



The Incident Commander

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Learning Objective: The student shall be able to describe the responsibilities of an Incident Commander.

The Incident Commander is the only position in the Incident Command System that is always filled regardless of the size or complexity of an incident. The IC has the responsibility for the overall management of the incident. Whatever functions or responsibilities that are not delegated to others remain the responsibility of the IC.

The engine Company Officer who responds to a call of food on the stove will fill the IC's position regardless of the local agencies' routine rank title for that officer. The initial IC's first responsibility is to assess the situation (size up) to determine the problems, issues or concerns that the crew is confronting.

For food on the stove, the initial IC most likely will use an intuitive assessment process — prioritize the problems and develop the objectives, strategies and tactics using a mental process that has come from responding to many incidents of similar types. The IC will then give verbal directions to the engine crew on the work assignments needed to bring this simple incident under control.

In this example, the initial IC maintained the responsibility for the safety of the crew(s) and the public, assessed the need for additional resources, directed the resources, and even developed a plan for contingencies.

It is safe to say that the vast majority of incidents stay small and are handled by just the IC's position being filled; however, even the simple or routine incident may grow in size and complexity thus taxing the IC's ability to maintain direct control for all the functions on the incident. An experienced IC will recognize early the need to delegate responsibility for many of the functions of command and the overall management of the incident.

As an IC, you must be ready to assume and maintain command of an incident that is expanding in complexity until the incident is either brought under control or relieved by a more experienced IC.



The Company Officer serves as the Incident Commander until command is transferred. Here a Company Officer briefs his crew before making an interior attack. *Photo Courtesy of Tom Aurnhammer.*