



Incident Command System Publication

Response To Civil Unrest Guidelines
ICS 912

April 2025

This document contains information relative to the Incident Command System (ICS) component of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). This is the same Incident Command System developed by FIREScope. Additional information and documentation can be obtained from the following source:

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FOREWORD

Emergency response during civil unrest events has proven to be one of the most challenging incident types involving fire service and EMS personnel. Over the last few years, there has been an increase in emergency response activity as a result of civil unrest that involve, or threaten, first responders and critical infrastructure. Law enforcement and fire agencies must act to protect these facilities for continuity of operations and for the greater safety and well-being of the population.

Civil unrest events can occur spontaneously and without warning, or more frequently, the events leading to civil unrest offer several opportunities for advanced planning. Fire Department members should be aware of national, state, and local events that can trigger or have the potential to incite protests or civil unrest. These events can range from opposition to judicial decisions or political activity that incite protests and/or civil unrest. Developing a relationship with Law Enforcement, or a Joint Regional Intelligence Center (JRIC) will offer opportunities for fire departments to be included early in the planning process for response to and managing a protest and or civil unrest.

This document has been developed to provide a framework for preparation and response to these incidents.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to assist fire departments with their response operations during civil disturbances. The primary goal of any response plan is to ensure the safety of all personnel, coordinate an effective response, and safely mitigate the incidents.

BACKGROUND

“Tactical Alert” describes a state of preparedness necessary to cope with civil disturbances or natural/man-made disasters. Special consideration shall be given to the safety of personnel, operational tactics, protection of apparatus and equipment, etc. Activities outside of quarters should be limited to emergency responses. The “Tactical Alert” has 3 Levels.

PROCEDURE

Level 1

A Fire Department agency may enter a Level 1 Tactical Alert when intelligence is received from recognized public safety agencies that a civil disturbance is possible in the foreseeable future. This is the planning level in anticipation of a civil disturbance. This will generally be done on a department-wide basis and involves coordination with involved law enforcement agencies. This may be implemented based on information that a civil disturbance is likely to occur within a 24 to 48-hour period or is occurring in a neighboring jurisdiction.

Level 2

A Fire Department agency may enter a Level 2 Tactical Alert when intelligence from a reliable source indicates civil unrest activities will or have caused a disruption to fire/rescue services. The initial implementation of the developed incident action plan may include such actions as apparatus pre-deployment, staging, increased staffing, identification of staging areas and/or a mobilization center, etc.

Level 3

A Fire Department agency may enter a Level 3 Tactical Alert when any department units or jurisdictions are actively involved in a civil disturbance that is believed to have major potential. This is the actual deployment of units according to the plan. All normal operations should be suspended in the impacted areas. In conjunction with the responsible law enforcement agencies, a unified command will be utilized to handle tactical operations in the impact area(s). Branches, Divisions, and Groups will be formed as necessary and all fire department responses in the affected areas will be controlled by the appropriate command. Level 3 will be implemented in the event of civil disturbance occurring within Fire Department jurisdiction or involving the response of agency units.

OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Fire Officers shall consider the overall environment of an incident, the potential of violence to firefighting personnel, and the damage of apparatus and equipment prior to committing resources into a hostile area. Fire Officers will modify tactics to increase safety and use of special tactics when dealing with civil disturbance situations. During a civil disturbance situation, Fire Officers are granted flexibility to deviate from the operational guidelines established by this procedure in situations where the safety of the individual company is at risk. Incident Commanders may utilize Strike Teams and/or Task Forces. Strike Teams/Task Forces will be teamed up with Force Protection.

Personnel Safety

The primary responsibility of all Fire Officers is to provide for the safety of the personnel under their command while attempting to accomplish the mission. Considerations include:

- Force protection for responding resources.
- Pre-determined travel routes.
- Issue and donning of ballistic vests and helmets.

Safety while responding

- Personnel riding in vehicles shall have the windows closed and doors locked.
- Alternate response routes shall be considered when responding to known trouble areas to avoid establishing a response pattern that can be anticipated.
- Consider turning off red lights and sirens on responses where such use would cause unwanted attention.
- In areas where a large crowd has formed, consider delaying approach until adequate security is available.

