

**PHOENIX REGIONAL  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

**Operations at Violent Incidents**

**M.P. 206.01**

**01/18**

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**Purpose**

The purpose of this procedure is to establish guidelines for fire companies operating at incidents where violence has occurred or could potentially occur. The Phoenix Fire Department will always strive to treat all patients as quickly and as safely as possible. This procedure is meant to provide a foundation for working in any violent incident environment and in any level of complexity. Responsibility and accountability for firefighter safety lies at all levels of an incident organization, including the strategic, tactical and task levels.

**Overview**

Violent incidents or incidents that have the potential for becoming violent are no less dangerous to firefighters than the traditional fire scene. These incidents include calls in private residences or businesses to large-scale public gatherings. Each incident has its own unique challenges for our service delivery as well as managing our firefighter's safety. The beginning of the fire department response is a call for service typically through our dispatch center. Once dispatched, it is imperative that our incident command system utilizes the same strategic decision making for violent hazard zones as it does for the traditional fireground hazard zone. Having two separate incident evaluation systems for different hazard zones is not logical. The standard strategic decision making model is the best-suited system for this type of hazard zone evaluation and management.

The standard decision making model for the Phoenix Fire Department includes:

1. Size up and Identification of the Critical Factors
2. Risk Management
3. Strategy
4. Incident Action Plan
5. Tactical Objectives
6. Review and Revision

This process is ongoing and continual, which requires a review/revision based on actions and conditions until the tactical objectives are met. In these incidents, the key tactical positions are:

- Triage
- Extrication
- Treatment
- Transportation

It is possible that other tactical positions may be necessary however the above are foundational to meeting the life safety tactical objective.

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**Dispatch Center Responsibilities**

Most emergency responses begin with a call to 911. It is the responsibility of the Phoenix Regional Dispatch Center to process these calls. Based on the information taken during a 911 call, the appropriate nature code is selected for the incident. Specifically, violent incidents come into the dispatch center in one of two ways. The incident takers can receive the information directly from the 911 caller or they receive the information secondarily from the PD dispatch center. In either instance, the standard method of information gathering, processing and dispatch is the same. The greatest variable to the accuracy of the dispatch nature code is the quality, quantity and timeliness of the information gathered by the incident taker. Initial information is not always complete or accurate so the incident takers and supervisors are trained to take a pessimistic approach to these incidents with regards to service delivery and firefighter safety. The information provided by the caller is the weakest part of our information gathering system. The system improves once we begin our strategic decision making model.

In instances when the incident information provided to the incident taker is inaccurate or incomplete, it is necessary for company officers and command officers to utilize their discretion to ensure the safest actions. Communications with the tactical radio operator (TRO) should be two-way communications. As the TRO gains information regarding these incidents they are responsible to convey it as quickly and appropriately as possible. It is important that Company Officers and Chief Officers communicate critical information to the TRO as well to ensure that this information can be relayed to all onscene and responding resources assigned to incident. In the case of direct radio communications with Fire Companies and PD units, an effort must be made to share pertinent scene information back to AHQ to close the communications and accountability loop.

It is the responsibility of the Phoenix Regional Dispatch Center to maintain phone communications to any law enforcement dispatch center or communications system that fire units do not have direct radio-to-radio communications. Phone communications becomes the best inter-agency information-gathering tool to incident situational awareness for violent hazard zones. Face-to-face or radio communications with officers on the street may not always be possible during the initial response of an incident. This link is imperative to the safety of firefighters and the effectiveness of the fire department mission within a violent incident hazard zone.

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**Operational Response**

**1. Size Up**

The ability to size up an incident is the primary step in achieving the tactical objectives. This is achieved by assessing the incident in a very standard way. This includes:

- What is the problem?
- What is getting in the way of me achieving the tactical objectives?
- What can hurt or kill me?

