



Firefighter Life Safety Initiative 12



National protocols for response to violent incidents should be developed and championed.



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Photo courtesy Pasadena Fire Department (CA)

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Background

In 1992, the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) was created by the United States Congress, and charged with the unfunded mandate to honor the nation's fallen firefighters and to provide their survivors with the resources they need to rebuild their lives. In 2004, under the leadership of Executive Director Ronald J. Siarnicki, the NFFF expanded its mission to include the prevention of firefighter injuries and deaths.

That March, the NFFF assembled more than 200 fire service stakeholders in Tampa, Florida for the first National Firefighter Life Safety Summit. In attendance were representatives of all of the major national organizations, as well as occupational health and safety experts and survivors of fallen firefighters. For two days, participants deliberated over the cultural, philosophical, technical and procedural problems that affected safety within the fire service, and jointly identified the most important domains. Over one hundred recommendations were put forth during the Summit, which were then refined into a set of key initiatives with which to define the mission of the effort going forward. By the conclusion of the meeting, *16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives* had been agreed upon, and the *Everyone Goes Home*® Program was created.

Firefighter Life Safety Initiative 12 (FLSI 12) states that “*National protocols for response to violent incidents should be developed and championed.*” In the narrative section supporting inclusion of FLSI 12, the Firefighter Life Safety Summit Initial Report (April 14, 2004) acknowledges the risk to firefighters when responding to violent incidents, specifically citing “the increasing exposure of firefighters to violent crimes and situations, up to and including terrorist attacks.”

A year later, a follow-up event was held in conjunction with the 2005 Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC) in Indianapolis. FDIC was selected in large part because of the critical role that training plays within the safety culture of fire service organizations, especially in terms of the establishing and fostering the continued evolution of attitudes, social norms and mores.

During this conference, eighty-two individuals participated in a full-day mini-summit. Of particular relevance to the issue of fire service organizations responding to violent incidents was the initial discussion on the topic of risk management, and the potential impact that the integration of risk management with incident management could have on a structured process for making strategic and tactical decisions at an incident scene. While not specifically articulated in the mini-summit report, the application of risk management techniques must be considered in any discussion relating to the fire service and response to violent incidents.

A second National Firefighter Life Safety Summit was held on March 3-4, 2007 in Novato, California. To guide discussion, the NFFF contracted subject matter experts to prepare White Papers on each of the *16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives*, which were distributed to participants in advance of this event. The White Paper on Initiative 12 documented five case studies and developed nine specific recommendations to support Initiative 12 (see box on page 3).



The White Paper's valid conclusion was that *the very nature of violent crime makes these incidents difficult to predict*. This White Paper can be found at <http://www.lifesafetyinitiatives.com/12/Initiative12.pdf>.

2007 Firefighter Life Safety Initiative 12 White Paper Recommendations

1. Improved Dynamic Risk Management for incidents involving violence.
2. Initiate and/or improve communications and relationships with law enforcement responders in your jurisdiction.
3. Define the role of dispatchers in reducing hazards to firefighters.
4. Prohibit single resource (individual) response to incidents of violence.
5. Require all Law Enforcement responders that may respond to a violent incident in your community to use an Incident Management System (IMS).
6. Fire department personnel should communicate, face to face, with the law enforcement component on scene.
7. Recommit personnel and equipment and leave if violence commences or recurs during fire department operations.
8. Obtain stakeholder understanding and buy-in of response and deployment policies including non-response and non-engagement at incidents of violence.
9. Fire Departments should strive to ensure their duty uniforms are not similar to, or could be mistaken for, those of law enforcement personnel.

The purpose of the 2007 Summit was to reaffirm the relevance of and develop implementation plans for each of the 16 Initiatives. The event's final report (usually referred to as "the Novato Report") acknowledges that "the strategies for reducing the risks associated with violence should include recognition of potentially dangerous situations as well as procedures to keep firefighters away from uncontrolled situations." While the Novato Report offered little in the way of concrete steps that could be used as a national protocol on the issue, it does contain two relevant recommendations:

10. Fire departments should work with other agencies to develop and implement joint SOPs/SOGs for all emergency response personnel (fire, law enforcement, EMS) and dispatchers, including the use of an effective incident management system.
11. All emergency response personnel and dispatchers should be trained in awareness factors for potentially violent incidents.

Over the next five years, steps were taken to address the issue on a local level. However, in 2011, the NFFF recognized that progress had been uneven in developing national protocols for response to violent incidents as was originally envisioned during the 2004 Firefighter Life Safety Summit. A focus group of stakeholders was convened to reexamine the issue, and to



recommend specific actions that could be implemented to reduce the potential for death and serious injury to fire service personnel and emergency first responders.

The focus group session was held on March 9-10, 2012 in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. Participants were selected based upon their research and work in the area of response to violent incidents by emergency response personnel, and also included representatives of agencies that had been directly involved in cases of violent incidents. Thirty-five participants representing twenty-nine organizations were in attendance. The NFFF commissioned this final report to include the findings of the focus group meeting, and to identify protocols that could be developed, distributed and implemented nationally.

