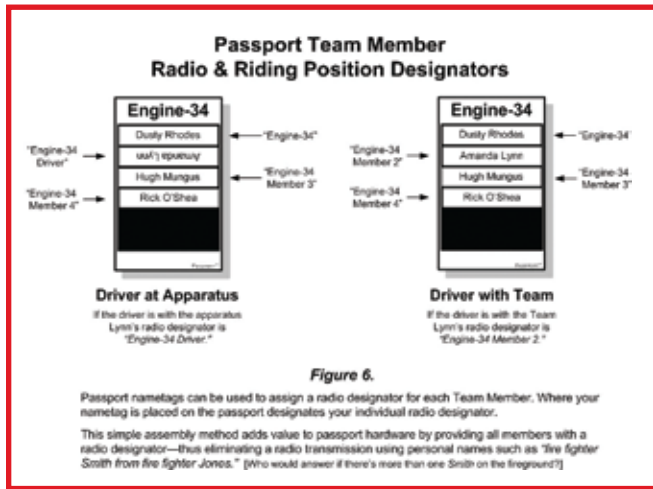
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Team leaders.

- Who directs and monitors the task-level progress of each team member? Team leaders.
- Who knows if team members need assistance? Team leaders.
- Who knows the exact location of each team member? Team leaders.

There you have it. Based on the information above, team leaders are re-

sponsible for team member accountability. Thus, the role of a team leader is to serve as the hazard area, point-of-attack, strategic resource for the team. Properly used passport accountability hardware establishes a team leader/team member relationship that dovetails with the most fundamental principle of ICS: span of control. Used properly, passports allow span of control to extend all the way

down to the team level. Used properly, passports become a vital incident management resource.

### Team Radio Designator

The following simple radio designator rules-of-thumb work flawlessly:

- Never change the radio designator of a tactical resource.
- Teams and companies are always

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called who they are. Never call a tactical resource what they are doing or where they are. No matter where they are and no matter what they are doing, Engine 34 will always be called Engine 34. Engine 34 is a perfectly good designator; don't mess with it!

❑ Consider this: Engine 34 is working inside a building. Also working inside the building are Truck 1, Engine 27 and Engine 11. The incident commander announces: "Interior from Main Street command." Who will answer? Isn't it likely that all four teams will answer? Let's say the incident commander wanted to talk to Engine 27. Doesn't it make sense that he or she transmit: "Engine 27 from Main Street command"?

❑ Consider this: Truck 16 is deployed on side B as the rapid intervention team. The rapid intervention team is activated and enters to determine the status of a team in trouble. To maintain "two-in/two-out" compliance, the incident commander quickly deploys Squad 51 as the replacement rapid intervention team on side B. The IC keys the radio and says: "Rapid intervention team from Main Street command." Who will answer? Isn't it likely that both rapid intervention teams will answer? Let's say the incident commander wanted to talk to Truck 16. Wouldn't it make sense for the incident commander to transmit: "Truck 16 from Main Street command?" Of course, radio discipline such as this will work only if you know who is there, where they are and what they are doing – tactical accountability.

❑ Always change the radio designator of a strategic resource.

❑ Strategic resources are always called what they are responsible for. If Engine 34's team leader is assigned an ICS position, he or she would no longer be Engine 34's team leader; a new team leader would be designated.

❑ Consider this: Engine 34's team leader (Captain Rhodes, Figure 1) is assigned as the supervisor of an evacuation group. Captain Rhodes' radio designator will become "Evacuation Group." Captain Rhodes' nametag is removed from Engine 34's passport and placed on the command board at the command post as evacuation group supervisor. Engine 34 would now have a new team leader or the team's passport would be piggy-backed with the passport of another team. Other examples of strategic resources include incident

safety officer, division supervisors, branch directors, operations section chief and strike team leader.

Figure 6 shows the radio designators of each Engine 34 team member. The team leader (represented by the top nametag) is always called the name of the tactical resource; in this case, "Engine 34." Individual team member

radio designators correspond to where their nametags are placed on the passport. Figure 7 shows apparatus riding position designators that dovetail with the passport nametag designators shown in Figure 6. Nametags can be arranged on the passport to show the riding position of each team member and provide a corresponding radio



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**TIPS FOR ACHIEVING AND MAINTAINING "TACTICAL ACCOUNTABILITY"**

1. NEVER send firefighters someplace without something to do when they get there.
2. NEVER give firefighters something to do without someplace to do it.
3. ALWAYS know why firefighters are doing what they are doing where they are doing it.

designator for each riding position. It's amazing how reactive accountability hardware can be used to proactively enhance your incident management capability and firefighter safety.

**Team Leader Accountability**

If you are responsible for Engine 34's team members (personnel accountability), who is responsible for you, Engine 34's team leader? The answer is simple and logical: the individual who has your Engine 34 passport is responsible for you, "Engine 34." This concept allows fireground accountability to dovetail with ICS span of control. This practice is essential for tracking the location and function of every team deployed on the fireground. Best of all, it works.

Allow me to explain: The ICS level directly above individual companies and teams is strike teams and task forces. As such, according to ICS hierarchy, company officers and team leaders report to individuals who have strike team leader or task force leader responsibility. On the typical square-foot structural fireground (as opposed to the square-mile, wildland fireground), this person is frequently a division or group supervisor. During the initial operation, and until delegated, the person with division/group responsibility is frequently the individual with command responsibility. Until division/group supervisor responsibility has been delegated, the incident commander retains division/group responsibility. (In fact, until delegated, the incident commander retains responsibility for all positions on the ICS chart.)

