Command Officer Development for the

Prince George’s County Fire/EMS Department

EXECUTIVE ANALYSIS OF FIRE SERVICE OPERATIONS IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

By: Jerome F. LaMoria

Prince George’s County Fire/EMS Department

Prince George’s County, Maryland

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ABSTRACT

The problem is Prince George’s County Fire/EMS Department does not have a developmental process for command officers.

The purpose of this action research was to develop training for incident commanders. Three research questions were developed:

What difficulties do command officer’s face?
What training programs exist for emergency scene command?
What methods do other departments utilize?

A survey revealed the difficulties officers faced in meeting challenges of incident command. Literature research and interviews identified programs available to prepare command officers and methods organizations use in officer development.

The research illustrated a need for training to prepare officers for challenges of commanding incidents and include a mentoring program.

A syllabus was developed for peer review. Additional recommendations include utilization of a Command Competency Program like Montgomery County Maryland and the development of a guidebook for mentoring newly promoted command officers.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................................................. 3
INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................................................... 7
BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE .................................................................................................................. 8
LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................................................................................................... 12
PROCEDURES ..................................................................................................................................................... - 19 -
  LIMITATIONS ...................................................................................................................................................... - 22 -
RESULTS .............................................................................................................................................................. - 23 -
DISCUSSION ....................................................................................................................................................... - 29 -
RECOMMENDATIONS ..................................................................................................................................... - 31 -
  Recommendation 1 ........................................................................................................................................... - 31 -
  Recommendation 2 ........................................................................................................................................... - 32 -
  Recommendation 3 ........................................................................................................................................... - 32 -
  Recommendation 4 ........................................................................................................................................... - 32 -
APPENDIX B ........................................................................................................................................................ - 38 -
APPENDIX C ........................................................................................................................................................ - 39 -
APPENDIX D ........................................................................................................................................................ - 40 -
APPENDIX E ........................................................................................................................................................ - 42 -
APPENDIX F ........................................................................................................................................................ - 45 -
CERTIFICATION STATEMENT .......................................................................................................................... - 47 -
INTRODUCTION

The problem is the Prince George’s County Fire/EMS Department (PGCFEMSD) does not currently have a developmental process for command level officers.

The purpose of this research is to develop, and propose for implementation, a training curriculum specific to the PGCFEMSD that will prepare personnel to properly and safely function as an emergency scene incident commander.

Research completed in 2005 by this author described the problem of ineffective incident command functions, as it exists in the PGCFEMSD. This descriptive research utilized data from several comprehensive reports prepared in the aftermath of serious firefighter injuries and a line-of-duty death occurring within the PGCFEMSD. A primary recommendation from this research included the establishment of a command officer training program specific to the operations at the PGCFEMSD.

Action research methodology will be utilized to develop a Command Officers Curriculum for the PGCFEMSD. The end product of this research will be a curriculum package including instructional objectives, key learning points and course outline (syllabus) ready for peer review and adoption. Through literature research and review I will determine the applicable content based upon best practices, standards and/or vocational course content. A survey will be sent to promoted command officers to identify what material is helpful to become an effective emergency scene incident commander. Personal interviews will be administered to individuals who have developed training programs for command officers. The following research questions have been developed to guide the project:

What difficulties do newly promoted command officers face in meeting challenges of their new position?
What training programs currently exist to prepare command officers to effectively perform emergency scene command?

What methods do other departments similar in make up utilize to prepare command officers?

**BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The PGCF/EMSD has experienced firefighter line-of-duty deaths and many serious firefighter injuries in recent history that can be attributed, in part, to failures in the incident command functions. In addition to the “high-profile” incidents resulting in firefighter deaths and injuries there have been many more accounts of incidents that have been negatively impacted by ineffective incident command functions. Many of these incidents went unreported or were never investigated (LaMoria, 2005).

Prior research by the author focused on four incidents, which resulted in one firefighter fatality and three potentially fatal injuries. Each of these reports indicated failures in the incident command system or a failure in the incident commander’s ability to handle the incident (LaMoria, 2005). Since the research was completed in 2005 there have been three additional incidents that resulted in several significant firefighter injuries. The departmental documents produced in the aftermath of each of these incidents clearly illustrate failures and weaknesses in incident command functions or decision-making by the incident commander. Taking no action to address these issues only makes them predictors of tragic events yet to occur.

The great majority of serious accidents are both predictable and preventable, and predictability is directly related to experience. Most fatal incidents and serious injuries can be traced to a series of contributing factors that come together to produce a highly undesirable outcome. Those individual contributing factors make themselves evident over
a period of time through minor mishaps and near-miss incidents that should, in an ideal
world, cause fire chiefs and safety officers to identify problems and implement corrective
actions. For every tragic outcome there could be 10 or 100 warning events. (Routley,
2005)

The Prince George’s County Fire/EMS Department (PGCF/EMSD) has utilized an
Incident Command System since the early 1980’s. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was
established in 1983 that formalized the incident command system. At the inception of the SOP,
training was provided to personnel to familiarize them with the system. Beyond the initial
training, and sporadic training for periodic revisions, there has been little formal departmental
training for fire ground commanders in the use of the ICS and in developing abilities in
commanding emergency incidents (Poole, 1998). Most revision or additions to SOP’s have been
merely placed in print and distributed to the workstations without formalized training.

Historically, the PGCF/EMSD has relied upon a person's own motivation and the
mentoring of superiors to prepare its personnel for the demands and challenges of command
level positions. Depending on how motivated or knowledgeable the superiors and the employee
are, the level of experience, training, and skills of potential command officers can be highly
inconsistent (LaMoria, 2005).

Another source of inconsistency comes from the career/volunteer combination make-up
of the department and the geographical location. The PGCF/EMSD is located in the Washington
DC Metropolitan area where there are many other career fire departments. Many of the
PGCF/EMSD volunteer command level officers are employed with these other departments
where they are trained and operate under different guidelines. These customs and procedures
may be valid and based on sound principles yet they may not always coincide with the
PGCF/EMSD.