Participating Organizations

(In alphabetical order)

Alton (IL) Fire Department
Anne Arundel County (MD) Fire Department
Arlington County (VA) Fire Department
Broward County (FL) Sherriff's Office
East Hartford (CT) Fire Department
El Mirage (AZ) Fire Department
Fayetteville (PA) Volunteer Fire Department
Fire Department of New York (FDNY)
George Washington University Department of Emergency Medicine
Howard County (MD) Department of Fire and Rescue Services
International Association of Fire Fighters
International Association of Arson Investigators
International Association of Fire Chiefs
Lewes (DE) Fire Department
Lexington (KY) Fire Department
Littleton (CO) Fire Rescue
Los Angeles City (CA) Fire Department
Maiden (NC) Fire Department
National Association of Police Organizations
National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
National Sheriffs' Association
Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal
Prince George's County (MD) Public Safety Communications
Prince George's County (MD) Fire/EMS Department
Philadelphia (PA) Fire Department
Richmond (CA) Fire Department
Teays Valley (WV) Fire Department
Tucson (AZ) Fire Department
Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Office of Emergency Management



Defining the Problem

While there has been significant discussion on the topic of response to violent incidents, it should be noted that among fire service constituency organizations, there is currently no clear and universally accepted definition of what constitutes a violent incident. This makes it difficult to track such incidents, gauge the extent of the problem and to create solutions that address the issue.

An internet search using the search parameters ‘violent incident emergency response’ yielded results ranging from a one-person attack on an individual responder to massive and widespread rioting in which entire agencies came under attack. In some situations, the acts of violence were premeditated, while in other cases the violence erupted without any warning. In a number of instances, responders were injured due to a lack of understanding of how certain situations can degrade quickly, such as following sporting events or sensitive community events where emotional expressions of passion turned violent. Local agencies often found themselves ill-prepared, understaffed and/or overwhelmed when events unfolded.

It should also be noted that the statutory definition of whether or not a crime is considered violent varies from state to state. Current (2012) New Jersey law requires the use of a weapon to constitute a violent crime, whereas the California Penal Code states that an assault is any unlawful attempt coupled with a present ability to commit a violent injury. The United States Department of Justice divides violent crimes into five categories: murder, rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault and simple assault. Using this definition, any criminal offense that involves the use or threat of force or violence can be considered a violent crime.

Firefighter Life Safety Initiative 12 was articulated to be intentionally broad in scope, so as to not limit its applicability to specific types of violent incidents. Accordingly, this final report will utilize a widely inclusive definition of “violent incidents” in order to facilitate the development of data collection and research efforts that identify and track the entire spectrum of violent incidents that impact firefighters. Because the federal definition has application in all United States jurisdictions, the focus group recommends the use of this definition when identifying violent incidents that affect firefighters.





Scope of the Problem

Little or no data exists that can define the scope of this issue. However, based upon anecdotal accounts related during the focus group discussion, it appears that the problem is widespread. Participants were able to recount multiple instances of attacks and assaults on firefighters. This also appears to be supported by the media; online reports indicating that emergency personnel were victims of violence are almost daily instances in the United States.

The lack of a systematic, coordinated process for collection of data pertaining to response to violent incidents is problematic. Focus group participants agreed that every violent act should be reported and documented, but a mechanism for collecting, organizing and disseminating the resulting data needs to be identified. Rather than creating a new reporting system for this purpose, the focus group recommended that one or more appropriate data field(s) should be added to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) to document violent incidents. If the incident resulted in an injury or death, the existing NFIRS firefighter injury or death reports would also then be completed. The focus group recommended that the associated data fields should identify:

- Whether the response was to a violent incident;
- What type of violent incident took place;
- Whether the violence was directed at emergency response personnel;
- Whether any emergency responder was injured or died.

Among focus group participants there was an underlying sense that many instances of violent behavior encountered during an emergency response go unreported. It is possible that the responders do not believe that certain actions require law enforcement involvement, such as when a patient slaps or hits a paramedic, or when threats of injury or violence are made but not taken seriously. Regardless of an individual's perspective, these acts are still forms of violence that could potentially escalate to the injury of a firefighter. What may seem like an empty threat could quickly become an assault that results in serious injury or even death.





Examples of Violent Incidents and Case Study Review

Emergency personnel respond to myriad types of violent incidents. The focus group heard presentations on three specific incidents from individuals who were involved in the response, and were also provided with background information related to several other incidents. In each case, significant points were identified during group discussions that should be incorporated into national protocols.

Littleton, Colorado

Two members of the Littleton (CO) Fire Department who were involved in the response to the Columbine High School shootings addressed the focus group. They provided background information and gave personal insights concerning the event as it unfolded and the actions that were taken or avoided by responders.

On April 20, 1999, two students engaged in an armed attack against their fellow students, faculty and staff at the Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. To divert the attention of emergency response personnel, the youths started a grass fire some distance away from the high school prior to the attack. Shortly thereafter, they began their attack on the school, which lasted approximately fifty minutes. Weapons used included improvised explosive devices, shotguns and high-powered rifles.

Inside the school, a scene of chaos and confusion ensued. Lack of unified command led to a fractured line of command and control, and numerous other missteps and misfires among the emergency response personnel who arrived to assist aggravated the situation:

- Throughout the incident, there were three different command posts.
- A number of law enforcement entities self-dispatched and self-deployed.
- Differing reports with conflicting information were given out, making clear communication impossible.
- Compounding the confusion was the use of terminology that held different meanings to different people and agencies (e.g. “clear” vs. “secure”).

Adding to the chaos, the attackers began shooting at the fire and emergency medical personnel. There is a substantiated report of a law enforcement officer aiming a rifle at a fire officer, mistaking him for one of the attackers, since the fire officer had removed his shirt that had become soaked with blood.

