

MODULE 1: THE COMMAND SEQUENCE

OBJECTIVES

The students will:

- 1. Learn about the decisionmaking and action planning process of managing company tactical operations.*
 - 2. Identify the three parts of the command sequence.*
 - 3. Identify the outcomes that follow from each of the three steps of the command sequence.*
 - 4. Identify the three incident priorities and the order in which they must be accomplished.*
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NOTE-TAKING GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

National Fire Academy (NFA) curriculum developed to assist fire officers in *Managing Company Tactical Operations*.

This course titled *Decisionmaking* is one component of a three-part series that will assist the Company Officer (CO) in developing skills for successfully and safely *Managing Company Tactical Operations*.

Successful incident management.

This course titled *Decisionmaking* is divided into five modules.

Management system: The Incident Command System (ICS).

Experience and practice.

NOTE-TAKING GUIDE

DECISIONMAKING COURSE

Designed to assist the first-arriving officer in making good decisions based on sound strategy and tactics.

Provides a step-by-step guide to developing and implementing an action plan.

Provides the basic tools to effectively manage initial response resources.

TARGET AUDIENCE

It is very important to understand that this course's material was developed for a specific target audience.

Target hazards.

NOTE-TAKING GUIDE

COURSE OVERVIEW

How to use the Student Manual.

Resources for activities.

OBJECTIVES AND OVERVIEW

The students will:

Learn about the decisionmaking and action planning process of managing company tactical operations.

Identify the three parts of the command sequence.

Identify the outcomes that follow from each of the three steps of the command sequence.

NOTE-TAKING GUIDE

Identify the three incident priorities and the order in which they must be accomplished.

NEED FOR A LOGICAL THOUGHT PROCESS

Emergency scene can be confusing.

Proactive versus reactive.

Dangers of being reactive.

Points to remember:

How to stay proactive.

NOTE-TAKING GUIDE

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMAND SEQUENCE



Incident priorities.

The command sequence--a three-step thought process.

Each step in the command sequence has an outcome.

Example.

The command sequence is a guide to action planning.

NOTE-TAKING GUIDE

Must be used at **every** incident.

SUMMARY

The CO needs to follow a logical thought process at every incident to assure that incident decisions result in an effective action plan and promote the safety of personnel.

The command sequence is a three-step thought process.

Each step has a specific desired outcome.

The entire process is based on the mission as defined by incident priorities.

NEED FOR A LOGICAL THOUGHT PROCESS

When pulling up to a structure with enough smoke and flames showing to barbecue Godzilla, that first-arriving Company Officer needs to go through a decisionmaking process to determine what actions need to be taken. Some of the more frequently used methods to make that determination include:

- Scream and panic.
- Whimper and moan.
- Stand and stare.
- Transfer command.

The emergency scene often can be both confusing and terrifying for the first-arriving officer. There is a high demand to take immediate action. There seems to be a multitude of decisions that need to be made and a minimum amount of information on which to make them, and radio traffic is at its peak, adding to the confusion.

Proactive Versus Reactive

We should understand that every incident has a leader. That leadership role can be filled initially by the first-in officer or by the incident. When the incident is the leader, it does something and we react to it. When one has insufficient experience with handling a particular type of incident, that person is most often in the reactive mode. A key indicator for this reactive mode is normally a feeling of being "overwhelmed" or "confused." In other words, there is a lack of expertise for that specific incident type. When this occurs, the Incident Commander (IC) becomes almost totally reactive to incident conditions and incident changes. The IC is constantly playing "catch-up" in the areas of strategy, tactics, resources, and action plan. The incident, through its changes, is dictating to the IC. The IC is in a reactive mode.

When the IC leads the incident, due to experience with that specific incident type, decisions are made based on prediction. Such decisions allow the IC to get "in front of" the incident changes before they happen, thereby achieving control earlier with less damage. The IC is said to be proactive. If the CO takes command and provides the leadership, problems are identified, priorities are established, resources are evaluated and used to the best of their capabilities, activities are coordinated, and

firefighter safety is protected. This officer is in the PROACTIVE mode and is fulfilling the leadership role.