Supervision at the battalion level has been a slow evolution in the PGCF/EMSD. In 1966
when the PGCF/EMSD was formed, stations were supervised by unit officers carrying the rank
of Sergeant and were responsible for the operations of a single company in their area. Captains
were assigned to staff positions only with no operational authority. Battalion level supervision
began in 1974 when the department was divided into six battalions (Bosanko, 1990). Captains
were assigned to manage the battalions and given the title of “Battalion Captain”. The position of
Battalion Captain was primarily a managerial position with relatively little emergency scene
responsibility. During this time the career force of the PGCF/EMSD mainly consisted of day
work positions which supplemented a volunteer force. It was commonplace for volunteer chief
officers to command most structural fires. As the department continued to grow and responses
increased, additional battalions were added to reduce the span of control. By the 1990’s there
were nine battalions with each being staffed by a Captain working a “day-work schedule” of
eight hours Monday through Friday. An additional position called the “Staff Operations Officer”
was staffed with a “shift-work” captain who worked a twenty-four-hour shift. This Staff
Operations Officer was responsible for the supervision of personnel working the twenty-four-
hour shift and for notification to departmental command staff personnel (Finamore, N.C.,
Personal Communications, October 10, 2007)

It was in 1992 that the rank of battalion chief was instituted in the PGCF/EMSD. A
change in the rank structure eliminated the lowest level company officer rank of Sergeant. All
 Sergeants were promoted to Lieutenants, Lieutenants were promoted to Captains and the position
of Battalion Captain was changed to Battalion Chief. As the community grew, and responses
increased, the availability of volunteer command officers dwindled. The role of the “Battalion Commander” evolved from a mostly managerial position to a position with a primary responsibility of incident scene command. It is now commonplace for the Career Battalion Chief to be the incident commander.

Today the department is divided into seven battalions with five being staffed by a career Battalion Chief working a twenty-four hour shift. The number of Battalion Chief positions has grown from a total of thirteen in 1992 to twenty seven today. With the addition of more positions as battalions are covered on a twenty-four-hour basis and attrition through retirements it has not been uncommon to promote ten or more Battalion Chiefs in a single year. Promotions at this rate have resulted in personnel attaining the rank of Battalion Chief at an earlier age and with relatively less experience (Finamore, N.C., Personal Communications, October 10, 2007).

The current promotional process for fire officers at the PGCF/EMSD includes an Officer Candidate School (OCS) to develop the abilities of company level officers (Lieutenants). Candidates who have passed a written test and practical assessment centers are sent to the OCS where they receive the Fire Officer I & II Curriculum. After this training is received and the promotion to Lieutenant is made, no additional training is required as officers ascend the ranks. An individual can be promoted to Battalion Chief or Major without ever receiving more than a Fire Officer II class.

This applied research project supports the primary goal of the Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management, which is to prepare senior fire officers in the administrative functions necessary to manage the operational component of a fire department effectively. The improvement of incident command functions should provide a safer and more cost effective operation that would benefit internal and external customers. The changes this
research identifies will challenge the organizational culture of the PGCF/EMSD and may require a significant change in tradition.

This applied research project is directly related to the goals and objectives of many prominent fire service organizations. The project relates directly to the United States Fire Administration’s operational objective of reducing firefighter death and injuries by twenty five percent. It also relates to the program goals of the NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program by establishing recommendations to prevent future death and injuries. Most currently, this research project is directly related to three of the sixteen Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives developed by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation:

1. Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety; incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility.

2. Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management at all levels, including strategic, tactical and planning responsibilities.

3. Develop and implement national standards for training, qualifications and certification (including regular recertification) that are equally applicable to all firefighters based on the duties they are expected to perform.

**Literature Review**

The objectives of the literature review were to identify training programs that assist incident command officers in gaining proficiency, and to identify how other departments have developed the skills of incident command officers.

On March 1, 2004, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to provide a comprehensive national approach to incident
management, applicable to all jurisdictional levels across functional disciplines. The NIMS provides a consistent nationwide approach for Federal, state, tribal, and local governments to work effectively and efficiently together to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity. The Homeland Security Presidential Directive, which preceded this, specified a timeline for compliance with mandated training for anyone involved in response activities. Building on the foundation provided by existing incident management and emergency response systems used by jurisdictions and functional disciplines at all levels, this document integrates best practices that have been proven effective over the years into a comprehensive framework for use by incident management organizations in an all-hazards context nationwide (NIMS, 2004).

A basic premise of the National Response Plan (NRP) is that incidents are generally handled at the lowest jurisdictional level possible. Police, fire, public health and medical, emergency management, and other personnel are responsible for incident management at the local level. In the vast majority of incidents, state and local resources and interstate mutual aid normally provide the first line of emergency response and incident management support (DHS, 2004).

Although the implementation of the National Incident Management System is not specifically a training program for the development of incident commanders, it is a major training initiative of nationwide significance for the fire service (Lindstrom, 2006).

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) produced the Officer Development Handbook in 2003. They defined Professional Development as:

“the planned, life-long process of education, training, self-development and experience” (IAFC).
It is important to note the four distinct elements that make up the definition. This handbook is formatted using these four elements for each of the four officer levels, supervising officer, managing fire officer, administrative fire officer and executive fire officer. Each of the four officer levels corresponds to the National Fire Protection Associations (NFPA) 1021 - Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications. At each of the four officer levels, recommendations are given for each of the four elements, training, education, experience and self-development. The handbook provides a matrix or “road map” if you will, to assists the user in establishing a systematic program of development. It is stressed in this document that it is the combination of the four elements, education, experience and self-development that leads to true proficiency.

“You should clearly understand that your objective is not the credential but rather the knowledge, skill, or ability to which the credential attests. The credential documents your achievements and is, therefore, an essential component (IAFC p.5)”.

The Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute (MFRI) is the lead agency for fire service training in the State of Maryland and operates under the University of Maryland System. The officer development series consists of four courses designed to satisfy the requirements of NFPA 1021 Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications (Fire Officer Level I through IV).

“It can not be stated forcefully or frequently enough that this course is only a foundation for developing quality fire officers. Professionalism and efficiency as a fire officer requires constant attention, maintaining and refining skills, familiarization with current trends and standards, seeking advanced educational opportunities, and faithfully perusing personal improvement.” (MFRI, Preface, 2006).

In a telephone conversation, Ron Hasson, Curriculum Development Officer for MFRI conferred the officer development series provides necessary knowledge skills and abilities to meet the standards set forth by NFPA 1021 and a ladder for credentialing of fire officers. He
further stated these fire officer courses should be used in conjunction with each individual’s self-development plan.

