

Operating Guideline # 701

Incident Command

December 8, 2019



PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Operating Guideline (OG) is to outline the general duties and responsibilities of the individual who assumes the role of the “Incident Commander” at an emergency incident on behalf of the Muskoka Lakes Fire Department.

ISSUE/RATIONALE:

Managing any emergency incident requires that one person takes charge and becomes responsible for the strategic decision making that is necessary to safely mitigate the emergency. This person must possess the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities to thoroughly assess the circumstances of the event; to understand risk management principles in relation to the incident, to assess the scope of the emergency and the capability of the resources that are immediately available (and might be available through outside agencies – i.e. Mutual Aid etc.); to plan a mitigation strategy; to put resources to work effectively; and to communicate effectively to all those who will operate under their command at the incident.

GUIDELINE:

General

1. All emergency’s attended by the Muskoka Lakes Fire Department and all fire department personnel operating at these scenes will be under the command of a person designated as the “Incident Commander” (IC). The Incident Commander will have responsibility for the oversight of all fire department functions and activities and is responsible for the safety of all fire department personnel and the successful mitigation of all situations attended by the Muskoka Lakes Fire Department.
2. The officer in charge of the first arriving fire department apparatus shall initiate the command process by establishing “Command”. Where no officer is available on the first arriving apparatus, the most senior firefighter on the truck shall assume this role until an officer (Captain, Deputy Chief or Chief Officer) arrives and a transfer of command is completed.

NOTE: The IC’s role is complex and demanding and therefore the person establishing “Command” should NOT perform other operational functions (i.e. pump operator) unless no other option exists.

Establishing Command

3. The officer/person in charge of the first arriving fire department apparatus an all incidents will initiate the incident command process by announcing arrival on scene and providing a situation report or SITREP. This person becomes the Incident Commander. (SEE ALSO OG 702 – SITUATION REPORTS.)

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Maintaining Command

4. The Incident Commander (IC) should conduct an incident size-up including the completion of a 360 degree scene evaluation whenever possible. Where this is not immediately conducted because of scene priorities or other impediments, it should be done as soon as possible. In some circumstances, the IC may assign the 360 degree scene survey to someone else, but the results of the 360 should be communicated directly to the IC as soon as possible.
5. The IC should utilize a standard size-up tool (i.e. – “the rule of 8”, “SLICE-RS”, “Coal was Wealth”) to assess the situation and develop an “Initial Action Plan” (IAP) when deciding to initiate an offensive strategy, a marginal strategy, or a defensive strategy. This overarching initial strategy should be communicated to other arriving units.
6. Once the IC has developed an IAP and declared a strategy, the IC should assign work (tactical assignments) to crews and establish various “sectors” or “groups” to accomplish these assignments (SEE ALSO OG 703 – SECTORING). Examples of routinely used sectors/groups include:
 - a) Accountability
 - b) Staging
 - c) Safety
 - d) R.I.T. (Rapid Intervention Team)
 - e) Fire attack (1, 2, 3 etc.)
 - f) Rescue (1, 2, 3 etc.)
 - g) Ventilation
 - h) Water Supply
7. The IC should consider utilizing a “Tactical Worksheet” for all incidents.
8. The IC should be mindful of the passage of time as the incident progresses and with fire emergencies, generally he/she should be observing that fire conditions are improving as the fire attack presses (if conditions do not improve, this is in indication that the tactics being employed need to be altered – i.e. more water needs to be applied to the fire, ventilation needs to be improved, etc.). Crews operating within the incident command system should be mindful of the need to provide timely and regular feedback to the IC.
9. If Mutual Aid resources are contemplated, the IC must be mindful of the response time required for units responding from out of town – request these resources early.
10. The IC should be cognizant of weather conditions and particularly wind velocity and direction as it relates to fire spread or the movement of smoke or hazardous vapours.

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11. The IC should transmit “benchmarks” at the appropriate time. Benchmarks utilized include:

- a) “Agent Applied”
- b) “Search Complete – All Clear”
- c) “Fire Under Control”
- d) “Loss Stopped”
- e) “Customer Stable”
- f) “Command is Terminated”

Transfer/Termination of Command

12. Once “Command” has been established, it will generally remain with the initiating officer unless another more qualified/experienced officer subsequently attends the incident *and* the command function will be significantly enhanced by a transfer of command, *or* the initial incident commander needs relief because of the duration of the incident. More senior or experienced officers who arrive later in the incident - in most cases - may serve as advisors (act in a support role) to the incident commander, or may be given tactical assignments as necessary.

13. When a transfer of command is necessary, the existing IC must brief the new IC in a face-to-face meeting advising all pertinent information including the status of all resources, progress being made to resolving the emergency, and any safety issues that exist. Once this meeting has been completed, the new IC shall announce that a transfer of command has taken place over the radio.

14. As the incident concludes, the IC must develop a plan to clean-up and release fire department resources and return units to their quarters. Where other first responders are involved in the incident, the IC should share this information with them, and once fire department units have ceased operations and are leaving the scene, the IC should declare that “Command is Terminated” over the radio.

15. Prior to leaving the scene, the IC shall complete the necessary investigations, scene release functions, and notifications etc. that are required in order to terminate activities.

RESPONSIBILITY:

It is the responsibility of all members to comply with the provisions of this OG and particularly that Company Officers (supervisors) and firefighters (workers) ensure that they adhere to their duties in accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

REFERENCES:

- Occupational Health and Safety Act (RSO 1990, c. 0.1)
- MLFD OG 810 – Operational Level Fire investigations
- MLFD OG 823 – Post Incident Notification of Outside Agencies