

# 12

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

## Executive Summary

Fire departments respond, in various capacities and roles, to incidents caused by violent acts. They also encounter violent persons at what was to be an ordinary incident. In order to ensure that we meet our mission, to make sure everyone goes home, everyday, we offer the following strategies designed to reduce the likelihood of injury or death from responding to incidents of violence.

- Improved understanding and application of Dynamic Risk Management
- Initiate or improve communication with the local law enforcement component.
- Define and expand role of dispatchers in reducing risk
- Prohibit single (person) resource response to violent incidents
- Require use of an Incident Management System
- Communicate directly with Law Enforcement component prior to operating at an incident of violence.
- De-commit personnel and equipment and leave if violence commences or reoccurs during fire department operations
- Obtain stakeholder understanding and buy-in of response and deployment policies including non-response and non-engagement at incidents of violence.

The implementation of these strategies will help reduce the likelihood of fire service members being injured or killed during a response to a violent incident. The 12<sup>th</sup> Initiative expands our understanding of how and where firefighters can be injured and demonstrates the need for the development of national protocols regarding violent incidents.

## Issue Description

From the beginning of America's fire service, firefighters have been responding to incidents that were the result of, or caused by, an act of violence. Fire departments respond to a wide range of events from the simple Saturday night altercation at the corner bar, to the large events whose place in history has been distilled to unforgettable images: Watts, Columbine, Oklahoma City, or 9/11. On most occasions, the fire department responds, renders service, and returns to quarters. But, unfortunately, over our history, not every member has been able to return home due to factors associated with violence.

In response to this trend, participants at the 2004 Firefighter Life Safety Summit developed Initiative 12: National standards for emergency response policies and procedures should be developed and championed.

The need for this Initiative was not born in a vacuum. A recent California study found violence toward responders in 4.5 percent of calls during the study period (Grange & Corbett, 2002). Nearly half of those incidents of violence included physical attacks. A similar study conducted in Philadelphia in 2002 found violence toward firefighters and paramedics at a 4 percent rate (Mechem, Dickinson, Shofer, & Jaslow, 2002). Medical attention was sought in 81 percent of the incidents and the member lost time from work in over 30 percent of the cases described (Mechem, et al, 2002).

The LODD rate from response to incidents of violence is not large. It is, however, a growing concern both in seriousness and frequency of the attacks. Five firefighters died in 2005 as a result of crime. Three firefighters died in arson-related fires, one firefighter was fatally shot, and one firefighter was killed in a crash with a vehicle that was fleeing law enforcement (United States Fire Administration, 2005).

## Background

The creation of protocols for fire department response to violent incidents cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. A review of recent history, currently available standards and laws, and case studies of firefighter injury and deaths that have resulted from response to violent incidents are necessary. There exist innumerable incidents that can be used as a basis for this discussion. For brevity, only five have been selected. The 1992 Los Angeles Riots, the Branch Davidian siege in Waco (TX), the shootings at Columbine High School, the Line of Duty Death of Lexington Kentucky Fire Lieutenant Brenda Cowan, and the shooting of a paramedic in Kansas City (MO) were chosen as each represents a different type of incident with dissimilar outcomes for emergency responders.

### **Los Angeles Riots, April 29-May 4, 1992**

At approximately 1 pm on April 29, 1992, the Los Angeles District Attorney's office was advised that a verdict had been reached in the Rodney King beating trial (Rosegrant, 2000). Four Los Angeles City Police Officers were on trial for the beating of Mr. King after a routine traffic stop. That the arrest and subsequent beating was video-taped led many to believe a guilty verdict was inevitable. However, when the verdicts were announced and televised live, the result was the acquittal for 3 officers and non-judgment for the fourth (Rosegrant, 2000). Almost immediately crowds began to gather and outbreaks of violent behavior were reported in the city. This violence increased in intensity, and eventually led to over 3,600 reported fires in the three-day period (Suburban Emergency Management Project Report, 2004). By the end of the violence, 54 persons were reported dead, over 2,000 injured, with property damage exceeding \$800 million.

During the evening of April 29, Los Angeles firefighter Scott Miller was shot in the face as he drove a fire truck to a conflagration (Rosegrant, 2000). In fact, there were more than 12 documented attempts to kill firefighters and paramedics in just the first three hours of the riots (Rosegrant, 2000).