“Full development of the fire officer’s ability requires continuous learning through practical experience and study” (MFRI, 2005)

National Fire Protection Associations (NFPA) 1021 - *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* identifies the minimum Job Performance Requirements (JPR) for service as a fire officer and specifies four levels of progression being Fire Officer I-IV. Each level of progression contains six sections being; Human Resource Management, Community and Government Relations, Administration, Inspection and Investigations, Emergency Service Delivery, and Health and Safety. Each of the sections list JPR’s specific to that area and the requisite knowledge and skill required. The amount of JPR’s and requisite knowledge and skill that relates directly to incident command abilities of an individual is a very small portion of this standard. Examples of JPR’s that relate directly towards incident command abilities, for the Fire Officer I level under section 4.6 Emergency Service Delivery:

4.6.3 - Implement an action plan at an emergency operation, given assigned resources, type of incident, and a preliminary plan, so that resources are deployed to mitigate the situation.

The requisite skill for this JPR is:

The ability to implement an incident management system, to communicate orally, to manage scene safety, and to supervise and account for assigned personnel under emergency conditions.

National Fire Academy’s *incident management curriculum* consists of five resident courses dealing with the command, control and decision making for emergency operations. The courses address command functions and disaster management for natural and man-made
incidents. These courses meet a variety of NIMS requirements at many levels. Much of the information utilized in the establishment of NIMS and the NRP came from the USFA and the course material of the incident management curriculum (USFA, 2007).

Courses are designed to be interactive using lecture, simulations, scenarios, and student participation as instructional methodologies. Operational applications in the Incident Command System (ICS), command and control, decision-making, strategic and tactical considerations, pre-incident preparation, documentation, and post incident analysis are topics covered in most of the courses. Throughout the courses, students are presented with a series of senior-staff-level issues requiring extensive analysis and action. Several very intense simulations and case studies are used to depict and review incidents and give students valuable experience in applying skills. A joint simulation exercise included with the Emergency Management Institute is included with courses dealing with disaster and/or terrorist incidents. The joint simulation is conducted so students can experience and practice the necessary coordination between Incident Command functions and Emergency Operations functions (USFA, 2007).

Research conducted in 2007 by Bilger, Gill and Strain evaluated the need for a standardized battalion fire chief guidebook for fire service organizations within the Washington Metropolitan and Baltimore Metropolitan regions. This research disclosed there are very few fire service organizations having formalized chief officer development programs. Although development is obtained by newly promoted battalion fire chiefs through practical and on the job experiences, what is evident is most jurisdictions surveyed in this research project fail to provide any kind of formal transitioning training to newly promoted battalion fire chiefs or soon to be promoted battalion fire chiefs.

“Many fire service organizations falsely make the correlation that providing Officer Candidate School (OCS) to newly promoted line officers is adequate when these
officers are preparing to assume roles as newly promoted battalion fire chiefs” (Bilger et al. 2007).

This confirms previous research by the author in 2005 which found that much of emergency incident command proficiency comes from experience and on-the-job training (LaMoria, 2005). Vincent Dunn wrote in 1999, “a chief learns life-and-death decision making in the fire service the same way he learns any other skill-by study and by practical application. First, he begins as an apprentice. He’ll watch others and learn. Next, he’ll become a journeyman. This means that, after years of study, he’ll know how to make decisions, but he’ll lack experience. Finally, after several more years, if he makes good decisions and causes no disasters, he may become a master of his profession” (V. Dunn, 1999, p. 16).

The author conducted three interviews as part of this research project. The first two interviewees were chosen based upon their experiences developing training programs for command level officers. A third interview was conducted with a retired command officer from the PGCF/EMSD who provided important historical perspective of the evolvement of the Battalion Chief’s position.

An interview was conducted with Battalion Chief John Salka of the Fire Department City of New York (FDNY) who was one of the developers of the FDNY’s Battalion Chiefs Training Program. He is the author of the text book, First in, Last out, Leadership Lessons from the New York Fire Department. The interview was centered around information of the content of the FDNY’s Battalion Chiefs Training Program, its origin, development, length, delivery method and its effectiveness. The interview was significant for the research as it solidified the importance in including mentoring as a part of the learning process.

A second interview was conducted with Captain Chuck Bartlett who is the Command Development Training Center Coordinator for the Montgomery County, Maryland Department of Fire and Rescue Services (MCFRSD). Captain Bartlett has been involved with the very recent
development and implementation of that departments Command Competencies Program (CCP) instituted by Fire Chief Thomas Carr. The CCP has been implemented for the purpose of establishing a standard for the knowledge, skills and abilities for which all command level officers must demonstrate. This interview is significant to this research because of the nearly identical comparison of the MCFRSD and the PGCF/EMSD. These two departments share a common geographical border in a very diverse urban and sub-urban area located adjacent to the Nations Capital, Washington, DC. Both departments are combination career-volunteer departments operating in an Executive Council style of County Government. Both cover a geographical area of nearly 500 square miles and a population between three-quarter and one million people. Each department handles between one hundred and fifteen thousand and one hundred and twenty five thousand emergency incidents a year (Internet, 2007). The departments share the commonality of having an integrated chain-of-command that shares responsibility between career and volunteer officers at every operational level.

The CCP is a novel and innovative approach for providing the MCFRSD a method to ensure command officers have a standard competency level. The method is simple and easy to use and reaches all users through an on-line, web-based system. The approach serves to be a self-development tool where participants either know the answer or are directed to the material where they obtain the answer themselves. The material is specific to the MCFRSD operations, policy and procedures and serves to address NIMS compliance. The process is gaining acceptance from all levels of the organization and has “raised the game” of personnel in the organization (Bartlett, 2007).

Nicholas Finamore, a retired employee of the PGCF/EMSD recounted much of the history of the development of the PGCF/EMSD during an interview on October 10th, 2007. In 1970, he was one of the first of four Captains promoted in the department and was deeply
involved in the development of the career fire service until his retirement as Deputy Fire Chief in 1991.

The literature review revealed a wealth of information could be found describing the function, operation and administration of ICS and NIMS. In contrast, very little information or research exists in regards to the development of the abilities or skills, specifically decision-making skills, of emergency scene incident commanders. Most officer development has been established around the meeting of standards such as NFPA 1021. A very small portion of this standard relates directly to incident command and decision-making abilities of the individual.