The initial step in quality size up includes accessing the appropriate Police Tactical Channel, if available, to begin listening to the incident communications. These communications allow insight into the dynamics and complexity of the incident. This allows the responding companies to begin to assess and plan for appropriate and safe actions. This is our standard size-up. The size-up for violent incidents should include:

- Dispatch information regarding the incident type or nature. This includes the type of violent actions of the incident if known (assault, stabbing, shooting, explosives, etc.).
- Location of incident and/or patients?
- Number of patients?
- Is there a history with this address and/or person?
- Does the incident nature code require units to stage?
  - If not, should that be considered?
- Is PD onscene yet?
- Is this a planned or unplanned incident?
- Is a Phoenix Fire Department Terrorism Liaison Officer (TLO - C958) onscene yet?
- Can units communicate directly with PD onscene either face to face or on the radio?
- Has PD defined an inner or outer perimeter?
- Are the patients located inside the inner-perimeter?
- If the scene is totally uncontained, can PD begin to extricate the injured patients to a safe treatment and transportation area?

The initial dispatch information is rarely complete. These situations evolve rapidly, and it is necessary to assume that the information, which is initially received, will change. It is important to approach these incidents slowly and cautiously. Over-committing prior to fully evaluating the critical factors can pose significant danger to firefighters and thus impacting their ability to delivery care.

Direct communications with PD is the best form of information gathering about these incidents. PD has the responsibility of hazard mitigation on these incidents. Fire/EMS resources are support resources necessary to triaging, treating, and transporting the injured. Communication with PD Officers, face-to-

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face or via radio will provide direct information as to the containment and coordination of the location and access to the injured. Direct communication and coordination are the most important steps to determining where and when Fire/EMS resources can access patients in the safest manner.

A significant resource in establishing the critical factors for a violent incident is the Phoenix Fire Department Terrorism Liaison Officers (TLO, C958). The TLO's mission is to provide an on duty, 24-hour law enforcement liaison for fire units regarding any police activities. C958 is a trusted partner with law enforcement from all levels of government (Federal, State, County and Local). Their primary mission includes information management regarding law enforcement activities and the safety, security and effectiveness of Phoenix Fire Department units in law enforcement hazard zones.

For pre-planned incidents that have the potential for violence, C958 will establish communication with the participating law enforcement agency and develop a unified plan to provide adequate fire department support to the incident. The plan will include direct supervision and communication of fire units as well as effective management of fire department unit's safety.

For unplanned incidents, on arrival, C958 will establish a liaison position with the jurisdictional law enforcement agency. The liaison is established to provide the incident commander real time information regarding critical factors, scene perimeters, police actions and coordination of police and fire activities. The Phoenix Police Department TLO (C958PD) is charged with establishing the same liaison position for the fire department.

## **2. Risk Management**

It is critical that all hazard zone actions are based on a sound risk management plan. The ability to measure risk is only possible with adequate size up. Communication and coordination with PD is critical to size up and understanding the environment in which we are working. This allows us to utilize the risk management plan. The standard risk management plan that is used on the fire scene is perfectly suited for violent incidents.

- We will risk a lot, in a calculated manner, to save savable lives.
- We will risk a little, in a calculated manner, for savable property.
- We will not risk anything for what is already lost.

The use of this risk management plan will improve the incident commander's ability to provide a more predictable, safe environment to achieve our primary tactical objective of Life Safety. If it is possible for a crew or crews to enter a violent hazard zone with appropriate police protection to triage, treat and extricate injured persons as a part of a well-communicated plan, it should be done. This is a component of taking risk in a calculated, well-communicated manner.

It is important that crews are not lured into dangerous or uncontrollable situations to save nothing or something that is clearly lost. A firefighter that becomes injured or trapped due to uncontrolled violence is ultimately unable to do their job.

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A component of Police Incident Command is the establishment of an inner and outer perimeter. The area within the inner-perimeter is the Hot Zone. Fire/EMS resources shall never operate within the inner-perimeter. The area between the inner and outer perimeter is defined as the warm zone. Fire/EMS resources can operate in this area to triage, extricate, and treat patients within a well-coordinated and communicated plan with PD. The inner and outer perimeter can be fluid and change as the hazard changes. The Incident Commander's ability and need to remain aware of any changes is critical. The Incident Commander must communicate and adjust the plan based on any changes made to the hazard zone (inner and outer perimeter). C958 can play an integral role to improving the communications with PD. C958 has access to encrypted and specialty radio channels that are not accessible for Command Officers and Fire Companies. C958 simply becomes a valuable technical advisor to the IC in these instances.

