



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

24-01

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**Incident Response Policy Appendix A  
Operational Doctrine Statement**

07/01/2017

Issued by: Fire Chief Scott E. Goldstein

Policy Number: 24-01

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MCFRS is a combination, all-hazards fire and rescue service, with both career and volunteer service providers.

The Operational Doctrine Statement (ODS) sets the tone for operational behavior. It describes the fundamental high-level notions on which all other operational matters are based. It is the authoritative statement of the MCFRS philosophical approach to emergency incident response.

The ODS applies to all incident operations, including those that do not fit neatly into categories. There will be times when the nature of an incident taxes the capacities of personnel and the organization. There will be times when the amount of uncertainty is difficult to overcome. But in all situations personnel have a duty to act when action is required and leaders have a duty to lead. The ODS is a framework for action and leadership.

### **The Demands of the Operational Environment**

The fire/rescue operational environment places demands on personnel. These demands can be broadly classified as moral, mental and physical.

#### **Moral Demands**

Many of the people assisted by MCFRS personnel are in a vulnerable position; they are either unable to resolve the issue at hand for themselves or they are unable to advocate for themselves. In some cases, personnel will need to act as a gateway to other agencies and services. In other cases, personnel will need to be advocates for those who cannot advocate for themselves.

Personnel must never lose sight of their role as public servants and the importance of advocacy to that role. They must remember that whenever they are operating as MCFRS members they represent themselves, their crew, their chain of command, MCFRS, and the County Government. All personnel have a duty to demonstrate integrity, empathy, and compassion, especially when the situation is challenging. This reality places a demand on the moral center of personnel.

#### **Mental Demands**



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The operational environment is mentally taxing because operations often occur in a cloud of uncertainty. Often, personnel will find themselves in dangerous places facing unclear problems under extreme time pressure. Good training will ease some of the burden but cannot remove it altogether. Personnel will also witness human tragedy, including death and great personal loss. These things are not easy to deal with; they will place a large demand on the emotional stability of responders. Personnel must report for duty mentally and emotionally prepared to engage.

**Physical Demands**

Research into the physiological demands of firefighting, especially as they relate to sudden cardiac events, makes it clear that personnel will face great physical stress. Bodies must be trained and prepared just as minds must be trained and prepared. Personnel must report for duty physically prepared to engage.

**Operational Values**

Operational Values are the core character traits of MCFRS personnel, the qualities that the organization expects its people to demonstrate. The three core MCFRS Operational Values are:

- a. A Commitment to Duty
- b. Respect for Others and the Organization
- c. Integrity

A Commitment to Duty requires:

1. Being proficient in your job, both technically and as a leader.
2. Making sound and timely decisions.
3. Ensuring tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished.
4. Knowing yourself and seeking improvement.

Respect for Others and the Organization requires:

1. Ensuring that people always come first.
2. Keeping a respect for the needs of those we serve in the forefront.
3. Knowing your subordinates, keeping them informed and looking out for their well-being.
4. Continually building the team at the unit, station, battalion, shift, and organizational levels.

Integrity requires:

1. Accepting responsibility for your actions.
2. Being a positive example.



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3. Being honest.
4. Acting in the best interest of the team.

**Operational Principles**

Our effectiveness as an organization is based on a small set of fundamental ideas about the way we operate: Operational Principles. These principles have evolved over time and are an integral part of our organizational culture. The Operational Principles are not rules, they are a description of how we think and how we operate on incidents.

**Commitment to Service**

MCFRS has earned and enjoys a level of public trust and it is our collective duty to perform and behave at the highest levels of professionalism to maintain that level of trust. Personnel have interactions with the public and those interactions have a profound effect on the perception of MCFRS. All personnel must make sure every encounter is a positive one.

**Effective Leadership**

Each incident requires effective leadership. Personnel at all levels of the organization have the opportunity to demonstrate leadership. There are attributes that effective leaders have in common, they:

- a. Are decisive.
- b. Recognize the duty to act and act when action is required.
- c. Are accountable for their actions.
- d. Refuse unnecessary risk but are not risk averse.
- e. Are engaged in continuous learning.

The supervisor's intent refers to both the objective and the reason for the objective. Supervisors at all levels must make the intent of their orders clear. Operations must be directed toward a clearly defined and attainable objective. Strategies are subject to change, priorities are subject to change, and tactics are subject to change but the intent of a given order rarely changes. Personnel must be willing to follow orders and act in ways that demonstrate a clear understanding of the objective and operational priorities.

**Scaled Response**

MCFRS incident response operations begin with the report of an incident. From this initial report one of a number of predetermined assortments of personnel and capabilities is dispatched.



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Beginning at the time of dispatch the organization then relies on personnel to conduct assessments and make judgements. One of the core judgements is whether or not the response package is appropriate. Based on situation assessments, the appropriate personnel determine whether to de-escalate the incident, maintain the incident, or escalate the incident.

The principle of scaled response contains within it the corollary of *defense in depth*. Defense in depth means that as the risk or complexity of an incident increases, the allocation of resources, the number of contingency plans, and the configuration of rapid intervention teams must also grow proportionately, scaling up or down to meet the needs of the incident.