The need for a training curriculum specific for the development, or the improvement, of incident command abilities for command level officers is a priority specific to the PGCF/EMSD. Documented incidents resulting in firefighter fatalities and injuries attributed to failures in incident command functions establish the urgency of this initiative (LaMoria, 2005). The attrition rate has resulted in rapid promotion of personnel to command positions with less experience than their predecessors (Finamore, N.C., Personal Communications, October 10, 2007). One of the most critical factors in crisis management is the skill of the incident commander (Arbuthnot and Flin, 2002, p. 3).

**PROCEDURES**

A key element to this research was a comprehensive survey of all career fire officers with the rank of Captain, Battalion Chief or Major that are currently employed with the PGCF/EMSD. The internal survey allowed the author to view how Battalion Chiefs, potential future Battalion Chiefs and the direct supervisors of Battalion Chiefs viewed the effectiveness of the organization’s developmental process for the position. The survey asked open-ended questions of current incident commanders about their development and preparedness. All survey responses were carefully considered and categorized into results for comparison. The raw responses were collated and typed into an Excel® spread sheet and maintained by the author. Utilizing the three
levels of officers allowed for data triangulation. According to the Online Writing Lab (OWL) from Purdue University, “triangulation data is when a piece of data, a finding, or a generalization is able to be verified with several different research methods. This helps add to your credibility and makes your findings stronger” (OWL).

The results of this survey gave the author insight into what the officers within the organization felt were the strengths and weaknesses of the developmental process for incident commanders. The results helped to guide the development of the training curriculum.

An interview was conducted by the author on June 10th, 2007 with Battalion Chief John Salka of the Fire Department City of New York (FDNY) while he was in Prince George’s County Maryland conducting a Seminar for the Professional Fire Fighters Union Local 1619. Chief John Salka was chosen for this interview for two reasons. He is the author of the text book, *First in, Last out, Leadership Lessons from the New York Fire Department* which is a study reference for the Battalion Chiefs promotional process at the PGCF/EMSD. The second reason was that he was one of the developers of the FDNY’s Battalion Chiefs Training Program. The interview lasted about two hours and information was gleaned about the content of the program, its origin, development, length, delivery method and its effectiveness. The information sought, along with a summarization of the answers are provide in Appendix D.

A casual discussion lasting several hours occurred after the formal interview where much information was shared about the FDNY’s operations and specifically incident command and fireground leadership.

What Chief Salka described is a developmental battalion chiefs training program consisting of three to four weeks. The length of the program can vary from cycle to cycle depending on funding, staffing or any number of issue’s. The program consists of classroom instruction, simulator exercises and a mentoring period where participants spend time with seasoned Battalion Chiefs. The origin of this program stems from a period of time ten to twelve
years ago when eleven line-of-duty deaths occurred in the span of twenty-two months. As a result, the FDNY developed and implemented several programs designed for “back to basics” instruction for safe practices at all levels of operation from “probie” to command level.

The content of the instructional portion of the program consist of operational and administrative topics. Some of the operational topics include; Safety Battalion, Hi-rise, target hazards, specialty teams and hazardous materials. Several simulators and table top exercises are conducted where participants practice fireground command functions.

A second interview was conducted with Captain Chuck Bartlett of the Montgomery County (Maryland) Fire and Rescue Services (MCFRS) on September 20th, 2007. Captain Bartlett is the Command Development Training Center Coordinator. The interview took place at Captain Bartlett’s office, lasted about two hours and included a tour of the training center facilities. The author was referred to Captain Bartlett after originally requesting an interview with Assistant Chief Mike Clemens after seeing his presentation of the program MCFRS Command Competencies – Are You Walking the Talk? at the July 2007 Firehouse Expo®.

Through this interview it was learned the MCFRSD has implemented a program where each command level officer, regardless of their affiliation (career or volunteer), must complete a Command Competencies self-evaluation and take part in a command exercise. This initiative was put into place to ensure all command officers have demonstrated knowledge, skills and abilities to a minimum standard. It was also learned that the MCFRSD utilizes a Battalion Chiefs Orientation to prepare career officers for their promotion from Captain to Battalion Chiefs. The information sought, along with a summarization of the answers are provide in Appendix E.

Nicholas Finamore, a retired Deputy Fire Chief, was interviewed in the office of the 5th Battalion on October 10th, 2007 for about an hour-and-a-half. There were no interview questions per se. Retired Deputy Chief Finamore recounted much of the history of the development of the PGCF/EMSD from its beginning in 1966. In 1970, he was one of the first four Captains
promoted in the department and was deeply involved in the development of the career fire service until his retirement in 1991.

LIMITATIONS

The effect of incident command functions on the outcome of an emergency incident defies objective measurement. The review of incident reports and documentation becomes subjective in nature. This review also makes assumptions that the information is truthful, comprehensive, unbiased and correctly recorded. The limitation of subjectivity is also present in the survey results of departmental employees. The survey responses were screened to eliminate biases and responses that where not relevant to the research. As an example, part of question seven of the Battalion Chiefs survey asked about the “weaknesses of the department”. The purpose of the question was to determine the weaknesses in the area of incident management and command. Several of the respondents reported, “staffing” as a weakness of the department. Although insufficient staffing is certainly an operational weakness, it does not necessarily relate to the intended research.

DEFINITIONS

Command Officer – fire department officers who have command authority and/or responsibility for directing multiple unit responses (3 or more units). For most departments this will mean Battalion Chiefs and above.

Incident Commander. The individual who is in overall command of an incident pursuant to the local jurisdiction's Incident Command System (ICS).

Incident Command System. An organized system of roles, responsibilities, and procedures used to manage emergency incidents.

Incident Management System (IMS). A system that defines the roles and responsibilities to be assumed by personnel and the operating procedures to be used in the management and direction of emergency operations.
**Fire Officer I.** The fire officer, at the supervisory level, who has met the job performance requirements, specified in the standard for Level I (NFPA 1021).

**Fire Officer II.** The fire officer, at the supervisory/managerial level, who has met the job performance requirements, specified in the standard for Level II (NFPA 1021).

**Fire Officer III.** The fire officer, at the managerial/administrative level, who has met the job performance requirements, specified in the standard for Level III (NFPA 1021).

**Fire Officer IV.** The fire officer, at the administrative level, who has met the job performance requirements, specified in the standard for Level IV (NFPA 1021).

