



## The Role of Scene Assessment or Size-up

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**Learning Objective:** The student shall be able to explain the acronym POST in relation to incident management.

An Incident Commander's responsibility is to assess or "size-up" the emergency situation to get a good understanding of the problems, issues and concerns and to achieve the needed situational awareness.

If the incident is going to grow to where a Unified Command structure is required, it is often helpful to write down the problems that each unified agency identifies as needing attention. This process often alleviates some of the resistance that occurs when trying to unify command among fire, law, public works, Emergency Medical Services, health and the other agencies represented.

List the problems in no particular order of priority using a white board, easel pad, tablet computer or other display so all can see. Create problem statements that are limited to one or two words, such as: people trapped, looting, flooding, street access, EMS, fire control, crime scene, etc.

Once all of the problems have been identified, the IC can use the acronym POST to create a hierarchy of decision making:

- **Priorities.** Regardless of the size or complexity of an event or incident, the fundamental priorities remain constant: life safety, incident stabilization and property conservation.
- **Objectives.** These are broad descriptions or statements of the desired outcomes or actions to achieve consistent with the priorities.
- **Strategies.** These are action processes by which the objectives are met.
- **Tactics (and Tasks).** These are the specific activities implemented to achieve the identified strategies.

Priorities include:

- **Life safety** for responders and the public. This includes rescuing endangered civilians, treatment of the injured, and provision for the safety, accountability and welfare of response personnel. The importance of the life safety priority is sustained throughout the incident.
- **Incident stabilization** is intended to keep the incident from escalating and bring it under control to limit the negative consequences.
- **Property conservation** is the priority of protecting property, infrastructure, evidence, economy and environment and providing for recovery after the event.

In the next few Coffee Break Training items, we will discuss the IC's role in defining objectives, strategies and tactics.



Regardless of the event type, an Incident Commander should remember the POST acronym to set incident priorities. Photo courtesy of Tom Aurnhammer.