### **3. Strategy**

Incident strategy is not just meant for the fireground. It should be utilized in all types of hazard zones. Strategy defines the operational posture of the incident. The strategy also defines our actions based on our location and proximity to the hazard.

As in fireground operations, the standard strategies for violent incidents are the same. We are either operating in an Offensive or Defensive strategy. As on the fireground, it is critical that we do not mix our strategies on the incident. There should be one, over-arching strategy for every incident.

An offensive strategy at violent incidents means entering a well-defined warm zone (between the inner and outer perimeter) to treat or extricate the injured based on the clearly communicated and coordinated information from PD as to the location of the injured. This strategy involves communications with PD, the incident commander, sector officers and other crews operating on the same scene. This is done by considering the same elements that are critical on the fire scene; including how are the crews entering the scene and getting to the patients, maintaining an effective exit plan and consistently evaluating the conditions or environment. This requires controlling the conditions within our power or exiting to safe refuge when we can't control them. Communications is critical for accountability and it ensures that subsequent arriving units understand the plan. The factor of operating in the Offensive Strategy under Marginal Conditions also applies to violent incidents. We only operate under Marginal Conditions for life safety. Units exit as soon as possible, usually when we obtain an all clear or conditions force us to change strategy. Accountability is imperative upon exit from the hazard zone.

A defensive strategy is defined by taking a posture outside of the hazard zone to stage until the scene is deemed safe or to establish a triage, treatment and transportation system ready to accept patients that have been removed from the hot zone. This strategy is taken when we have prolonged violent incidents or during episodes that are so volatile that PD is unable to ensure safe areas or corridors for our efforts. In this situation, our presence in the hazard zone may be detrimental to police activity or we simply cannot plan for our safety or retreat. Again, a firefighter that becomes injured or trapped

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due to uncontrolled violence is unable to do their job.

It is possible that an incident may require a change in strategy based on the conditions and actions of either the hazard or PD. In this case, just as in the traditional fireground, it is critical to recognize changing conditions. Once recognized, we must clearly communicate the change and verify an accountability process to ensure all companies understand the change in strategy and retreat appropriately. This means removing crews to safe areas and being ready to meet our tactical objectives from this position once a PAR has been obtained.

#### **4. Incident Action Plan**

Violent incidents are very fluid and dynamic. The incident action plan (IAP) must be safe, well communicated and continually evaluated against the conditions and the effectiveness of the actions. This requires an incident commander. Whether the incident commander is a company officer in the fast attack mode or a battalion chief in a command post, the IC must manage the plan simultaneously with the work to ensure firefighter welfare and quality care. Direct communications with initial officers (any rank) is critical and the first steps of a unified command system. Just as in fireground operations, it is completely acceptable and necessary to initiate the Incident Command System from the fast attack mode in concert with our onscene PD counterparts.

As in fireground management, if the conditions and actions don't match the plan (IAP) or strategy, or the situation is not improving, a new IAP is required. The IAP must consider both firefighter safety and the effectiveness of the care. Law enforcement will not dictate a plan of action to our Fire Companies. It is the IC's responsibility to use the information that is gained through communication with PD to determine the best plan and coordinate that with the PD Officers working at the scene. Communicating any changes to the IAP insures that all units are working safely and within the same plan.

The IAP should always match the strategy. In an offensive strategy, firefighters will be actively entering the warm zone to protect life safety while consciously monitoring the conditions. In a defensive strategy, firefighters will identify what or who is lost, write it off and treat and transport everyone else exposed to the scene.

Violent incidents have the potential to require large amounts of resources. Depending on the potential and actual patient counts, upgrading these incidents as information becomes more available will be necessary. The complication of adding a mass casualty incident to a violent hazard zone should be considered in the initial size-up of these incidents. Standard mass casualty procedures apply if the tactical benchmarks can be met within an IAP that consciously accounts for firefighter safety.