Many of the same fire and emergency tactics employed during the Watts riots of 1965 were utilized in 1992. For instance, in 1965, Deputy Chief Raymond Hill advised companies “to move in fast, knock the fire down in a hurry, pick up your lines and make yourself available for another fire (LAFD, 2006).” During the 1992 riots, Chief Donald Manning instructed firefighters to use a “hit-and-run” approach, dousing fires and then moving on, rather than devoting the time it would take to make sure each fire was completely extinguished (SEMP, 2004). One thing that was different in 1992 was the constant presence and critique by media outlets. It was noted that “Almost as soon as the riot began, the media began to criticize the LAPD and LAFD for a slow and inefficient response” (Rosegrant, 2000). An aggressive program to forward information directly to the individual media outlets was implemented. “We were talking about specific examples of the problems firefighters were facing, getting the message to the public that we’re trying to get a handle on this and bring back the calm...” (Rosegrant, 2000).

### **Waco, Texas, April 19, 1993**

In the spring of 1993, the Branch Davidian religious sect, led by David Koresh, occupied a compound called Mount Carmel Center near Waco, Texas. In response to allegations of polygamy with underage brides, the physical abuse of children, and the stockpiling of illegal weapons, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) conducted a full scale military-style raid on the compound on February 23, 1993 (US-DOJ, 1993). The violent raid resulted in the deaths of four agents and six Davidians, after the Davidians refused to acquiesce to the demands of federal agents (US-DOJ, 1993). Following this confrontation, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) surrounded the compound and attempted, through various means, to get the Davidians to surrender. After days of unsuccessful negotiations, the decision was made, in early April, to utilize a form of liquid tear gas to remove the occupants from the building (US DoJ, 1993).

The plan to raid the compound was authorized by the United States Attorney General Janet Reno, and commenced at 6:50am on April 19, 1993 (USDOJ, 1993). The tear gas was administered via track vehicles similar to a tank. At approximately 12:07 pm, one of the units observed smoke coming from the buildings. By 12:11 pm fire was reported throughout the building, which was large enough to house over 100 persons (US-DOJ, 1993). By 12:15 fire department personnel were requested to respond. In one of the planning meetings held in early April to discuss the gas insertion plan, the possibility of fire at the compound was raised. **The FBI decided not to have firefighting equipment at the scene during the active phase.** At approximately 12:34 the first fire department units arrived on scene. At 12:41 the fire department units were allowed to approach the

remains of building. It was the opinion of Special Agent in Charge (SAC) Jamar that it was “unnecessarily risky for firefighters to attempt to approach, much less enter, the burning compound until it was safe to do so.” SAC Jamar stated that even if the firefighters had arrived at the compound earlier, he would not have permitted them to enter due to the great risk to their lives (DOJ, 1993). This case offers both a positive and negative outcome. That firefighters were not expected to place themselves in harm’s way is a positive. The exclusion of the fire department from the planning process is lamentable, and would have put firefighters in harm’s way if things had gone differently. Participation in the planning process would allow the fire department to better understand the risk and hazards present, a capacity that was not available to them due to an omission in the planning.

### **Columbine High School, Littleton (CO)**

On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold initiated a planned, multidimensional attack on the students, faculty, and facility of Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colorado. The attack began with the explosion of a homemade bomb in a grassy open space three miles from the high school. The bombs were intended to divert the attention of law enforcement units away from the school. The Littleton Fire Department dispatched an Engine Company to the explosion and subsequent grass fire (Jefferson County, 2000). The attack at the school began at approximately 11:19 am with a series of shotgun fires. The first fire department vehicle dispatched was the closest engine company for a medical response at the school at 11:26. The attack continued until Dylan and Klebold killed themselves at approximately 12:08. During the 50 minute attack, Dylan and Klebold used improvised explosive devices constructed of propane tanks, as well as shotguns, and ‘high-powered’ rifles. Fire, police, and EMS members exposed themselves to significant danger to retrieve victims still in and around the building, both running into the building unshielded and by using fire apparatus as rolling cover (Columbine Review Commission, 2001).