The need to include spousal and family briefing and debriefing when managing a violent incident was also noted, because family members should be kept apprised of events during and after the incident.

The impact of the media during and after a violent incident was discussed in great detail. A media plan is essential to the successful management of a violent incident. Media personnel



and their demands on the responding organization cannot be overstated, and must be included in pre-planning for this or any other type of violent incident. The competitive nature of the media can overshadow the efforts of emergency responders, and create confusion adding to the danger of the incident.

Lexington, Kentucky

In 2004, Lieutenant Brenda Cowan of the Lexington (KY) Fire Department was shot and killed while responding to a medical aid call. During the focus group session, a member of the department provided background information on this particular event and provided attendees with a copy of the revised Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) adopted by the Lexington Fire Department subsequent to the event (Appendix).

On the afternoon of February 13, 2004, a Lexington Fire Department unit was dispatched to a report of a woman down on the ground that may have been shot. The apparatus was parked away from the scene and crew members, under Lieutenant Cowan's supervision, approached the shooting victim on foot. At the same time that the fire department had been dispatched to the medical aid call, police units were dispatched to the same address for a possible shooting.

As Lieutenant Cowan and her crew bent over to assess the condition of the victim, gunshots were fired. These bullets struck Lieutenant Cowan and another firefighter. At almost the same time, a police officer arrived at the scene and attempted to use his police vehicle as a shield to protect the firefighters from further harm. Shots continued to be fired at the firefighters and other emergency responders. A police tactical team removed Lieutenant Cowan approximately forty minutes after the shooting began.

In the aftermath of this incident, several recommendations were made to reduce the likelihood of a similar outcome. These recommendations included:

- Developing an integrated communication system that permits information to be relayed between caller, dispatcher and responding personnel.
- Holding joint training sessions between law enforcement, the fire department, its mutual aid units and other emergency response agencies;
- Establishment of a requirement for emergency dispatch centers to have the ability to archive historical data on an individual or location, as well as the ability to provide that information to emergency responders in a timely fashion.

Focus group participants agreed that being provided with historical data for specific locations or individuals would improve the ability of emergency response personnel to develop and implement defensive tactics in anticipation of a potential violent incident. Conducting joint training exercises with other agencies and disciplines was also viewed as a positive step forward.¹

¹ It should be noted here that some focus group members opined that often agencies believe that since a violent incident has not yet occurred in their jurisdiction, the likelihood of one occurring is remote, and therefore training time and resources should be focused on more mission-critical endeavors. Other focus group members commented that some limited interagency trainings are usually only held after notable violent incidents. As a result, initiating and conducting joint training sessions may be easier said than accomplished.



Following this incident, the Lexington Fire Department revised its Standard Operating Procedure for response to violent or potentially violent incidents by establishing a tiered response system in which the level of responder caution and restraint increases with each additional tier (Lexington Fire Department SOP 200.48 revised 10/2011). The tiers are based on the type of situation and the potential likelihood for an escalation in violence. For example, an assault where the assailant has left the scene is classified as a Tier-One response, and an assault that is still in progress is a Tier-Two response. If the assault is a shooting and the assailant is still on the scene, the incident would be classified as a Tier-Four response, requiring the greatest restraint on the part of fire and emergency services responders. In all cases, company officers have the authority to stage their personnel and apparatus away from the scene, and await the arrival of law enforcement personnel. On Tier-Three and Tier-Four responses, a district chief or higher-ranking officer is dispatched to the scene.

One notable feature of the Lexington SOP is the checklist of action steps that can be utilized to direct field operations during the unfolding event. Checklist utilization is a best-practice methodology in many professions, including medicine and airline operations. While checklists are generally applicable to most fire service operational activity, they are particularly effective in managing responses to crisis situations. Focus group participants endorsed the use of checklists to facilitate decision-making and to guide action steps during responses to violent incidents.

An additional outcome of the violent incident that claimed the life of Lieutenant Cowan was the passage of the Brenda D. Cowan Act by the state legislature. This bill amended the Kentucky Revised Statute 508.025 to state *that a person is guilty of assault in the third degree when he causes or attempts to cause physical injury to emergency medical personnel, fire department members or rescue squad personnel*. While this is a tool that can be used after the fact in judicial proceedings, focus group members opined that criminal actors rarely consider the ramifications of their actions while committing a crime, particularly a violent one.

McKinney, Texas

The former fire chief of the McKinney (TX) Fire Department provided an illustrated and descriptive presentation of a shooting incident that occurred at the McKinney (TX) Public Safety Complex.

On August 17, 2010, in a premeditated incident, a lone gunman drove a pickup truck towing a trailer to the front entrance of the complex. In the gunman's trailer "were wood chips, roadside flares, gasoline, and ammonium nitrate fertilizer, the type used in the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City." (Meyers and Wigglesworth, Dallas Morning News). The complex was relatively new and featured large planters, bollards and elevated walls in front of the main entrance to prevent a vehicle from driving into or close to the building. The gunman set fire to the truck in what authorities believed was an attempt to detonate the explosives. He then fled into a field across the street from the Public Safety Complex and began firing a gun at the building. Fortunately, the pickup truck loaded with explosives failed to explode. It is believed that if the detonation had been successful, that there would have been major structural damage to the Public Safety Complex and a corresponding loss of life to the occupants.