Dangers of Being Reactive

The dangers of being reactive are significant. First, the officer is not meeting the responsibility to protect the safety of the firefighting personnel and citizens who may be jeopardized. If the only thought is to grab a line and "put the wet stuff on the red stuff," time is not taken to properly identify existing or potential problems and the possibility for bad things to happen is increased greatly. Coordination among companies can break down, resulting in ineffective use of resources and increased damage or spread of the incident.

Points to Remember

To help ease the pressure we place upon ourselves, there are a few points we should try to remember. When we roll out the door of the station, we are usually responding to someone else's mistake. Our job is to not compound their mistake by making mistakes of our own. If you tell yourself, "I didn't start it" and "It's not my house," it may help to place things in their proper perspective. We only get one chance to do it right so we need a logical process to follow to keep us proactive and in the leadership role.

GYST

Any decisionmaking process you may use to get into the proactive mode should start with first taking the time to gather your thoughts and getting the initial rush of adrenaline under control. A few seconds taken upon arrival to gain control of yourself before you attempt to control the fire can save hours in the history of the incident. Bad decisions made early can come back to haunt you and also result in unnecessary loss and risk to firefighter safety. So the first step in the decisionmaking process should start with GYST or Gather Yourself Together.

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMAND SEQUENCE

Incident Priorities--Mission of the Fire Service

When asked what the mission of the fire service is, the response we usually hear is "To protect life and property." That is the primary mission of every fire department and it is made clear to us from the time we first

pin on the badge until they place the flag over our coffin. Any decision-making process we use should center on our basic mission. The incident priorities clearly state our mission and our responsibility to our communities. Those priorities are:

1. Life safety.
2. Incident stabilization.
3. Property conservation.

The incident priorities serve as a reminder that our basic mission does not change and the actions we take at an incident should always reflect what those priorities are.

Life Safety

Our primary mission is to protect lives, both firefighter and civilian. The first responsibility any officer has is to safeguard the safety of the personnel under their direct supervision and to take all reasonable risk in protecting the lives of the public they serve. Life safety is always our first consideration. This priority is a key factor in the risk/benefit analysis, the most important decision in managing company operations.

Incident Stabilization

The second priority is incident stabilization. The goal of incident stabilization is to minimize the amount of damage or spread of the incident once the fire department intercedes. Fire behavior and construction type are key variables that affect your ability to stabilize an incident. To do so we must ensure the actions we take properly address the problem(s) and we use our resources in a coordinated, safe, and effective manner.

Property Conservation

The third incident priority is that of property conservation. Firefighters often think of this as the salvage and overhaul part of firefighting that takes place after the flames are knocked down and we are into cleaning up and checking for hot spots. Property conservation can start with the initial attack line that enters the building. By using effective stream management, performing aggressive ventilation, throwing salvage covers early in the incident, and committing necessary resources to protect the contents of the involved structure, property conservation can be something we consider from our initial actions to completing a thorough overhaul.

Effective property conservation measures can have a positive impact on the property owner and the community. Irreplaceable possessions can be saved, damage reduced, and the structure reoccupied within a minimum amount of time. If a commercial structure is involved, the community can benefit by jobs being saved, downtime for the business reduced, and tax dollars continuing to be generated.

The Command Sequence

Keeping the incident priorities and our mission in mind, we need to follow a logical decisionmaking process to establish and maintain a proactive mode. The command sequence offers a three-step decisionmaking model that leads the officer through the development and implementation of the incident action plan.

Step One--Size-Up

Too often we see fire companies pull up in front of an involved structure, fight over who gets the nozzle, and race to the front door to make entry. A few brief moments are not taken to GYST or make a determination as to the number or extent of the problems that may be facing the firefighters making the attack. In our business we identify this as the "moth to the flame" syndrome. By their very nature firefighters tend to be aggressive and the desire to spring into action is something that needs to be contained and controlled.