The standard procedures for Level I and Level II staging are appropriate for these types of instances. Level I staging for single unit responses with PD should be utilized following standard practices. Level II staging requires active management by the Sector Officer with clear communications with the Incident

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Commander to best support the IAP. Staging in quarters is an acceptable option if the incident is within proximity or for long durations. However, staging in quarters should include being on the apparatus and actively monitoring Fire and PD radio channels for information regarding the incident and necessary response. Staging in quarters should not delay a company's ability to respond.

Level II staging should be utilized for 1<sup>st</sup> Alarm incidents or greater; or when it is impossible to establish a defined hazard zone upon the arrival of the initial companies. The incident commander should establish a Level II staging location in a safe location that allows company's access to the scene but remains clear of the potential hazard zone

### **Communications**

The Phoenix Regional Dispatch System provides a direct link to all law enforcement agencies dispatch centers within the State of Arizona. Many Law enforcement agencies within the Central Region of Arizona are a direct connection via pre-established communications lines. It is the responsibility of the Phoenix Regional Dispatch System to take an active role in the managing the information sharing for violent incidents during incidents when direct radio-to-radio or face-to-face communications are not possible.

Currently, the Phoenix Fire Department has access to the tactical radio channels for the following Police Agencies:

1. Glendale PD
2. Peoria PD
3. Surprise PD
4. Tolleson PD
5. El Mirage PD
6. Avondale PD
7. Scottsdale PD
8. Paradise Valley PD
9. Tempe PD
10. Chandler PD
11. Mesa PD
12. Gilbert PD
13. Apache Junction PD

This communication and coordination is critical to successful size-up and safe, effective operations on violent incidents of any size.

### **Strategic Level Considerations**

In the same manner, as on the fireground, a company officer is typically the initial incident commander (IC#1) for a violent incident. IC#1 is expected to operate at the strategic, tactical and task levels

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simultaneously until command has been appropriately transferred to a stationary battalion chief or shift commander (IC#2). This is a complicated task. It is necessary for IC#1 to process all the available information into the strategic decision making model to ensure the quality of care and firefighter safety is appropriate. The overall incident success is greatly improved when IC#1 can successfully process information accurately from the beginning. The best opportunity for accurate and timely information is direct communication with the PD Officers onscene. It is necessary to process this information with a pessimistic perspective and insure all actions are well communicated.

IC#1 should be cognizant of not only the initial incident evaluation but also the necessary actions for the other responding units. Safely staging resources until an appropriate size-up, strategy and plan can be formulated and then communicated is critical to incident success and firefighter safety. It is always easier to get companies into the hazard zone, than it is to get them out. The hazard zone on violent incidents can be dynamic and migrating rather than stationary.

IC#2 shall evaluate the incident in the same manner utilizing the same strategic decision making model to ensure the actions and the conditions are matching. This also increases the likelihood of a successful incident management and firefighter safety.

Direct communication with PD, either face to face or on the PD tactical radio channel is a critical factor to accurately managing the safety and effectiveness of fire department operations. When operating in the fast attack mode, IC#1 should ensure that they can communicate with PD on their tactical channel via portable radio. He/she can manage this very critical communication function or delegate to a qualified crewmember. Bottom-Line: If the incident commander is unable to get accurate, timely information regarding the hazard zone or the safety of the work environment, this may require a change in strategy and the removal of all fire crews from the hazard zone.

It is necessary to understand the mission of the Police Department when operating in a violent hazard zone. During an active violent incident, the main tactical objective for the police department is to eliminate or mitigate the hazard. This involves physically engaging the bad guy or bad guys and causing their surrender or forcefully eliminating the hazard. It is the fire department incident commander's job to ensure the fire department and the police department's tactical objectives can be done in the same proximity safely and effectively. In the event they cannot, the incident commander must remove the firefighters from the hazard zone until it is safe.

### **Tactical Level Considerations**

Sector officers operating in violent hazard zone situations have the same responsibilities on the fireground. They must establish ownership for their geographical position or function-based sector and process their own decision model/size-up (all five steps) to meet the overall tactical objectives. This assessment is then communicated to the incident commander in the form of progress reports. This is standard to any hazard zone, and both captain level sector officers and battalion chief level sector officers can complete this. As in fireground hazard zone management, the use of battalion chief level



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sector officers is preferred simply from the stand point that the battalion chief and Field Incident Technician (FIT) can take a much more tactical level perspective due to not actively managing task level operations simultaneously to managing the sector. This allows for better communications and less distraction in evaluating conditions, actions and accountability.