#### Effective Teamwork

Incident operations require teamwork and teamwork requires the subordination of selfish aims to the needs of the team. Effective teamwork is characterized by the ability to:

- a. Develop and communicate situational awareness.
- b. Demonstrate a clear understanding of the incident objectives and priorities.
- c. Provide assistance to others as necessary to support the incident objectives.
- d. Monitor team action and thought for errors and to correct them as necessary.
- e. Use all available information resources.

The first arriving unit officer sets the tone for the incident operations. Subsequent operations must focus on supporting the initial arriving decision makers. Supporting the decisions of the initial decision makers acknowledges that these personnel have made an assessment of the situation and are likely most suited to determine the initial course of action.

There will be times when the initial response actions are not correct. This will be discovered by ongoing assessments. It is expected that when the initial decisions are not appropriate personnel will communicate, coordinate, and adjust as necessary to meet the objectives.

#### On-Scene Initiative

Initiative is action in the absence of orders, or in the presence of unforeseen opportunities or threats. At times during an incident there may be one person who is the only one in a position to see what needs to be done and to do it. Circumstances may not permit waiting for permission before the opportunity is lost or the threat materializes.

The operational environment demands that all personnel be given sufficient latitude to act quickly and decisively within the scope of their authority to accomplish critical tasks, without waiting for direction when immediate action is required.

#### Managed Risk



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MCFRS seeks to reduce the risks associated with any incident to the lowest achievable level without compromising the mission:

- We will extend calculated risk to save savable lives.
- We will accept limited risk to save savable property.
- We will not risk Firefighter lives for lives or property that cannot be saved.

Every incident has some degree of risk and all the risks will never be known. However, personnel are required to accept risk when the benefits outweigh the costs.

The most logical choices for accomplishing a mission are those that meet all the mission requirements exposing personnel and resources to the lowest possible risk. Accepting unnecessary risk contributes nothing to the safe accomplishment of a task or mission.

#### Commitment to Learning

As a learning organization, MCFRS actively engages in critical self-analysis, the discovery and dissemination of lessons, and continual operational evolution. Engaging in critical evaluation, even after success, is vital to improvement.

There is often more to learn from mistakes than from successes. Mistakes should be brought out into the open, discussed and shared in ways that are respectful of participants and that enhance the rapid transmission of lessons.

The purpose of all training is to develop personnel and teams that perform well under the adverse conditions that they are likely to face. Continual training is a key to operational success. Training exists on many levels and at each level there is a supervisor who must ensure that the training is appropriate and effective.

Individual skills are the foundation for operational effectiveness and must receive heavy emphasis. The operational environment demands team skills as well. Supervisors at each level must have sufficient time and freedom to conduct the training necessary for operational effectiveness.

#### Balance

Emergency operations require balance in all respects and at all levels of the organization. The Incident Commander must control the pace or "tempo" of events without diminishing the initiative of officers. There must be a balance between speed and thoughtfulness. Speed is a derivative of efficiency, which is a derivative of training.

There must be balance between tactics and available resources. We must choose the course of action that provides the quickest, most effective and most efficient methods for ensuring the incident priorities and incident objectives are met using the resources that are on hand. But we must also



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recognize the need for additional resources and the need to adjust tactics when additional resources are available.

There must be a balance in planning. Plans must be proportional to the complexity of the incident, only prescribing what is absolutely necessary and leaving the initiative of subordinates intact as appropriate. A planning balance also speaks to the need to ensure an appropriate allocation of time spent planning in the present and time spent planning for the future.

There must be balance in communication. The Incident Commander must control the pace of events, but must also realize that unit officers are communicating with their crew members or with civilians. While the Incident Commander must get reports from the assigned units and while they must be prepared to provide those reports, a balance must be struck between talking too much and not talking enough.

**Operational Anchors**

Operational decisions and actions are the by-products of assessments. Personnel must assess many things such as scene security, the severity of the chief complaint, the structural stability of burning structure.

Each of these assessments represents a moment in time. New hazards often emerge as others are being resolved. For this reason, effective operations require on-going assessments and adjustments as necessary to meet the objectives of the incident.

The Operational Anchors are key assessments and practices that are applied throughout an incident. They inform all aspects of incident decision-making and are always running in a loop in the background.

**Situational Awareness**

Situational awareness is the ability to identify, process, and comprehend the critical elements of information about what is happening at the incident. Situational awareness is a process. It is knowing what is going on around you.

**Accountability**

This term has two meanings. First, it means that all personnel are responsible for ensuring they know where their subordinates are, and that their supervisors know where they are. Secondly, it means that all personnel are responsible for all of their actions.

**Safety**



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While MCFRS has a responsibility to ensure the health, safety, welfare, and accountability of its personnel, this does not replace the need for each individual to ensure their own health, safety, and welfare.

MCFRS relies on its personnel to demonstrate judgment and effective supervision to ensure that safety is accounted for, especially when there are multiple competing objectives.