A logical approach that integrates passport accountability into incident management is to make it clear that team leaders always "talk to your passport." If your passport is at the Main Street command post, you will talk to "Main Street command"; should the Division 12 supervisor possess your passport, you will talk to "Division 12"; if an evacuation group supervisor has your passport, you will talk to "Evacuation Group"; if the



staging area manager has your passport you will talk to "Staging"; and so on.

**Reducing Risk To Team Members**

As the hazard area, point of attack strategic resource for the team, a team leader must "CARE" for team members. To CARE for the team, team leaders must be free to continuously monitor:

- Conditions – Monitor visibility, temperature, smoke, signs of rapid fire growth
- Air – Monitor remaining air supply (as a percentage) in relationship to time and distance
- Radio – Monitor radio for status report request, withdraw, abandon, emergency traffic, etc.
- Egress – Monitor locations for emergency egress

When functioning at task-level (operating a chain saw, operating a nozzle, pulling ceiling, etc.), it is impossible for the team leader to diligently monitor conditions, air, radio, and egress, thus enhancing team member safety. Your fire department has a major cultural problem, training problem – or both – if fire officers do task-level tasks while firefighters watch.

Where I work, we have a five-person truck company. During a garden apartment fire, the truck was assigned offensive vertical ventilation. The evening news showed a video clip of the rooftop operation shot by a news helicopter. The clip shows three firefighters at task level, executing the cut-and-remove ventilation operation, while the lieutenant stood 20

feet from the firefighters. The lieutenant was clearly a strategic resource for the team, monitoring conditions, air, radio and egress.

Although Commandment II proclaims "maintain teams of at least two personnel" (one firefighter is not a team), I believe that a team of three or four in the hazard area enables the team leader to function as the strategic resource for the team and CARE for team members. Don't forget that it is a violation of federal law for any firefighter to be alone in an immediately dangerous to life or health (IDLH) hazard area. All team members must be within touch, sight, voice or safety guide rope/tether. Portable radios do not count as "voice."

**Status Reports**

Once again, you are the team leader for Engine 34. While stabilization of a smoky fire is in progress on the top floor of a three-story office building, you and two team members are performing primary salvage on floor 2. Your Engine 34 passport is with a salvage group supervisor. Your driver's nametag is upside-down, indicating that she is with the apparatus. Three additional teams are assigned to "Salvage Group." The salvage group supervisor – with all four passports – is in the stairwell. (Passports never enter the hazard area.) You are diligently monitoring conditions, air, radio, and egress. The salvage group supervisor hails you on the radio:

"Engine 34 from Salvage Group."  
 "Engine 34."  
 "Status report."

Now what? As Engine 34's team leader, what status would you report? What is the expectation of the salvage group supervisor? If your fire department has established a structured, meaningful, company-level status report model, you should be commended; if not I recommend you adopt a model that will ensure that your status reports are structured, consistent and meaningful. I recommend PACT. (Tired of the barrage of fire service acronyms? You're certainly not required to use acronyms, but you have a better memory than I do if you can remember all these models without using the acronyms.) The status report acronym PACT represents:

- Progress – Reported as "in-progress" or "complete." It is also appropriate to report "need" and/or "recommend."

- ❑ Air – Reported as “50-minus,” “50” or “50-plus” (percent is inferred). Keep it simple; don’t split hairs by reporting 63%, 29% or 74%. The team leader reports his or her remaining air, not each member’s air; the point is for the team leader to make sure all members have enough air to safely withdraw without bells ringing. (Note: All team members are responsible for notifying the team leader when they have 50% air.)
- ❑ Conditions – Reported as “stable” or “unstable.” It is also important to report visibility and heat, and perhaps smoke; other words include “increasing” and “decreasing.” It is also appropriate to report “need” and/or “recommend.” The point is to not be surprised by a hostile fire event.
- ❑ Team – Reported as “with three” (or two or four, etc.) as in “Engine 34 with three.” The number reported includes the team leader; the word “members” is inferred. Also use the word “withdraw,” as in “withdrawing from side A with three.”

### Final Thoughts

A competently managed fireground is not an accident; competent incident management is the product of a consistent, deliberate, systematic process that begins with identification and prioritization of problems and ends with termination of the command post. Between size-up and termination there’s a lot of strategic and tactical “stuff” that needs to happen.

A competent incident commander solves problems strategically by managing strategy, resources and risk. Problems are solved tactically by competent companies and teams doing the work that provides strategic benefit. Team leaders must understand their fireground role and responsibility. Role and responsibility should be clearly defined. A consequence of random, poorly defined fireground responsibility is tactical and task-level freelancing. Likewise, a consequence of random and poorly defined command post role and responsibility is strategic freelancing. Tactical/

task-level freelancing is the direct result of strategic-level command freelancing.

### Call To Action

Competent fireground management requires that a strategic “thread” be established that extends from the command post, to division/group supervisors, to team leaders (Figure 8.) Bad, even tragic things can happen if this strategic responsibility thread is severed. Once a team leader is functioning at task-level, the strategic thread is severed; when a team leader is focused at task level, there is no longer a team leader.

Make sure that team leaders know that they are responsible for personnel accountability, for monitoring conditions, for monitoring remaining air supply, for monitoring the radio for important messages (such as “abandon the building”), for identifying alternate egress and for monitoring the progress of their assigned objective.

Next: Command-ment III – Thou Shall Recognize (and Factor) Three Situations That Kill Firefighters.



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