Sector officers should also establish effective face-to-face communications with police officers or supervisors managing the areas in which the firefighters are working. Face to face communications should provide effective situational awareness and better understanding of the police department's strategy and incident action plan.

Sector officers should provide a resource assessment for the sector with concern for utilizing only enough resources necessary in the hazard zone to minimize exposure to the violent situation. Effectively establishing triage, treatment and extrication of the patients to a safer area of the incident for transportation is most desirable. Limited exposure to violence or hazards decreases the possibility for injury to firefighters or the disruption of treatment of the patients.

### **Task Level Considerations**

As with fireground awareness and safety, it is necessary for all firefighters to be responsible for their own safety. No incident command system or incident organization can out-perform bad personal decisions by the individual. It is necessary that firefighters remain aware of their surroundings, work together as crews to ensure each other's safety and communicate when things appear unsafe or rapidly changing.

It is critical that all members operating in any hazard zone function as a part of the incident organization and within a well-communicated plan. There is nothing safe about freelancing in any hazard zone. Everyone is accountable to themselves and their company officer. Each company officer is accountable to their sector officer. Each sector officer is accountable to the incident commander. This system is the best way to effectively manage the overall safety of everyone and the effectiveness of the overall hazard zone operations.

It is critical that each individual firefighter not be lured into dangerous or uncontrollable situations because of the police department or bystander's actions. All incident actions must be communicated to ensure the safety or security of areas or persons. Good intentions or an overly aggressive nature can easily lure individuals or crews into bad situations with significant consequences. Continual communications regarding situational awareness between crewmembers and their company officers is necessary.

Company officers should maintain and communicate simple and effective exit plans during operations in violent hazard zones. As in high-rise firefighting, continual management and awareness of areas of safe refuge are critical to firefighter safety. Once identified these areas should be communicated to the sector officer for situational awareness and sharing with other companies working within that geographical area.

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**Unforeseen or Unpredicted Violent Situations**

It is common for fire companies to, on a random basis, encounter situations that did not appear to be volatile or violent, but have become so. Quite often these situations surprise firefighters in the process of delivering service that has been done thousands of times before without incident. Historically, firefighters escaping without injury are usually because we can quickly over-power a situation or smoothly talk our way out of violence because of our good standing within the public. Neither is reliable or predictable enough to ensure any amount of success. The most effective means are true situational awareness and defensive tactics that limits our exposure to these scenarios.

The most effective actions when firefighters find themselves in an unpredicted, possibly violent situation is (run, hide, fight):

- Removing themselves to safety
- Communicate directly with PD over their tactical channel to request assistance
  - Communicating who, what and where
- Utilizing the emergency traffic button on our portable radios when it is not safe to speak
- Utilize any area of safe refuge or cover
- Only actively engage the aggressor as an absolute last resort
  - Fully commit to neutralizing the aggressor

The most effective method to ensure firefighter safety is to not allow us to be surprised or lured in to dangerous situations. This can be very difficult. When firefighters find themselves in a violent situation the safest thing to do is to remove themselves from the violence and retreat to safe refuge. Self-removal is not always easy. Firefighters should work in a minimum of pairs or even better as an intact crew to improve everyone's overall safety from violence. This will also improve maintaining situational awareness for all parties involved in the incident scene.

Active management of our environment and our proximity to patients is important to our overall safety. The key to close quarter interactions with patients is maintaining defensible space. Removing or coaxing patients to open areas or unconfined spaces can improve our defensible space. Due to the nature of our job, working near patients sometimes is necessary. Remain aware of their body language and communications. It may be reasonable to sometimes only treat emergent issues as an effective way to improve overall safety. Simply getting patients to an environment that firefighters can control (maybe with the assistance of PD) is important to reducing the overall exposure to violence. Furthermore, removing any items that may conceal weapons or eliminating dangerous items from proximity of the patient can significantly limit the overall exposure to violence. It is imperative that company officers and individual firefighters are continuously aware of their surroundings.