

FIRELINE HANDBOOK

**CHAPTER 5—TRANSFER OF
COMMAND**

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TRANSFER OF COMMAND

A continuous command presence must be maintained on all incidents until all resources are released. Command of incidents, and some or all personnel in the incident management organization, may change one or more times as the incident changes in size or complexity, is of long duration, or changes jurisdiction(s). A briefing that captures all essential information for continuing effective command of the incident and provides for firefighter and public safety must occur prior to transfer of command. This information should be recorded and displayed for easy retrieval and subsequent briefings.

The transfer of command authorities for an incident must be as efficient and orderly as possible. The incident commander and his/her organization in place remains in charge of the incident until the incoming commander and his/her personnel are briefed by their counterparts and, where one is required, a delegation of authority has been signed.

MANY SAFETY PROBLEMS EMERGE AS AN INCIDENT BECOMES LARGER AND/OR MORE COMPLEX. INCIDENT TRANSFER OF COMMAND HISTORICALLY HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS PHASES OF INCIDENT MANAGEMENT. INCIDENTS SHOULD TRANSFER COMMAND AT A SPECIFIC TIME, PREFERABLY AT THE START OF A NEW OPERATIONAL PERIOD.

THE OPERATIONAL EFFORT SHOULD CONTINUE DURING TRANSFER PERIOD WITH COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE INCIDENT FIRMLY IN PLACE, AND WITH CLEAR, ACHIEVABLE AND SOUND STRATEGY AND TACTICS COMMUNICATED TO AND IMPLEMENTED BY ALL FIREFIGHTING RESOURCES.

INCIDENT COMMANDER BRIEFING

The outgoing Incident Commander must brief the incoming incident commander upon his/her arrival. The incoming Incident Commander should not assume command until thoroughly briefed and an exact time of command transfer is determined. If the incoming Incident Commander is arriving with a team, his/her team members may also attend the briefing. Likewise, if the outgoing Incident Commander has a team in place, those team members may also attend the briefing. After the briefing, incoming team members will start phasing into their areas of responsibility, but will not assume control until the predetermined time as agreed upon by the incoming and outgoing Incident Commanders. Notification of transfer of command must be immediately communicated to **ALL** firefighting resources, affected dispatch office(s), and agency administrator(s) through radio communication and/or verbal briefing.

Incident Commander's Checklist

The incoming Incident Commander, at all levels of complexity, should address the following items before he/she assumes command of an incident:

- Name and location of the incident.
- Jurisdiction(s) responsible for the incident.
- Name/location/radio contact of current Incident Commander(s).
- Agency Administrator(s) objectives for the incident.
- Current status of the incident:
 - ✓ Size.
 - ✓ Legal location.
 - ✓ Current fire behavior.
 - ✓ Expected fire behavior.
 - ✓ Most current fire weather forecast for incident area. Obtain spot weather forecast if possible.
 - ✓ Fuel type(s) involved, or likely to be involved.
 - ✓ Resources assigned to the incident, their status and location.

- ✓ Resources ordered for the incident and their estimated time of arrival.
- ✓ Operations being undertaken and their level of success.
- ✓ Operations planned for next operational period.
- ✓ Location of existing incident facilities, (ICP, base, camps, helibases, helispots, staging areas, etc.) if any.
- ✓ Values to be protected.
- Current map(s) of incident.
- Point of origin preserved?
- Fuel and weather conditions; current, predicted, variations from normal (described in terms of expected fire behavior).
- Fire history of the incident area, including any unusual or potentially unusual fire behavior.
- Firefighter and public safety concerns.
- Other agencies on incident and their representatives.
- Transportation routes to/from the incident.

- Date/time for transfer of command.
- Primary contact for coordination and support.
- Radio frequencies assigned to incident.
- Necessary releases of any assigned resources.
- Reporting requirements (situation updates to dispatch, agency administrator(s), ICS-209, etc.).
- Resource ordering protocols.
- Other (use of trainees, public information).

**AGENCY ADMINISTRATOR'S
RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE
TRANSFER OF COMMAND AND
RELEASE OF INCIDENT
MANAGEMENT TEAMS**

The following guidelines are for the orderly transfer of command of fire management authorities to incoming Incident Commanders and their teams as well as their release. Agency administrator(s) always maintain responsibility for the incident. Some information will need to be in writing and some may be verbal.

ASSUMPTION OF AUTHORITY

- The incident commander in place is in charge until officially released. Release should not occur until incoming incident commander and his/her team members are briefed by their counterparts and ready to take full command of incident.

- The operational effort should continue during transfer period with command and control of the incident firmly in place, and with clear, achievable and sound strategy and tactics communicated to and implemented by all firefighting resources. As a general rule, command transfer should occur at the end of an operational period.
- The requesting unit should specify the expected time of arrival and expected time of transfer of command to the incoming team.
- The current Incident Commander should contact the local Agency Administrator in advance for location and time for Agency Administration briefing.
- The requesting agency should accomplish the following prior to the arrival of the incoming team:
 - ✓ Make contact with incoming Incident Commander prior to his or her arrival. Give IC an update on progress of fire and inquire if there are any special needs for the team.
 - ✓ Determine ICP/Base location.
 - ✓ Order support equipment, supplies, and initial basic support organization for the incident.
 - ✓ Secure an ample supply of appropriate maps.
 - ✓ Determine transportation needs of the team and obtain needed vehicles.

- ✓ Schedule agency administrator briefing time and location.
- ✓ Obtain necessary information for the agency administrator briefing.
- ✓ Obtain necessary communications equipment and support for the incident.
- It is the responsibility of the jurisdictional Agency Administrator(s) to ensure that, where required, a wildland fire situation analysis is completed for all fires that are not expected to be controlled before the second burning period and revise when necessary.
- The existing Incident Commander at the ICP should brief the incoming Incident Commander and his/her team. The time of transfer of command will depend upon incident complexity, expertise of the existing team, and/or other problems.
- Complete a written Delegation of Authority, per agency policy, for the incoming Incident Commander to review.

AGENCY ADMINISTRATOR BRIEFING

This briefing should take place as soon as the incoming team is completely assembled.

RELEASE OF AN INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Agency Administrator must approve the date and time for the release of an Incident Management Team. The outgoing Incident Commander should start phasing in the incoming team members prior to demobilization of outgoing team members.

- The outgoing team should not be released from the incident until fire management activity and workload is at a level that the incoming team can reasonably assume. Some considerations to assist in this determination are:
 - ✓ A transfer of command plan should be prepared for the incoming Incident Management Team by the team being released.
 - ✓ Fire should be controlled or mopped up to a specified standard.
 - ✓ Unneeded resources have been released.
 - ✓ Base/Camp shut down, reduced, or being shut down.
 - ✓ Planning Section Chief has prepared a rough copy of the fire report and narrative.
 - ✓ Finance/Administration Section Chief should have known finance problems resolved. Contact should be made with agency fiscal personnel.

- ✓ Resource rehabilitation work is completed or to a point where the agency is satisfied with assuming remaining work.
- ✓ Overhead performance ratings are completed.
- The departing team should have an internal debriefing session prior to meeting with the Agency Administrator.
- The Agency Administrator should debrief the departing team and prepare a written evaluation as soon as possible after release, per agency policy.