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LESSON LEARNED

Incident Command: Locating the Incident Command Post

SUMMARY

Incident command posts should be located close enough to allow the incident commander (IC) to observe operations but far enough away to provide safety and shelter from the noise and confusion that accompanies normal operations. A command vehicle is often ideally suited for this purpose.

DESCRIPTION

At approximately 11:00 p.m. on Thursday, February 20, 2003, sparks from a pyrotechnic display ignited the ceiling of the Station Club in West Warwick, Rhode Island. The fire spread rapidly throughout the building, and within minutes flames engulfed the entire structure. A police officer who was working a security detail at the Station Club that night made the first emergency notification at 11:07 p.m. The intensity of the blaze, combined with the number of victims who needed to be treated and evacuated from the scene, required a massive response. Approximately 575 fire, police, and emergency medical personnel from over 35 agencies responded to the incident.

Shortly after the fire began, the chief of the West Warwick Fire Department arrived at the Station Club. He assumed overall incident command and established an incident command post (ICP) near the front entrance of the building, converting the trunk of a parked car into a makeshift worktable. The IC chose to establish the command post at this location because the proximity to the incident allowed him to observe both fire suppression and rescue operations.

The ICP's location, however, presented certain problems at the site. The IC's proximity to the scene allowed responders to bypass the normal chain of command and to communicate directly with him. This created confusion because many responders were unaware of the decisions and orders coming from the IC. There was some concern that the location of the command post unnecessarily placed the leadership in harm's way because of the potential for the wall to collapse on the ICP.

The incident after-action report recommended that ICPs should be located close enough to allow the IC to observe operations but far enough away to provide safety and shelter from the noise and confusion that accompanies normal operations. A command vehicle is often ideally suited for this purpose.

CITATION

Titan Systems Corporation. *Rhode Island: The Station Club Fire After-Action Report: State, Local, and Federal Government and the Private Sector.* Jul 2004.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=10806>

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