**Job Performance Requirement (JPR).** A statement that describes a specific job task, list the items necessary to complete that task, and defines the measurable or observable outcomes and evaluation areas for the specific task.

**RESULTS**

**Question 1.**

What difficulties do newly promoted command officers face in meeting challenges of their new position?

The internal survey was utilized to answer this question. The survey was conducted with Battalion Chiefs, Captains and Majors and asked open-ended questions on the strengths and weaknesses of the developmental process for incident commanders. Utilizing the three levels of officers allowed for data triangulation in an effort to help validate the results.

There are thirty-eight promoted Captains and each was sent a survey by electronic mail. Twenty-two were returned resulting in a fifty-eight percent return. The respondents reported the main source of incident command training came from OCS. Only twenty-seven percent had received any additional training and only two of the twenty-two respondents had attended any training from the NFA.
Thirty-six percent of the respondents felt mentoring from seasoned Battalion Chiefs was an important component of command officer development.

Nearly half, (41%) thought the study of promotional material was an ineffective method of officer development.

Lack of experience (32%) was listed as the greatest weakness in regards to managing incidents and functioning as the Incident Commander followed by a lack of confidence (18%). Losing a firefighter was the largest concern (41%) in regards to functioning as the incident commander followed by safety (18%), being unprepared (18%) and the fear of making mistakes (14%).

Officer training and development (45%) was listed as the greatest weakness of the department followed by an unclear chain-of-command (27%).

The respondents felt having mentors (41%) and acting as a Battalion Chief (36%) provided valuable experience for them in functioning as an incident commander. Busy assignments (23%) and additional training taken on their own initiative (18%) were also listed as valuable experiences. The majority of the respondents, sixty-eight percent, felt they lacked experience in actually commanding incidents.

Simulator exercises and drills (55%) topped the recommendations for methods of improvement followed by a mentoring program (41%), leadership training (18%) and strategy/tactics classes (14%).

Seventy-seven percent of the respondents did not know of any additional training programs that were available to benefit themselves or the department.

Other recommendations offered by the Captains included the development of a Battalion Chiefs training school (41%) and the establishment of a mentoring program with senior Battalion Chiefs (32%). Another response worthy of mention from a single respondent was an officer exchange program with other departments.
There are twenty-two promoted Battalion Chiefs and each was sent a survey by electronic mail. Fourteen were returned resulting in a sixty-four percent rate of return.

OCS remains to be the largest source of incident command training with only twenty-nine percent of respondents receiving any additional training. Only four respondents had received training from the NFA. None of the training was a part of the Battalion Chiefs promotional process. The majority of respondents (71%) felt the study of promotional material was not an effective training method for the position of Battalion Chief.

ICS training (71%) was reported to be the most essential material for newly promoted Battalion Chiefs followed by a clear expectation of the position (43%). Safety, administrative tasks and human resource skills were also listed.

Respondents reported what would have been most helpful was some type of a guide book for Battalion Chiefs (43%) that gave clear expectations along with guidance on administrative tasks (29%).

Being in command of previous incidents (43%) was considered to be the most beneficial experience in preparation for promotion to the command officer level followed by the mentoring from previous officers (29%). Dealing with special operations (57%) followed by hi-rise procedures (29%) was reported, as the areas respondents felt least experienced with.

Respondents reported lack of experience (29%) and communication skills (29%) as being their two greatest weaknesses. Managing emergency scene accountability was also listed as a weakness.

The largest concern of being in command of an emergency incident was handling a MAYDAY (86%) situation.

Weaknesses of the department were described as operational discipline (43%), lack of officer development (43%) and accountability (29%).
Recommendations for improvement included an officer mentorship program (71%), an OCS for Battalion Chiefs (43%) and continuing education for command officers (29%). It was also suggested that in-service training take place to include simulator exercises for all Battalion Chiefs.

There are a total of ten promoted Majors and all of them received the survey through electronic mail. A total of four responses were returned resulting in a forty percent rate of return.

In addition to the training from OCS, half of the respondents reported having received FOIII training and the NFA command & control classes.

Training on the Incident Management System (67%) was reported as the most essential material for newly promoted command officers, followed by material related to handling of MAYDAY’s (50%).

All of the respondents felt the use of study material for the promotional process was not an effective training method for command officers.

The respondents reported their largest concern of managing incidents was accountability (75%), followed closely by operational discipline. They also reported crew integrity was the biggest operational weakness of the department.

Fifty percent of the respondents reported the experience of commanding incidents benefits them the most in regards to functioning as an incident commander. Conversely, they also reported that experience commanding a large incident was the experience they lacked the most.

Suggestions for improvement included establishing a mentoring program for command officers, regular in-service training and simulators exercises.

**Question 2**

What training programs currently exists to prepare command officers to effectively perform emergency scene command?
The NFA has developed courses for their *incident management curriculum* that teach command and control strategies for multi alarm incidents, target hazards and both natural and man-made disasters. These courses focus on fire ground decision making, advanced Incident Command, command and control, safety, personnel accountability, and communications. They also deal with risk assessment, incident documentation, media/political considerations, standards, legal mandates, capability assessment, damage assessment, emergency operations, Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS), Multi-Agency Coordination Systems (MACS) including the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), and emergency information systems. The courses from the *incident management curriculum* are resident course offered at the NFA campus in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Each course is extremely interactive, using lecture, simulations, and student participation as instructional methods. The simulations are conducted in a laboratory facility built specifically for that purpose.

MFRI’s *officer development series* provides a curriculum for students to attain fire officer certification levels I-IV. The curriculum focuses on (NFPA) 1021 - *Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* and provides a rounded approach to fire officer development. The portion directly dedicated to incident command abilities of an individual is only a small portion of the instruction. The PGCF/EMSD delivers an OCS to perspective Fire Lieutenants which essentially provides them with the MFRI Fire Officer I & II curriculum.

The internal survey clearly indicates that the majority of fire officers from the PGCF/EMSD from Captain to Major have little, if any, incident command training past what they received in OCS which is equivalent to the FOII standard.