Fire department units were dispatched for the truck on fire. The fire chief was in his office and was aware that a shooting incident was in progress. He made several attempts on the radio to alert incoming fire apparatus of the unfolding situation, but had difficulty getting his message out due to non-stop safety instructions monopolizing radio frequencies. However, the fire chief was finally able to warn units about the shooter just prior to their arrival on scene. In the meantime, the gunman continued to fire shots at the Public Safety Complex and the police officers who were now engaged with the shooter in a gun battle. Eventually, one of the police officers wounded the suspect seriously enough to reduce the hail of bullets fired in the direction of the police officers. The siege ended when the gunman shot himself with his second to last bullet, and died from his self-inflicted wounds. The entire event lasted only five minutes.

The key lesson learned from this incident was the value of building design features that can limit vehicle and individual access to critical infrastructure. The unfortunate realization by the focus group participants was that some targets, such as fire stations, by their very nature and mission are limited in restricting access because fire apparatus need to respond. However, there are defensive building features that can and should be designed into all fire stations and critical infrastructure, such as:

- Employ ballistic safety and shatter-resistant glass.
- Use of roll-down shutters as barricades.
- Limit the amount of glass used, such as using solid bi-fold or overhead doors rather than glass on apparatus bays.
- Exterior finishes should be made of materials such as brick which are not penetrable by gunfire.
- Structures should have safe rooms, which can double as tornado or storm shelters.
- Intercom and telephone systems should have emergency capabilities and a well-practiced emergency protocol.
- Camera/telemetry response vehicles and command post units should have access to video being filmed by building security cameras.
- Vehicle barrier walls outside the building prevent penetration of the building itself by motor vehicles.
- Co-location with the police department or community emergency services center provides additional resources during emergencies.



The fire chief also noted the need to have protocols for employees to follow when under attack in order to limit their exposure to harm.



Civil Disturbances

The focus group reviewed and discussed a number of civil disturbance incidents in which fire service personnel were impacted.

In Benton Harbor, Michigan in 2003, a young person died following a chase by police. Racial tensions within the community mounted, ultimately erupting in rioting. Individuals set fire to buildings and vehicles. When the fire department responded to put out the fires, the mob began to attack the firefighters.

This response was similar to the event which took place in Los Angeles, California in 1992, following the acquittal of police officers in the Rodney King trial. During that event, Los Angeles firefighters were advised and directed by their superiors to use a strategy that they had been effective during the 1965 Watts riots: to move in rapidly, make a quick attack, then pick up and become available for another response. The biggest difference between the response to the Rodney King riots and that in Benton Harbor was that the Los Angeles City Fire Department had previous experience, and planned for the possibility of widespread civil disturbances. The Benton Harbor Fire Department had no prior experience with such a scenario. As such, no planning for such a contingency was done until after the events unfolded.

Civil disturbances combined with fire setting and rampaging behavior can sometimes occur following sporting events. This has been particularly noted at venues where the population includes large numbers of people who have consumed alcohol. To reduce the risk of this outcome, certain sports and sporting venues have policies that restrict alcohol sales after a particular point in the game. (For example, Major League Baseball does not permit alcohol sales after the seventh inning). However, these policies probably do little to quell the enthusiasm of team supporters (or detractors) who spill into the streets to create merriment or to express their frustration. While these actions are usually not intended to cause injury or destruction, they often result in considerable property damage and expose firefighters to high levels of risk.

The lessons learned from the discussion of these incidents include:

1. Prior planning enables fire departments to be better prepared.
2. Constant interaction with law enforcement during the duration of an event is critical.
3. Maintaining situational awareness is paramount.

Booby Traps, Secondary Devices, Criminal Activity and Terroristic Actions

One of the focus group participants represented the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI), and has both fire service and law enforcement experience. He cautioned that criminal elements routinely set traps in buildings to protect or safeguard their operations. While responding to a fire or other unknown emergency event, firefighters can become victims of unforeseen consequences. Some examples he shared included holes cut in

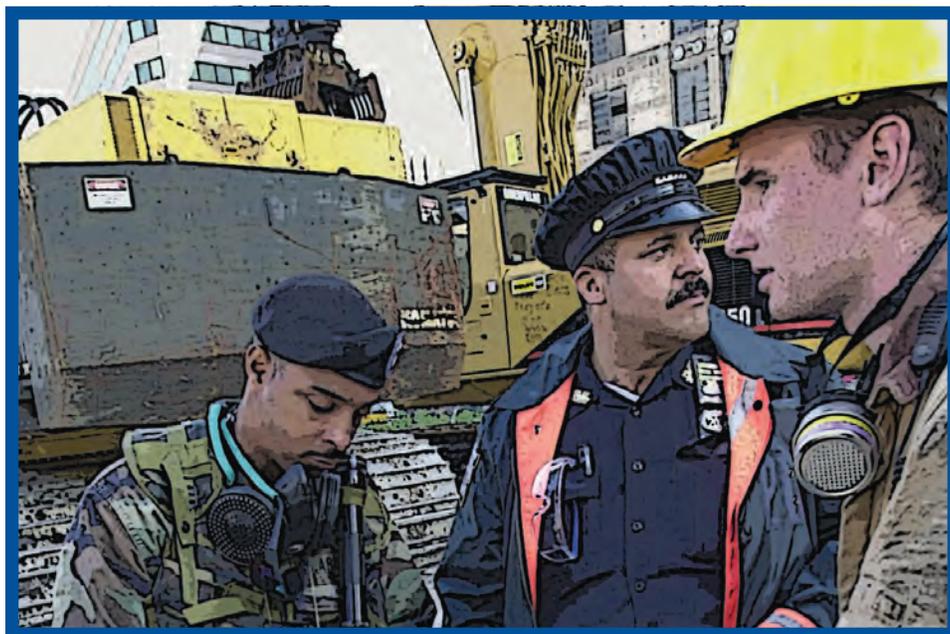


floors that are then covered with carpet or newspapers, multiple steps being removed from staircases and in some cases explosives are set with trip wires to injure or kill “intruders.” Illegal drug labs, firearms trafficking, contraband storage and illicit drug distribution locales are the primary venues for such booby traps.