ORGANIZATION

In situations where multiple incidents occur in an impacted area, establishment of an area command may make incident commanders and agency or jurisdictional administrators more effective. See the FIRESCOPE [ICS 420-1.3](#) Area Command Document for a detailed review of these organizational principles.

STRUCTURE FIRE CONSIDERATIONS

Emergency responses during civil unrest events have proven to be some of the most challenging for fire and EMS personnel.

Because most civil unrest activities involve local government infrastructure, law enforcement and fire agencies must act to protect these facilities for continuity of operations and for the greater safety and well-being of its population.

Successful firefighting operations during these incidents require consistent standard operating guidelines, strong command, continuous and accurate size-ups, a well-communicated strategy, and effective firefighting tactics. Additionally, firefighters often encounter challenges related to extended response times, blocked streets with limited access, water supply issues, inability to perform laddering, extreme fire behavior, and restricted ventilation, which ultimately delays fire suppression.

Most strategies focus on these four areas:

- Provide for firefighter and public safety.
- Prioritize incidents and mitigate the potential for conflagrations.
- Protect critical infrastructure.
- Protect exposed buildings, especially occupied structures where incidents exceed available resource capability.

While these tactical hazards and challenges increase the complexity of the incident, having a thorough knowledge of the response area, pre-fire planning, and properly identifying these types of occupancies in advance, can better prepare fire personnel to mitigate responses safely and successfully during these types of incidents.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

While operating under either a Level 2 or Level 3 Tactical Alert, the IC and assigned resources should reference FIREScope Field Operations Guide 420 -1 (Ch 15 Multi-Casualty and Ch 18 Unified Response to Violence).

FIRE/LAW ENFORCEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

This procedure shall guide the mutual Fire/Law Enforcement coordination during incidents involving civil disturbances. Through good initial coordination and a strong unified command, other jurisdictions will be able to safely and quickly blend into the organization formed for the incident.

EXTRACTION MISSIONS

During the early stages of a civil disturbance there is a possibility that fire and EMS units will be deployed on incidents or even housed in the impacted areas. The purpose of these missions is to provide these units adequate force protection to escape the impacted area.

FORCE PROTECTION MISSIONS

Force Protection missions will be requested by the Incident Commander when responding to an area affected by civil unrest. Fire and EMS units will not attempt to enter areas designated by law enforcement as “hot,” until that area has been secured. This does not prohibit fire and law enforcement from making a mutual decision to enter an impact area in cases of risk to life safety.

The level of protection provided to fire and EMS units will be determined by the Unified Command. It is intended that during a force protection assignment, law enforcement units assigned to force protection will remain with the fire and EMS units for the entire time that they are deployed in the impacted area. During a civil unrest incident, it is important to remain calm and communicate with local law enforcement as they are there to provide protection and give direction.

Consideration of a P.A.C.E. will assist field resources in developing an operations plan.

Primary Plan

- Normal response operations with no threat to jurisdiction.

Alternate Plan

Decision Point: Local credible threat or civil disturbance in or near your jurisdiction.

- Consider alternative response routes.
- Contact Command and Control with updated situation and status.
- Contact immediate need Strike Team(s)/Task Force(s).
- Consider dividing response jurisdiction in half.
- Consider Battalion Command to establish an Area Command.

Contingency Plan

Decision Point: Confirmed civil disturbance in or near your jurisdiction.

- Coordinate with law enforcement and communicate with appropriate supervisors.
- Identify possible staging locations.
- Consider “non-emergency” response.
- Maintain proper span of control.
- Consider Medical Task Forces.
- Develop Rescue Task Forces with LE force protection.

Emergency Plan

Decision Point: On going civil disturbance disrupting jurisdictional operations.

- Request immediate law enforcement emergency response.
- Stop all operations, evacuate or shelter in-place with law enforcement assistance.
- Relocate resources outside of impacted location.

CONCLUSION

This document supports the framework for preparation and response to civil unrest incidents. These incidents require flexibility and skilled use of the Incident Command System including common terminology to bring about the safe and effective mitigation of such events.