**Question 3**

*What methods do other departments similar in make up utilize to prepare command officers?*
The research obtained from MCFRSD was most significant due to the nearly identical comparison to the PGCF/EMSD. The factor of being a career/volunteer combination system was a critical factor in this research. The departments share the commonality of having an integrated chain-of-command that shares responsibility between career and volunteer officers at every operational level. The newly implemented CCP is a novel and innovative approach for providing the MCFRSD a method to ensure command officers have a standard competency level regardless of career or volunteer status. The method is simple and easy to use and reaches all users through an on-line, web-based system. The approach serves to be a self-development tool where participants either know the answer or are directed to the material where they obtain the answer themselves. The material is specific to the MCFRSD operations, policy and procedures and serves to address NIMS compliance. The success of the program has been demonstrated in a couple of ways. A course evaluation has been administered to participants of the CCP since its beginning and received very favorable responses. Captain Chuck Bartlet provided data which showed ninety-four percent of the participants found it to be beneficial. Many reported feeling much more confident in their command abilities after participating in the process. A significant finding in this research is the CCP is specific to “command competencies” versus many other developmental programs which are a general officer development program.

The research revealed the FDNY has utilized a developmental battalion chiefs training program for many years. The origin of this program was a string of tragic events when eleven line-of-duty deaths occurred in the span of twenty-two months. The content of this training program has been based on the specific needs of the FDNY Battalion Chiefs and includes operational as well as administrative topics. Some of the operational topics include; Safety Battalion, Hi-rise, target hazards, specialty teams and hazardous materials. Several simulators and table top exercises are conducted where participants practice fireground command functions.
The program consists of classroom instruction, simulator exercises and, most importantly, a mentoring period where participants spend time with seasoned Battalion Chiefs.

What was learned from the research is the FDNY relies heavily on the lessons learned from past experiences and the mentoring portion of the program is a critical component for the development of their command officers.

Through the literature review, the research revealed the efforts of the IAFC through the publication of the *Officer Development Handbook*. The handbook provides a matrix or “road map” if you will, to assists the user in establishing a systematic program of development. This document stresses it is the combination of the four elements, education, experience and self-development that leads to true proficiency at each officer level.

Based on the findings of this research, a curriculum package including instructional objectives, key learning points and course outline (syllabus) ready for peer review and adoption has been designed. The draft curriculum package is provided in the appendix section of this applied research.

**DISCUSSION**

This research disclosed the PGCF/EMSD is much the same as the majority of fire departments in America in its lack of formal development for command level officers. Although there are programs available for officers to enroll in, very few are required prior to obtaining the position.

Research conducted by Bilger et al. 2007 confirms that although development is obtained by newly promoted battalion fire chiefs through practical and on the job experiences, what is evident is most jurisdictions fail to provide any kind of formal transitioning training to newly promoted battalion fire chiefs or soon to be promoted battalion fire chiefs.

“In any other professional occupation, professional development is not an afterthought but a requirement of the profession. Certainly the individual employee
should and must accept the primary responsibility for his or her own professional development. Nevertheless, due to the nature of our business, it is essential and fundamental that our future and current leaders are provided worth-while training and developmental sessions, and not the proverbial “rubber stamp” to maintain our required professional certifications” (Bilger et al. 2007).

Prior research by the author in 2005 determined demands placed on emergency incident commanders can quickly overwhelm the most skilled in the profession. The dynamic nature of emergency scene mitigation, with subordinates working in environments that are immediately dangerous to life and health, are unique to most supervisory positions. Expecting someone meeting the requirements for unit-supervision or command staff to operate at a higher position, without prior evaluation, is injudicious (LaMoria 2005).

The uniqueness in this research project is it deals specifically with the development of abilities to effectively operate as an emergency incident commander. This is dissimilar to most officer development which is often general in nature and designed to cover standards found in NFPA 1021. This is very similar in the approach the MCFRSD and the FDNY undertook in the design of training for incident commanders specific to those organizations.

The survey responses indicate what Battalion Chiefs, former Battalion Chiefs and future Battalion Chiefs all feel was important information for that position. The majority of the respondents clearly desire more emphasis on the operational component of commanding emergency incidents. Responses also indicated some type of a guide book providing clear expectations of the position and reference for administrative type tasks. The most surprising revelation from the survey is how much the respondents valued some type of a mentoring program with senior Battalion Chiefs.

The results of the survey confirmed what researchers Bilger, Gill and Strain revealed in 2007.
“Specifically, incident command, administrative duties list, disciplinary process & resources, organizational goals & objectives, organization mission statement, management skills, and supervision skills were the highest choices for topics in the guidebook” (Bilger et al. 2007).

Tim Eckles described in *Mentoring Battalion Chiefs for Achievement within the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF)* the benefits of mentoring programs included measurable growth in motivation, productivity, stability, reduction of turnover, and reserve of future leaders (Eckles, 2002).

Most disturbing is what the officers (Major’s, Battalion Chiefs and Captains) of the PGCF/EMSD have reported as the operational issue’s we face everyday. The respondents listed operational discipline, crew integrity and fireground accountability as major weaknesses in emergency scene operations. They also listed the loss of a firefighter or managing a MAYDAY situation as their greatest fear. With the three levels of officers citing these concerns, this research reads like a prediction of tragedy yet to come.

**Recommendations**

The stated purpose of this action research was to develop a training curriculum to prepare personnel to properly and safely function as an emergency scene incident commander at the PGCF/EMSD. Based upon the research, a proposed course syllabus, including learning objectives, has been included in the appendix section and is ready for peer review.

Additional recommendations have been formulated based upon the results of this research. The recommendations are listed below in a random order and do not represent any type of priority.

**Recommendation 1**

Develop a program similar to the Montgomery County Command Competency Program (CCP). Successful completion of the CCP should be required for every current command officer
annually to retain authority to operate as an incident commander. This process should incorporate changes of operational policy from year to year to assure compliance.

**Recommendation 2**

Implement the proposed Command Officers Training Curriculum (Appendix F) to be included as part of the Battalion Chiefs promotional process. Captains who have successfully passed the written examination for Battalion Chief would complete the training program prior to practical assessment centers.

**Recommendation 3**

Deliver the proposed Command Officers Training Curriculum (Appendix F) twice annually for volunteer members to complete as a requirement to be a Command Level Officer.

**Recommendation 4**

The research indicated a system of mentoring as being a critical component of the development of command level officers. Developing a structured mentoring program would be relatively easy for career command officers. Officers who had completed the curriculum would then be required to spend time shadowing a seasoned Battalion Chief. A task book for command officers, much like a recruit book, which included objectives that had to be accomplished, should be developed. Additionally, a program for volunteer participants of the program should be developed. MFRI has utilized a “preceptor segment” for the FOI and FOII training curriculum that could serve as guide for this development.