Acts of politically motivated terrorism continue to plague the nation, and such terrorism takes many forms. It could be domestic violence executed by ecologically motivated individuals or groups (the Animal Liberation Front and the Earth Liberation Front being two of the more active groups), or domestic terrorism aimed at political targets such as medical clinics, testing labs or government buildings. Abortion clinics, cosmetic facilities that test on animals, military recruiting centers and large government buildings (such as the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) can be targets for such terrorist attacks. Large-scale attacks by foreign terrorists (such as the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon), whether developed abroad or taking place within the country, are of course a major threat to the nation as well.

Firefighters and other emergency first responders need to be aware that they can become direct victims or collateral damage of such attacks. Enhancing awareness of potential threats and targets can better prepare firefighters for their response to these incidents. Having access to intelligence regarding terrorist activities and then applying that information to daily response activities would clearly also be beneficial.

Another useful strategy is the proactive transmission of potential intelligence to fusion centers charged with collecting, analyzing and disseminating information to the emergency services community. The fire service is out in the community on a regular basis, and firefighters may see something that does not appear to be “normal” or “natural.” Passing on this information to the fusion center for evaluation could be the impetus for preventing an attack or stopping a serious injury from occurring. While this may be occurring in some jurisdictions, this practice should be implemented in all jurisdictions.





Specific Strategies for Addressing Response to Violent Incidents

The focus group agreed that the nine recommendations contained within the 2007 Firefighter Life Safety Initiative 12 White Paper remain valid in today's emergency response environment. The attendees also drew a number of conclusions and offered additional recommendations that can be used to reduce the potential for death or serious injury beyond those already made and commented on in this report.

An attendee representing the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) had both fire service and military experience. He was able to draw a distinct parallel between military operations and fire service response to violent incidents. He recommended that, at a minimum, fire service entities adopt a Preliminary Checklist when confronted with a violent or potential violent incident (see below) modified for fire service use when responding to violent incidents. The Checklist stresses a proactive approach that starts at the initial size-up of an event or response, and empowers fire service responders to disengage from a potentially threatening situation at any time. The use of force should only be employed when removal or disengagement is not possible. In these cases, non-lethal force is the preferred option.

Preliminary Checklist when Confronted with a Violent Incident

1. If your initial size-up assesses a threat of confrontation, wait for police assistance. Do not insert yourself into the situation.
2. If you find yourself in a confrontation where you can remove yourself to wait for police assistance, do it.
3. If you find yourself in a confrontation that you cannot remove yourself from:
 - a) If confronted with non-lethal force (no weapons are involved), defend yourself and attempt to control the situation using non-lethal force.
 - b) If confronted with lethal force, use whatever means is necessary to eliminate the threat or get out of the way. At times, this could mean not doing anything at all that might provoke the attacker. This would be an appropriate course of action when a gun is pointed at you.

Previous papers on violence in the workplace have commented on requirements within the General Duty clause administered under OSHA's federal regulations. The United States Department of Labor website (www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/standards.html) comments that there are currently no specific standards for workplace violence. However, the OSHA General Duty clause has been interpreted by the courts to mean that "an employer has a legal obligation to provide a workplace that is free of conditions or activities that either the employer or industry recognizes as hazardous and that cause, or are likely to cause, death or serious physical harm to employees when there is a feasible method to abate the hazard." It also implies that "an employer that has either experienced acts of workplace



violence or becomes aware of indicators that the potential for workplace violence exists would be on notice of the risk of workplace violence and should implement a workplace violence prevention program combined with engineering controls, administrative controls, and training.”

The focus group also recognized that awareness training, self-defense training and protocols, and policies were all tools that fire departments could implement to protect their members, both career and volunteer. Attendees agreed that even if an agency has not yet experienced an incident of workplace violence or responded to a violent incident, a policy regarding such incidents must be in place, and that the agency must be held accountable for training its members to protect them from harm.

After Action Review

While the topic was not specifically addressed during the March 2012 focus group session, any discussion of fire service response to a potential or realized threat of violence should include the use of an After Action Review (AAR) protocol to process such an incident. Performing an AAR at the company or department level will provide a meaningful mechanism to review the incident and to answer questions about the response. It will also help to relieve anxiety and uncertainty among firefighters about their performance and will provide a safe segue into discussing the emotional impacts of the event if necessary.

Though the AAR protocol disseminated by the NFFF is adopted from the military “Hot Wash” model, the process is not new to the fire service: it goes by many different names, and good officers have been doing it all along. The AAR is a straight-forward systematic review of a recently completed action, taking steps to identify lessons learned and affirm positive risk management decisions. Firefighters can give and receive constructive feedback on their performance and those of their fellow team members, and are able to move recommendations that will directly impact firefighter safety “up the food chain,” leading to positive changes in departmental operations and policies and procedures.