If the initial reaction is to "put the wet stuff on the red stuff," we are leaving out some key elements of any decisionmaking process. Before we ACT we first need to THINK. Size-up is the THINKING phase of the command sequence.

Definition of size-up: Size-up is an ongoing process of gathering and analyzing information critical to incident factors that lead to problem identification.

Before we take action we first need to assure our actions address the problems. Size-up is where we make our best determination as to what those problems are based on the information we have available.

Step Two--Strategy and Tactics

Operational responsibilities of Command include three levels:

- strategic level--determines overall direction of the incident;
- tactical level--assigns operational (tactical) objectives; and
- task level--completes specific tasks assigned to companies.

The strategic level is a function of the Incident Commander (IC). The IC sets the overall plan and strategic priorities.

The tactical level is a function of the Operations Section Chief. Operations selects the tactical objectives and prioritizes the accomplishment of the objectives. When an Operations Chief has not been designated, the IC must perform the tactical-level responsibilities.

When, and if, the Planning Section is established, the strategic and tactical levels of the operation should become part of the information given to the Planning Section Chief. This is vital information for Planning, since the primary function of this section is evaluating the incident and forecasting incident needs. The Planning Section also must develop alternative plans that include strategic- and tactical-level information.

The task level is a responsibility of the Company Officer (CO) and the firefighters who are performing the individual tasks that achieve the tactical objectives.

Once the problems have been identified we are ready to go on to the next step of the command sequence. The actions we take to address the problems resulting from our size-up should be based on a PLAN. The plan should first define WHAT has to be done to solve the problem. Firefighters refer to this as strategy.

Definition of strategy: Strategy consists of broad goals that constitute an overall plan to control the operation.

Having determined what has to be done, the plan should include HOW the strategy is to be met. We know this as tactics.

Definition of tactics: Tactics are specific, measurable objectives that are necessary for the achievement of the strategies.

When the strategy and tactics have been established, we have the PLANNING phase of the command sequence in place.

Step Three--Implementation

Having done our THINKING and our PLANNING we are now ready to ACT. Step three of the command sequence is the implementation of the action plan. Executing the plan will require clear, concise communications and coordinating the actions of the available resources responsible for the plan's success.

It is not until we have first completed the THINK and PLAN phases of the command sequence that we are ready to do the ACT phase that involves what firefighters like best. We can now force entry, squirt water, conduct our search, chop holes in the roof, and the other tasks that may be necessary to address the problems identified in size-up and successfully accomplish the action plan.

Results of the Command Sequence

Each step of the command sequence has a positive result.

STEP	RESULT
Size-up	Problem identification
Strategy and tactics	Action plan
Implementation	Tasks

By using the command sequence officers first THINK and PLAN before they ACT. It helps you to get into the proactive mode and assures that important considerations are not overlooked.

Must be Used at Every Incident

For a decisionmaking process to be effective it must become a matter of habit. Most of the incidents to which we respond are not of a complex nature, and by using the command sequence at the typical everyday incident we can develop good decisionmaking habits. An old axiom tells us that "under stress you will perform as you practice." If using the command sequence becomes a matter of everyday practice, decision-making becomes easier when faced with "the big one."

SUMMARY

The mission of the fire service is defined by the incident priorities, and how we function at the emergency should address that mission. The command sequence offers a logical three-step model decisionmakers can follow to help secure and keep the leadership role throughout the incident. In using this model, officers are compelled to THINK, PLAN, and ACT in that order. It gets us out of reacting in a knee-jerk manner of firefighting and into a proactive mode that makes the most effective use of available resources and protects the safety of our personnel.

Activity 1.1

Need For A Logical Thought Process

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to place the following six steps in proper order of accomplishment.

Directions

Reorder the following activities in the order that you perform them:

Problem Identification _____

Action Planning _____

Implementation _____

Tasks _____

Size-up _____

Strategy and Tactics _____