Further research is needed in the area of development of decision-making abilities for emergency incident commanders. The results of the research suggest that the majority of decision-making skill is based upon experience rather than training. A wealth of information can be found describing the function of, or the operation of, the ICS and the IMS. In contrast, very little information or research exists in regards to the development of the abilities or skills of emergency scene incident commanders.
In 1999, Dunn wrote that the United States Marine Corps approached the FDNY to find out how the fire service makes its most critical decisions.

Just as soldiers do, firefighters learn how to make life-and-death decisions through experience. We learn the craft by doing it. Experience is the best teacher, even for decision makers (Dunn, 1999, p.11).
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APPENDIX A

Command Officer Development Survey Prince George’s County Fire/EMS Department

Captains

1. What training have you complete in the area of incident command and what was the source of the training? (MFRI, PGFD or other)

2. What material or information do you feel is essential to prepare you for the promotion to Battalion Chief?

3. What is your opinion on the effectiveness of the study of promotional material as a training method for promotion to Battalion Chief?

4. What concerns do you have in regards to managing emergency incidents and functioning as the Incident Commander?
   a. What do you feel your weakness(‘s) is/are?
   b. What concerns (scare) you the most?
   c. What are the weaknesses of the department?

5. What experience(s) have you acquired that you feel will be a benefit to you in functioning as an incident commander?
   d. What experience(s) do you feel you are lacking?

6. What are your recommendations for improvement?

7. Is there an established course of study you feel would be a benefit for you and/or the department? (NFA, MFRI or otherwise?)

8. What other improvements are needed?
APPENDIX B

Command Officer Development Survey
Prince George’s County Fire/EMS Department

Battalion Chiefs

1. What training did you complete in the area of incident command prior to your promotion and what was the source of the training? (MFRI, PGFD or other)

2. How much of your training was received as a part of the promotional process for Battalion Chief?

3. What is your opinion on the practice of utilizing study material for the Battalion Chiefs process as a training/development method for command officers?

4. What material or information do you feel is essential for a newly promoted command officer?

5. What material or information do you feel would have been most beneficial which was not provided to you?

6. What experience(s) have you acquired that has been a benefit to you in developing abilities in incident command?
   i. What experience(s) do you feel you are lacking?

7. What concerns do you have in regards to managing emergency incidents and functioning as the Incident Commander?
   i. What do you feel your weakness is/are?
   ii. What concerns (scare) you the most?
   iii. What are the weaknesses of the department?

8. What are your recommendations for improvement?
   i. Is there an established course of study you feel would be a benefit for you and/or the department? (NFA, MFRI or otherwise?)
APPENDIX C

Command Officer Development Interview Prince George’s County Fire/EMS Department

Majors

1. What training have you completed in the area of incident command and what was the source of the training? (MFRI, PGFD or other)

2. What material or information do you feel is essential to prepare personnel for the promotion to Battalion Chief?

3. What is your opinion on the practice of utilizing study material for the Battalion Chiefs process as a training/development method for command officers?

4. What concerns do you have in regards to the management of emergency incidents given the current practices in use?
   a. What concerns (scare) you the most?
   b. What are the weaknesses of the department in regards to incident command and/or management?

5. What experience(s) have you acquired that you feel benefit you in functioning as an incident commander?
   a. What experience(s) do you feel you are lacking?

6. What are your recommendations for improvement?

7. Is there an established course of study you feel would be a benefit to personnel being promoted to the command officer level and/or the department? (NFA, MFRI or otherwise?)

8. What other improvements are needed?
1. **What is the developmental process for command officers for your department?**

Captains who have successfully passed the Battalion Chiefs Promotional Test are sent to the Battalion Chiefs training program at the Fire Training Academy. The Captains are sent prior to their promotion to Battalion Chief. In addition, the candidate spends time with a seasoned Battalion Chief in a mentoring program.

2. **How long has it been in place?**

About 10-12 years

   a. **Was the development generated by an event or occurrence? If so what was it?**

   No specific event or occurrence but was developed along with several other programs after a series of tragic events. FDNY experienced 11 line-of-duty deaths in a span of 22 months.

3. **What is the content of your developmental process?**

The training program is about 75% operational based and about 25% administrative. The course covers topics on Command of fire grounds and special type incidents. It includes courses on:

- Safety – safety battalion
- Hi-rise
- Target hazards
- Specialty teams/units
- Haz-mat

   a. **Is it based upon any standards and what are they?**

   No – Standards and/or certifications were not part of the development

   b. **Is the development focused on training or experience?**

   Both – Training portion and Mentoring
4. **How was this determined?**

A group was put together to develop the program and was given the task of identifying the needed content. Priority was assigned and the most important was included in the time frame given for delivery.

5. **What is the delivery method?**

Personnel are detailed to the class on daywork and placed “off-line”. Detailed to battalions for the mentoring portion.

6. **Has there been a measurable benefit and what is it?**

There has been a noticeable improvement in the abilities and confidence of the newly promoted battalion chiefs. The benefits have never been formally analyzed or measured.

7. **What steps should departments take to develop a process?**

First, it is important to gather the right people to develop the program. A list should be developed and prioritized on the subjects that are relevant to the organization. Objectives should be determined to guide the development.

8. **Where there pitfalls and/or obstacles you encountered and if so what were they?**

A varying level of experience of the candidates presented some obstacles.

9. **Are there improvements you would like to make to your process and if so what are they?**

The program has been dynamic and ever changing from the start. The program has grown from a one week class to 3-4 weeks. Some of the subjects which were initially not included do to priorities are now included.
APPENDIX E

Command Officer Development Interview
Captain Chuck Bartlett
Montgomery County Maryland Department of Fire and Rescue Services

1. What is the developmental process for command officers for your department?

Captains who have passed the Battalion Chief Promotional test attend a one week training program. This program consists of Departmental rules and regulations and several table-top (simulator) exercises.

A recent development is the Command Competencies Program (CCP) instituted by Fire Chief Thomas Carr. The CCP is a required element for all current command level officers. This includes all Battalion Chiefs and above which includes volunteer command officers which are Chiefs, Deputies and Assistant Chiefs.