Performing an AAR means asking five basic questions, every time wheels roll:

1. ***What was our intent?***
2. ***What went well?***
3. ***What could have gone better?***
4. ***What should we have done differently?***
5. ***Who needs to know?***

AAR should become standard operating procedure in all fire departments, and should be used at the company or crew level on every call. Such daily use, like the regular application of incident command skills, greatly enhances overall performance, builds a safer organization and provides a solid foundation for the occupational, personal and emotional skills that become critical during and after major events.





Conclusion

Every day, fire departments are called daily to hundreds of incidents. Within even the most routine response situations is the potential for serious injury or death for firefighters, emergency medical services personnel and other responders. Encountering violence during the call compounds this inherent vulnerability, and adds an unacceptable level of risk for every responder.

The recommendations included in this report advance Firefighter Life Safety Initiative 12, and represent identified best practices from fire service organizations across the country. They are intended to reduce the likelihood that responders will encounter violence; to standardize response protocols to reduce the inherent chaos of these situations; and most of all to increase survivability for fire service personnel when such a scenario is unavoidable.

Since 2004, the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation has spearheaded industry-wide efforts to reduce line-of-duty injuries and deaths among firefighters. Through the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives and the Everyone Goes Home® program, the NFFF encourages the nation's fire service organizations to implement strategies, tactics, policies, procedures and recommendations that will substantially and quantifiably result in improved outcomes for firefighters. Adopting the recommendations within this report is an important step forward in terms of acknowledging the risk of encountering violence, and providing firefighters with the education and tools they need to keep themselves safe, and to ensure that everyone goes home.





Recommendations

1. **To standardize identification the federal definition of a violent incident should be adopted by fire service organizations.**
2. **The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) should be modified to include appropriate data fields to facilitate statistical data collection and analysis of violent incidents.**
3. **Response agencies must adhere to a unified command structure that reinforces the use of an integrated incident management system. Multiple or separate command posts should be discouraged.**
4. **No resource should be permitted to self-dispatch or self-deploy to any incident. All requests for assistance should emanate from the command post following established protocols.**
5. **Radio and communication discipline should be stressed so that conflicting information can be evaluated before action is taken. Concurrently, on-scene personnel movements must be tracked through an accountability system to prevent emergency responders from becoming victims of friendly fire.**
6. **Dispatch should provide all emergency responders with historical data for specific locations or individuals so that the responders can develop and implement defensive tactics in anticipation of a potential violent incident.** Where legal obstacles prevent the dissemination of such information, efforts should be undertaken to enact laws or regulations to permit this information to be shared with emergency responders.
7. **All emergency response agencies should adopt protocols and policies dealing with response to violent incidents.** Examples of such protocols and policies are provided in the appendices of this report. These policies should be as inclusive and encompassing as possible while recognizing the resource limitations of each particular agency. Protocols should also include policies on the dissemination of information to family members, the media and the general public.
8. **Training programs should be developed that include recognition of the potential for violent incidents; situational awareness and appropriate actions to take during violent incidents; and self-defense strategies and tactics to employ if confronted by a violent incident.** Agencies should participate in multi-discipline training exercises that can simulate an event and create opportunities to refine and improve the strategy and tactics to be used during a violent incident.
9. **The potential for violent incidents should be considered when constructing new facilities.** Where appropriate, construction-hardening features including access-limiting designs should be incorporated.
10. **Prior to and during times of heightened or sensitive events, fire departments should conduct planning sessions with law enforcement and other response elements to discuss how operations will proceed before, during and after the event.** During such planning, member protection and situational awareness should be emphasized.
11. **Fire service organizations should proactively provide information and intelligence to fusion centers for evaluation and analysis on an ongoing basis.**
12. **Fire departments and law enforcement agencies should work together to develop procedures or guidelines for response to “active shooters,” including incidents at schools and mass-gathering facilities.**
13. **After Action Review (AAR) should be standard operating procedure in all fire departments.**
14. **National, state and local stakeholders should be used to mobilize efforts that create awareness and advance this initiative.** These same networks can be used to ensure that the training, policies and protocols created to address this initiative are distributed in a sensitive manner.



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Appendix

Lexington, Kentucky Department of Fire & Emergency Services

SOP 200.48: Response to Violent or Potentially Violent Incidents

Revision Date: 10/2011

Purpose: The purpose of this SOP is to establish guidelines for the safe response to potentially violent incidents and management of violent or potentially violent incidents by Division of Fire and Emergency Services' personnel.

Scope: All sworn personnel in LDFES.

Command and Control: This SOP is at the direction of the Chief of LDFES. All Incident Commanders (IC) shall ensure compliance with this SOP.

Content:

In today's world, the possibility of first responders being exposed to a violent incident is greater than in the past. Traditionally violent acts were rarely directed at First Responders, who were allowed to enter scenes and render aid with minimal risk. Our working environment has changed and now includes individuals and groups with different value systems may place their needs over the impact to innocent human lives. Examples of groups or incidents that may pose an increased threat to our members and the community include:

- Suicidal patients
- Domestic Violence calls
- Assaults in progress
- Domestic and international terrorist groups
- Human trafficking/kidnapping rings
- Violence related to immigration issues
- Increasing gang violence and networking
- Gang/group members with military backgrounds and combat experience (paramilitary)
- Organized drug trafficking
- Home invasions

Emergencies are often chaotic and emotionally charged events. Any situation has the potential to turn violent. The individuals encountered may be or become agitated, desperate, motivated by criminal or other hostile beliefs, or their judgment may be impaired by drugs/alcohol.

