

RELATED TERMS

- Evacuation
- Protective Actions
- Structural Fire



Lessons Learned Information Sharing

www.LLIS.gov

PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Fire
- Emergency Management

LESSON LEARNED

High-Rise Fires: Obtaining Pre-Incident Site Plans upon Arrival at the Incident Site

SUMMARY

Fire departments should require the incident commander (IC) to obtain a building's pre-incident plan upon arrival at a high-rise fire.

DESCRIPTION

On October 17, 2003, a fire in the Cook County Administration Building in Chicago, Illinois, killed six people and seriously injured eight others. An office worker detected the fire on the 12th floor of the 37-story high-rise office building at 4:57 p.m. Prior to the arrival of the Chicago Fire Department (CFD), on-duty security personnel ordered a full evacuation of the structure. Occupants were evacuating down the building's two stairwells when CFD arrived at the incident site.

Structural features of the building's southeast stairwell jeopardized occupant safety during the incident. For instance, the passageway should not have been used for fire-attack operations because it was designed to serve as the primary evacuation stairwell in the event of a fire. Firefighting activities caused large amounts of smoke to infiltrate the stairwell and compromised its safety as an egress route. In addition, locked doors along the stairwell confined evacuating occupants to the passageway once they entered it. The building's pre-incident plan described these features of the southeast stairwell and warned of their possible consequences during a fire.

The [National Fire Protection Association](#) defines a pre-incident plan as "a written document resulting from the gathering of general and detailed data to be used by responding personnel for determining the resources and actions necessary to mitigate anticipated emergencies at a specific facility." Pre-incident plans are also referred to as "pre-plans," "pre-incident site plans," and "pre-fire plans."

The IC did not request the building's pre-incident plan upon arrival at the incident site. As a result, he was unaware of the southeast stairwell's structural features and their potential impact on occupant safety. Had the IC been aware of these features, he may have unlocked stairwell doors and prevented firefighters from using this passageway as the primary fire-attack stairwell. All six victims of the fire succumbed to smoke inhalation after becoming trapped in the southeast stairwell while trying to evacuate.

A commission established to investigate the fire recommended that CFD require ICs to obtain pre-incident plans upon arrival at high-rise incidents. CFD's *High-Rise Incident Command Order* now mandates that the first arriving IC request the pre-plan from building personnel immediately after arriving at the incident site.

Fire departments should require the IC to obtain a building's pre-incident plan upon arrival at a high-rise fire.

CITATIONS

Chicago Fire Department. *The Chicago Fire Department's Response to the Cook County Commission Recommendations on the Fire at 69 West Washington*. Chicago, IL. Oct 2004.
https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=13221

Cook County Board of Commissioners. *Report of the Cook County Commission Investigating the 69 West Washington Building Fire of October 17, 2003*. Chicago, IL. 07 Jul 2004.
https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=18689

DISCLAIMER

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) is the US Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency response and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the US Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email Feedback@llis.dhs.gov or visit www.llis.gov.