The CCP is a program to “bring all incident commanders to a minimum standard”. The program has two components. The first is a “self-evaluation” which can be taken on-line through a web-based instructional soft-ware program. The second component is a simulator exercise conducted at a facility located at the Fire and Rescue Training Academy. The simulator facility use a combination of both computer generated simulation produced with Digital Combustion™ and through a table top model city.

2. What is the content of your developmental process?

The Battalion Chief orientation is a review of department policies and procedures. It also includes some simulator exercises to practice command skills. The CCP is more of a self development tool through the use of the on-line self-evaluation.

a. Is it based upon any standards and what are they?
Standards are used in the development of Department Policies and Procedures and both the Battalion Chiefs Orientation and the CCP are rooted in the Policies and Procedures. The standards which come to mind are NFPA 1500, 1561, 1021, 1710 & 1720.

b. Is the development focused on training or experience?
Both, participants must have completed minimum training requirements to reach the command officer level. The CCP test that knowledge, and provides the participants experience through simulation. It also is an indicator of the participants level of experience or how the participant has utilized his own experience.
3. How was this determined?

The CCP has been the vision of Fire Chief Thomas Carr and the content was developed through a committee tasked with bring the vision into practice. The Captain at the FTA is the coordinator of the program and oversees the implementation of the program.

4. How long has it been in place?

The Battalion Chief Orientation has been in place for several years. The CCP is a new and evolving program that has been instituted in the last year and a half.

c. Was the development generated by an event or occurrence? If so what was it?
Not specifically.

5. Has there been a measurable benefit and what is it?

Has raised the game of the people in the field because they know it is coming. Terminology has improved.

6. What is the delivery method?

The Battalion Chief Orientation is a week long class that Captains who have passed the promotional exam sit through. As described earlier the CCP has two components. The first is the on-line self evaluation that is done at the participant’s convenience. The second component is a simulated exercise done at predetermined intervals at the FTA.

7. What steps should departments take to develop a process?

Should be developed through the input of all levels of command officers in both Career and Volunteer ranks. “By-in” should be sought to lessen the effect of the “must do” and the “evaluation”.

8. Where there pitfalls and/or obstacles you encountered and if so what were they?

Many people do not like the thought of being evaluated.
9. Are there improvements you would like to make to your process and if so what are they?

The CCP is a program that is truly a work in progress. The system was designed to be “scalable” so that it can grow into many other aspects. The computer simulations and the facility are designed so that company officer can participate in certain roles. The plan is to deploy entire box alarm assignments to the simulator and to run the simulation as an actual event.
**Appendix F**

**Command Officers Training Program**

**Course Syllabus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Session 1 | Role & Responsibilities of the Incident Commander | 1. Define “Incident Commander”  
2. List the major responsibilities of the Incident Commander  
3. List the 3 areas the Incident Commander (IC) must be well trained.  
4. List the eight common denominators of effective command presence |
| Session 2 | Incident Command & NIMS | 1. Describe the 5 Command Functions  
2. Demonstrate the ICS organizational structure  
3. Describe the duties of command staff  
4. Describe the development and concepts of the National Response Plan  
5. Describe the purpose and guiding principles of the NIMS  
6. Describe the 6 components of the NIMS  
7. Demonstrate the use of the NIMS forms |
| Session 3 | General Orders & SOP | 1. Identify PGCFEMSD General Orders and SOP’s related to emergency scene incident management.  
2. List the benefits of strong procedures and operating guidelines. |
| Session 4 | Assumption of Command & Size-Up | 1. Describe the process of assuming command  
2. Define Size-Up as it relates to the IC  
3. Describe the process of incident scene size-up  
4. Explain the importance of receiving size-up reports from subordinates |
| Session 5 | Risk Assessment and Evaluation | 1. Describe the process of incident scene risk management  
2. Identify risk to operating personnel on the incident scene.  
3. Demonstrate the process of Risk/Benefit Evaluation |
| Session 6 | Operational Modes | 1. Describe the 3 basic operational modes  
2. Explain the purpose of basic strategy decision  
3. Demonstrate the ability to develop a incident action plan |
| Session 7 | Command Post Operations | 1. Describe the standard position for the IC  
2. List the advantages of a stationary command post  
3. Explain the communications responsibilities of the IC  
4. Identify major incident scene communications problems  
5. Demonstrate the use of the Incident Command Board |
| Session 8 | Resource Management | 1. Identify key principles of effective resource management  
2. Demonstrate the use of resource management aids.  
3. Describe the importance of effective resource management.  
4. Explain the use of Divisions and Groups as it relates to managing resources |
| Session 9 | Safety | 1. Explain how organizational culture effects safety  
2. Identify Departmental procedures relating to Safety  
3. Through the use of PGCFEMSD case studies; identify the cause of and steps for preventing injuries.  
4. List the duties of the Incident Safety Officer |
# Session 10: Accountability

1. Demonstrate the use of accountability procedures for the PGCFEMSD.
2. Explain the importance of crew integrity and accountability.
3. List actions that IC’s can use to ensure accountability is maintained effectively.

# Session 11: Fire Ground Emergencies
- MAYDAY’s
- Missing Members
- Emergency Traffic

1. List common fire ground emergencies and their causes.
2. Identify and review the Operational Procedures dealing with fire ground emergencies.
3. Describe the actions for IC’s to take when managing fire ground emergencies.

# Session 12: Emergency Management & The Emergency Operations Center

1. List major issues communities face when dealing with large scale incidents.
2. Identify the relationship of the EOC to Incident Command.
3. Describe the major functions of the EOC.
4. Describe the process for activating the EOC.

# Session 13: Incident Simulations and Exercises

1. Demonstrate the use of proper strategy and tactics to control a simulated emergency incident.
2. Produce an operational plan requiring the use of multiple resources.
3. Assume a role within the ICS and demonstrate decision making for a simulated emergency incident.

# Session 14: Incident Simulations and Exercises

1. Demonstrate the use of proper strategy and tactics to control a simulated emergency incident.
2. Produce an operational plan requiring the use of multiple resources.
3. Assume a role within the ICS and demonstrate decision making for a simulated emergency incident.

# Session 15: Emergency Operations Center Exercise

1. Assume an emergency management role in an EOC.
2. Demonstrate decision making for assigned role.
CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _________________________________________

Jerome F. LaMoria