#### Effective Communications

Effective communications are critical to emergency operations. Ideas, plans, objectives, and orders are useless until they are communicated. Effective communication speaks to more than the allocation of time for talking. It also requires that supervisors issue orders with clear objectives and intent. Personnel must know what is expected of them.

Effective communications also requires that personnel use the most efficient language possible while avoiding non-standard phrases.

#### Risk Assessment

Risk describes the relationship between hazards and harm. More specifically, risk is the product of the chance that a certain hazard will cause harm and the severity of the harm if it were to occur. A risk assessment is a dynamic process of gathering information about the operational environment as it relates to risk, and then comparing the identified risks to the expected benefits of a given action. Stated differently, it is the process of making the decision of whether or not it is "worth it" to conduct a given operation.

In the context of incident operations the benefits are usually framed in terms of lives saved, significant injury reduced or avoided, and reduction in property loss. The risks may include injury or death.

#### Crew Resource Management

Crew Resource Management (CRM) is a system of organizational behavior that focuses on how team member attitudes and behaviors impact safety. It considers the team rather than the individual as the standard operating unit. CRM encourages leadership and teamwork skills by supporting input from the entire team while preserving chain of command.

#### Incident Strategies

For each incident there is a general operational posture that personnel assume. MCFRS refers to these postures as strategies. MCFRS recognizes two strategies: offensive and defensive. The choice of strategy is independent of location (inside or outside) as it relates to the hazard area. The strategy may change over the course of an incident but only one of the two strategies can be in use at any one time.



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An offensive strategy means that personnel are actively and directly attempting to correct the identified problem. This might mean that they are doing CPR on the pulseless patient, directing water streams into the burning structure, or trying to plug the leaking vessel.

A defensive strategy is where personnel decide that the best course of action is to contain the problem. In this case personnel might build containment around a leak, or only put water on threatened exposures.

Any change of strategy must be the result of deliberate defensible thought and must be communicated.

**Incident Priorities**

The incident priorities are Life Safety, Incident Stabilization, and Property Conservation.

Ideally, all of the incident priorities are addressed simultaneously. When available resources do not allow for simultaneously addressing the priorities, they must be addressed sequentially and in the listed order.

**Life Safety**

Life safety means to account for people possibly in danger. Personnel must use the fastest, most prudent, methods available to ensure the safety of people. Life safety concerns include civilians and firefighters alike.

Once the decision is made to enter a hazard area, a search of the hazard area must occur. This search must occur regardless of reports that "everyone" is out of the structure or area. The assessment of whether entry is prudent comes first and independently; the search comes as a matter of course.

There will be occasions where there are reports of persons trapped or unaccounted for inside a hazard area. Personnel must never treat these reports lightly but they must not accept them blindly. As the risk inherent in search or other operational efforts increases, personnel must make a proportionally greater effort to ensure that the information they are acting on is current and valid.

Survivability is an assessment of how likely people are to survive a particular emergency. Personnel will accept extreme risk to assist people who are known to be in danger and who are within our capability to save. Despite our best efforts there may come a point where people in danger are beyond our ability to save them. This does not mean that MCFRS "gives up" on people. MCFRS does not "give up" on people in the sense that we refuse to accept risk to save them, but MCFRS does recognize that human life operates within narrow environmental ranges.

The separation provided by compartmentation can provide an effective barrier from most hazards. Untenable conditions tend to be specific to individual compartments, such that while one





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compartment is untenable, an adjacent compartment might be tenable. Personnel must not rule out survivability in all compartments based on conditions in a single compartment.

#### Incident Stabilization

Incident stabilization means stopping a problem from getting worse. Incident stabilization is situational. Personnel must first stop the spread of a danger or risk before addressing the risk directly. It is often the case that a direct attack on a given problem is the best solution for preventing the problem from growing worse, but not always.

#### Property Conservation

Property conservation is often the most meaningful act to those we serve. Property conservation must be considered as part of all actions. MCFRS demonstrates our role as servants of the community and stewards of their property by our conservation efforts. Personnel must constantly be on the lookout for opportunities to maximize property conservation.

#### Conclusion

Operational success is the effective application of the operational doctrine, policies and procedures, training, and education to create solutions for problems, even where no clear solution exists.

Effective pre-planning, education and training will make it more likely that personnel will take the proper action in the moment. However, despite good preparation the incident scene can be full of uncertainty. The factors on which incident action is based is often wrapped in uncertainty. Personnel must work through this even when their best reasoning feels inadequate.

There are times when the incident's rate of expansion or complexity are so great that effective action and planning become difficult. In such situations, the resources on the initial response assignment can become overwhelmed, making the right thing to do unclear. It is during these times that a firm grounding in the operational doctrine, solid education, and good training combine to produce effectiveness and eventual success.

It is expected that personnel will be able to use the ideas, values, principles, and operational anchors contained in the ODS as the basic building blocks to enhance the likelihood of operational success.

*Do the right thing.*

Approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Scott Goldstein'.

Scott E. Goldstein  
Fire Chief

April 14, 2017