The goal of this SOP is to allow members of the Division of Fire to utilize their training, education, and experience, combined with the circumstances around each particular incident,



to evaluate the need to “stage” Division of Fire Resources in a location away from the incident scene, or proceed to the dispatch location. The way members can minimize the risks when responding to and operating at these events are:

- Making a size-up of the situation based on the information available
- Make a standard risk management decision based on the information gathered
- Identify and communicate the appropriate deployment of resources based on the risk assessment.
- Communicate and Coordinate with Law Enforcement thru joint command interaction at all incidents.
- Follow the Department’s SOP’s/Policies.
- Continually assess the situation to determine if your deployment model is appropriate for the conditions.

Response Tiers

Division of Fire responses to violent or potentially violent incidents will be broken down into four (4) Tiers, with the level of restraint increasing with each additional Tier (Tier-One being the least restrictive, and Tier-Four being the most restrictive).

Tier-One Responses

In a Tier-One response, the first due Company Officer or Acting Officer (AO) has the authority, using the information at hand, to either approach the scene as circumstances allow based on size-up information, or stage in a Tier-Two status and await for law enforcement to arrive on scene.

Tier-One responses include (but are not limited to):

- Calls of Domestic Violence where the violence is known to be over
- Assault calls where the assailant has left the scene
- Any incident where children have been injured (less than 13)
- Accidental cuttings/shootings
- Suicidal subjects without deadly weapons
- Shootings/stabbings where the assailant has fled the scene.

It is always appropriate for Company Officers or AO’s to choose to stage based on size-up.

Company Officers and AO’s will communicate and coordinate with Police Officers to improve safety and promote consistent inter-agency actions. Company Officers and AO’s will maintain “situational awareness” of crews and environment.



Tier-Two Responses

In a Tier-Two response, the crews shall position and await the arrival of law enforcement before proceeding to the scene. If law enforcement is on scene, the Company Officer or AO's shall then utilize size-up information to determine if the crew may approach the scene or should wait and allow police further time to stabilize the scene.

Tier-Two responses include but are not limited to:

- Calls of suicidal subjects with a deadly weapon
- Calls of domestic violence in-progress
- Assaults in progress
- Shootings where a subject is reported to have actually been shot and the location of the shooter/assailant is not known.

When law enforcement presence is on scene and based on size-up information the first in company may then move up to the scene. All other companies need to stage at least one block (or sheltered location) and await further instructions from the Incident Commander (IC). Only companies requested to approach by the IC shall move up to the scene.

When law enforcement presence is NOT on scene and size-up information indicates the situation should be handled as Tier-Two, then the first in company shall stage and continue size up information gathering and notify by radio all other responding companies. As Police arrive and stabilize the scene, the IC will determine if approach is warranted, and may move up to the scene. All other companies need to stage at least one block away (or sheltered location) and await further instructions from the IC. Only companies requested to approach by the IC shall move up to the scene.

If size up information indicates that the approach is not warranted even after arrival of Police, then the companies may choose to remain in Tier-Two staging and should have communications relay this to the Police Officers on scene.

Staging should be in a sheltered position with an established means of egress from the area. Remember it is NEVER wrong to stage and wait for law enforcement.

Division of Fire personnel will always comply with specific law enforcement instructions to wait or stage if their on-scene size-up indicates risk above a Tier-Two event.

Company Officers and AO's will communicate and coordinate with Police Officers to improve safety and promote consistent inter-agency actions. Company Officers and AO's will maintain "situational awareness" of crews and environment.

Tier-Three Responses

Tier-Three response procedures shall be followed when an incident or location poses an imminent risk of actual violence towards firefighters, or an act of violence has occurred to firefighters or first responders. Such incidents may include but are not limited to:



- Potential civil disorders
- Crowd disorders with shots fired that are not stabilized
- Barricaded subjects with threat of violence to others

For these types of incidents with a perimeter should be identified a *minimum* of one block (or out of sight) in each direction from which the act occurred. A District Officer or higher ranking officer shall be dispatched or requested after dispatch to all these types of incidents. If a first responder arrives prior to the District Officer, they shall conduct size-up and compile information from the staging area and update the District Officer upon their arrival. The District Officer may call for additional resources to respond to a designated safe staging area as appropriate.

Once law enforcement has arrived on scene in a safe number to reasonably ensure the safety of the fire crews, the District Officer shall proceed into the incident location and make contact with Police. They will determine which units are needed on the actual incident scene. ALL other using SHALL remain in the staging area unless requested to respond in by the IC. These scenes may rapidly become unstable and rapid egress may be required by fire companies. This is more rapidly accomplished with fewer units directly at the incident scene.

In the event there is no law enforcement presence on scene and the District Officer makes the tactical decision to proceed into the incident scene for size up the District Officer should take a second firefighter/fire officer into the area for team safety.

District, Company and Acting Officers will communicate and coordinate with Police Officers to improve safety and promote consistent inter-agency actions. District, Company and Acting Officers will maintain “situational awareness” of crews and environment.

