

RELATED TERMS

- Incident Site Safety
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- Structural Fire



Lessons Learned Information Sharing

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PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

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LESSON LEARNED

Fire Operations: Maintaining Awareness of Team Makeup during Incident Response

SUMMARY

Firefighters should remain aware of the makeup of their team at all times to ensure accurate accountability if any team member becomes disabled during incident response operations.

DESCRIPTION

On April 4, 2004, an arson-caused fire at a Houston, Texas, nightclub killed one firefighter and seriously injured two others. The Houston Fire Department (HFD) dispatched units to the incident after receiving reports of a burning truck in the building's parking lot. HFD units noticed the structural fire in-progress and initiated fire suppression operations as additional resources arrived onsite. At 6:08 p.m., the incident commander (IC) assigned an engine company to establish and maintain HFD's electronic accountability system and to act as the rapid intervention team for the incident. At 6:15 p.m., the IC ordered firefighters to evacuate the building in response to deteriorating incident conditions.

Not all members of the interior fire attack teams were aware of their unit's composition during the incident. When the captains of two fire attack teams became incapacitated while fighting the fire, the teams' engineers assumed operational command. Personnel accountability was compromised when the engineer of one fire attack team incorrectly reported to the IC that all members of both teams had safely escaped the building. This erroneous information contradicted other reports and exacerbated confusion regarding the safety of firefighters at the incident site. A member of one of these units eventually succumbed to thermal burns after being left disabled inside the burning building. Following the incident, the Texas State Fire Marshal's Office recommended that firefighters maintain constant awareness of their team's makeup to ensure accurate accountability during future incidents.

For more information on personnel accountability see the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Best Practice document: [Incident Site Safety: Planning Personnel Accountability](#).

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CITATION

Texas Department of Insurance. *State Fire Marshal's Office Firefighter Fatality Investigation: Firefighter Kevin W. Kulow, Houston Fire Department, April 4, 2004.* Austin, TX. ND.

https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=26510

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