

## **NORTH BERRIEN FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT**

**Category: Emergency Operations**

**Issued: 2010.01 Updated:**

**Title: Fire Ground Strategy**

## **OPERATIONAL POLICIES**

**Policy: 09-002**

**Issued By: F/C Spiegel**

### **PURPOSE**

Identify the most effective fire ground strategy for various fire situations crews may encounter. The strategies are based on a standard risk management philosophy that is to be employed at all fire situations.

### **SAFETY CONCERNS**

When operating on the fire ground, the Incident Command and all firefighters must make decisions on how much risk is assumed / acceptable in their role in the incident. The Incident Command and all firefighters must have situational awareness at all times weighing all the risks and make decisions with great appreciation for the entire situation in relationship to the incident.

### **GUIDELINE - Risk Management Philosophy**

**Risk a lot to save a lot!** We may risk our lives a lot to protect savable lives.

**Risk little to save little!** We may risk our lives a little to protect savable property.

**Risk nothing to save nothing!** We will not risk our lives at all to save what is already lost.

Considering the level of risk, the Incident Command will choose the proper strategy- Offensive, Defensive, or Marginal, to be used at the fire scene. The strategy can change with conditions or because specific objectives are met. Factors in deciding the proper strategic mode may be based on:

- The building- type of construction, condition, age, etc.
- Structural integrity of the building- contents vs. structural involvement
- The fire load- what type of fuel is burning and what's left to burn
- The fire and/or smoke conditions- extent, location, etc.
- The rescue profile- savable occupants/survivability profile

Once the appropriate strategy is initiated, it becomes the job of the Incident Command to ensure that all personnel are operating within the strategy. Additional safety issues to consider when deciding proper strategy are as follows:

- Avoiding simultaneous offensive and defensive strategies in the same fire area
- Matching the appropriate strategy to the fire conditions of the structure by properly reading the building and the smoke/fire conditions
- Announce any change in tactical priorities over the fire ground radio Managing fire ground strategies and keeping all firefighters on scene working together requires consistency. It starts from the initial 911 communications, arriving companies size-ups, the IC task delegations, and fire ground communications. Working together as a team will help improve safety and maximize potential of all companies working.

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### **Offensive Attack strategy**

Within the framework of the Risk Management Philosophy, a determination must be made as to the mode of operation that will be utilized. The Incident Command and companies on the scene should consider the following guidelines for making that decision.

- Initial attack efforts must be directed toward supporting a primary search.
- Ideally, offensive fires should be fought from the interior unburned side. An attack from the burning side generally will drive the fire, smoke, and heat back into the building and drive the interior fire control forces out of the building.
- Avoid exterior application of water during offensive operation.
- Companies must resist the urge to focus only on the fire. In some cases, the most effective tactical analysis involves an evaluation of what is NOT burning rather than what is actually on fire. The unburned portion represents where the fire is going and should establish the framework for fire control activities and requirements.
- Command must consider the most critical direction and avenues of fire extension, plus its speed, particularly as they affect the risk to firefighters, rescue activities, confinement efforts, and exposure protection. Command must consider the 7 sides of the fire: front, rear, both sides, top, bottom, and interior. Fires cannot be considered under control until all 7 sides are addressed. Not doing so results in fire extension. Where the fire involves concealed spaces (attics, ceiling areas, construction voids, etc.), it becomes paramount that companies open up and operate fire streams into such areas. Early identification and response to concealed space fires will save the building. Crews should also consider the use of a piercing nozzle for effective extinguishment of concealed fires.

Early ventilation (natural or positive pressure) is a major support item that must be addressed during concealed space attacks. This must be initiated early and be well coordinated.

The Incident Command must use a strategy and tactics that will get ahead of the fire. Command must make critical decisions and develop a fire control strategy that will be realistic and effective. It takes a certain amount of time to place hose lines, obtain positive water, and navigate through a structure. Command must consider where the fire will be when attack efforts are ready to be initiated.

### **Defensive Attack strategy**

The decision to operate in a defensive strategy indicates that the offensive attack strategy, or the potential for one, has been abandoned for safety reasons.

The announcement of a change to a defensive strategy will be made as Emergency Traffic and all personnel will withdraw from the structure and maintain a safe distance from the building. Company officers will account for their crews and advise their group/division supervisor on the status of their crew. A Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) shall be obtained after any switch from offensive to defensive strategy.

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Interior lines will be withdrawn and repositioned when changing to a defensive strategy. Crews should retreat with their hose lines if safe to do so. If the safety of firefighters is in immediate jeopardy, hose lines should be abandoned in order to make a rapid exit.

All exposures, both immediate and anticipated, must be identified and protected. The first priority in defensive operations is personnel safety, then to protect exposures.

The next priority may be to knock down the main body of fire. This may assist in protection of exposures but does not replace it as a higher priority. Master streams are generally the most effective tactic to be employed in defensive operations.

### **Marginal Attack strategy**

Many times offensive/defensive conditions are clear cut and the Incident Command can quickly determine the appropriate strategy. In other cases, the situation is marginal and Command must initiate an offensive interior attack, while setting up defensive positions on the exterior. The only reason to operate in a marginal mode is for rescue. The effect of the interior attack must be constantly evaluated, and the IC must make a decision when to transition into offensive or defensive modes. Strategy changes can develop almost instantly or can take considerable time.

Command must match the strategy with the conditions. The Incident Command controls overall incident scene safety by determining the proper strategy to be used. Command should abandon marginal attacks when:

- A primary all clear is obtained and the situation is still marginal.
- The roof is unsafe or untenable. Especially working fires in large unsupported or lightweight floors and/or trussed attic spaces. Very important to have a roof division monitor the status of the roof during this mode.
- Interior forces encounter heavy heat and cannot locate the fire or cannot make any progress on the fire.
- Heavy smoke is being forced from the building under pressure and is increasing.

Command needs to constantly evaluate conditions while operating in a marginal strategy. This requires frequent and detailed reports from all group/division supervisors. Write-off property that is already lost. Property that is already lost and there is no chance for salvage should be "written off." Protect exposures based on the most dangerous direction of fire spread. Do not continue to operate in positions that are essentially lost.