Tier-Four Responses

Tier-Four response procedures shall be followed in the followed when actual acts of violence, or a series of events have occurred in a specific area of the City. Such incidents may include but are not limited to:

- Active shooting scenarios where the assailant is still on the scene
- Active civil disorders
- Active gang/crowd violence
- Hostage situations
- Barricaded subjects with weapons
- Unrelated set fires in an area of potential civil disturbances
- Area -specific looting

In these situations, a perimeter encompassing ½ square mile or more should be established around the area. A Command Post shall be established well outside that perimeter. When possible, a joint Command Post should be established with the Police Department. If this is not possible, a ranking Police Officer should be requested to report to the fire department Command Post.



All units responding into the perimeter will be grouped (no single company responses) and shall have Police escorts. Responding units will communicate with the IC. Request for additional assistance by a company/unit shall be directed to Command, utilizing the appropriate channel (Primary dispatch of a Tactical Channel). NO ENTRY into the area of disturbance is allowed without the approval of the responding District Officer or a higher level ranking officer. Entry will be made ONLY with a police escort of at least two (2) Police Officers.

An entry team shall be comprised of a minimum of four (4) firefighters with a designated officer in charge. These four crewmembers shall remain in contact by voice or direct visual contact at all times. The apparatus operators shall remain staged at their trucks for security of the apparatus and to assist in providing rapid egress from the scene if necessary. The IC should consider requesting additional police officers to aid in securing the apparatus while in the area of unrest.

If at any time the Tier-Four entry team loses contact with the Police escort, the team shall affect an immediate exit from the incident area. Team members shall maintain “Company Integrity” as a team at all times inside the perimeter and not become separated. When operating in a Tier-Four situation, emphasis must be placed on stabilizing the incident as rapidly as possible, if safe to do so, and the pulling out.

There may be certain circumstances (ie; mass casualty incidents with an active shooter) where members of the LFD could be asked to make entry into a non-secured area of a scene to effect a rapid extraction of wounded persons. The decision to make this type of entry shall only be a District Officer/Chief Officer and at the direction and approval of the Police IC. The number of personnel utilized shall be limited to the minimum number needed to affect the rescue.

Personnel making such an entry would only enter areas previously “cleared”, but not “secured” by law enforcement. It is important to remember that the security of these areas can not be guaranteed and situations can rapidly change. Those personnel making such an entry will be voluntary and shall be provided with body armor. Personnel shall only proceed into the non-secured area if escorted by armed law enforcement officers. Advancement into any “cleared” area should be made only with the permission of the on scene law enforcement IC.

Upon completion of the call, the companies shall leave the area as a group and return to the Command Post or designated staging area, be accounted for, and return to Tier-Three Staging.

Command will request that Communications monitor all radio traffic via a dedicated dispatcher on the assigned Tactical Channel. Command should consider rotating units from throughout the City into the Tier-Four staging area to respond. This can help reduce tension and maintain alertness of crews.

During the duration of the shift, (unless otherwise ordered by the Fire Chief or his designee) fire department companies shall not respond into that area without a police escort and shall follow the requirements of the SOP. Future emergency responses shall not occur into or through the area during the restricted time period and companies shall stay clear of the area when returning from other calls. Non-emergency runs shall not be made into the area unless authorized by the Fire Chief or his designee. Fire Companies from stations located adjacent to the perimeter area will return to their stations except to respond to, and return directly from calls, and remain in their stations. These companies shall go into a “Lockdown” mode



for security reasons. All doors will be closed and locked. Members will remain indoors at all times. Any fire stations located inside the established perimeter shall have their resources reassigned to a station outside the perimeter.

Safety Considerations:

- No single company responses will be permitted in Tier-Three and Tier-Four situations.
- Police escorts will be required in Tier-Four. Police presence is required in Tier-Three.
- All fire department personnel will respond to and from all emergencies in Tier-Four in protective clothing (helmet, bunkers coat, etc.) for protection and ease of identification.
- Use of sirens and air horns within the perimeter should be avoided. Emergency lights may be used if the Company Officer in charge determines it is necessary.
- When responding to any “Tier” situations, apparatus *must* be placed in a manner that will allow for rapid, unobstructed retreat from the area. Apparatus must also be parked in a manner that best protects the crew. This may require backing apparatus down a dead end street in order to ensure rapid egress, or avoiding dead end streets entirely.
- When operating in Tier-Four mode, all tools and equipment located on the exterior of apparatus must be removed and placed in interior compartments.
- Crews should be careful about what is said over the radio. Outside speakers on apparatus (if so equipped) may broadcast all messages (to the public). MDT’s or cellular phones should be used as much as possible for sensitive communications.
- Our members must control their behavior. We should back off in most potentially violent situations so that we do not fuel a major disturbance when it could have been avoided with the use of discretion.
- Any civil disturbance has the potential of escalating into a major situation.

Tactical Considerations

- Establish joint command interaction with law enforcement at all incidents to coordinate actions and improve communication.
- Patients may be more effectively treated in potentially violent situation if the patient is rapidly removed from the scene to an exterior treatment area (scoop and run).
- When no lives are at stake, emphasis will be on protecting savable property. Buildings, vehicles, etc. that are fully involved with no or little exposure problem may be left to burn at the discretion of the IC.
- Emphasis will be fast attack, heavy streams to rapidly control and extinguish the fire and then to get out of the area. Routine salvage, ventilation and overhaul practices may be discontinued. Use of hand lines should be limited.
- All fire units will enter the perimeter as intact groups, travel in groups, operate in groups, and return in groups. In Tier-Four responses, a “team” shall constitute four (4) firefighters operating as one unit.