The after-action report of the Columbine Review Commission made the following recommendations:

- Because the establishment of an Incident Command System is an essential component for successful planning for emergencies, implemented by well conceived and frequent intra- and interagency training programs, the Commission recommends a much-increased emphasis on training in preparation for large-scale emergencies
- Add EMT’s to Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Teams so that emergency medical help arrives as a component of each SWAT team.
- Response agencies must not only plan, but also must have practiced and rehearsed together for major emergencies.
- The inability to shut off the fire and sprinkler system hampered operations.
- School officials must be included in planning.

The Fire Department response to Columbine High School was universally praised in the Governor's Report. Firefighters placed themselves in harm's way, multiple times, to remove injured students and treat their injuries and to assist the law enforcement agencies. The level of planning for major events, the use of an incident management system, regular and planned training events, and the incorporation of other agencies into the planning process were key elements to this success.

### **Fire Lieutenant Brenda Cowan**

On February 13, 2004, Lexington (KY) Fire Lieutenant Brenda Cowan, the department's first African American female firefighter, was shot and killed while she was attempting to render care to a victim of a domestic violence call. On this day, during her first tour of duty after being formally promoted to lieutenant, Cowan was the supervisor of the first unit to respond to the call, arriving prior to the police department (NIOSH, 2004). Lt. Cowan and the members assigned to her unit parked a distance from the scene and walked to where a victim, Fontaine Hutchinson lay (NIOSH, 2004). As they were assessing the patient, the first shots were fired. The shots struck Lt. Cowan and another firefighter. At almost the exact time, the police department arrived and an officer attempted to use his vehicle to shield the victims from further harm (NIOSH, 2004). Shots continued to be fired in the direction of Lt. Cowan, the other members of her company, and at subsequent responders. Cowan was later extricated from the scene by a police tactical team approximately 40 minutes after the initial shots were fired (NIOSH, 2004). Two interesting developments occurred after Cowan's death—one a somber reminder to jurisdictions that they have a responsibility to keep emergency responders safe, and the second a hopeful response to the death of Brenda Cowan—*In Memoriam*.

In March 2005, the estate of Cowan filed a lawsuit over her death. The lawsuit accuses top Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government officials, 911 operators and emergency dispatchers of negligence. It sought compensation for Cowan's pain and suffering, wrongful death, loss of capacity to labor and earn income, right to future benefits, damages for loss of life and medical and funeral expenses.

In the very same month, the Brenda D. Cowan Act, Senate Bill 217, unanimously passed the Kentucky Senate. The bill would amend KRS 508.025, relating to assault in the third degree, to provide that a person is guilty of assault in the third degree when he causes or attempts to cause physical injury to emergency medical services personnel, organized fire department members, and rescue squad personnel.

The NIOSH investigation of Lt. Cowan's murder offered a series of recommendations to minimize the risk of similar occurrences. Pertinent to the 12<sup>th</sup> Initiative, are the following:

- Develop integrated emergency communications system that includes the ability to directly relay information between the caller, dispatch, and responding emergency personnel.
- Hold joint training session with law enforcement, mutual aid and emergency response departments.
- Consider requiring emergency dispatch centers to incorporate the ability to archive location or individual historical data and provide pertinent data to responding fire and emergency medical personnel.

## **Kansas City (MO)**

On Monday, February 23, 2004, two homes in the Grandview Road neighborhood exploded in propane tank fire as a sniper hiding in nearby woods fired shots at emergency workers. Responding Kansas City Fire Department units were met with gunfire as they approached the scene. Gunfire struck Paramedic Mary Seymour from the local EMS agency, and suffered a serious injury. Fire Battalion 107 was the first to arrive at the scene, and quickly came under fire from the shooter. Responding firefighters crossed nearly 100 feet across open space to reach a victim.

During this time, they met almost constant gunfire. The firefighters carried the victim back across the open area to a waiting ambulance (Fire Chief, 2004). Because of the shooting, no emergency or fire workers approached the house despite intense flames. Kansas City Fire Chief Smokey Dyer called what happened a "deliberate ambush." "Whenever you arrive at a fire incident scene and numerous pieces of fire apparatus -- all together we have four pieces of apparatus that have been heavily shot, we have reports from our personnel and the tactical team from the police department that's been in the area that all of our tires have been shot out -- it would be hard to believe that this could be an accidental event," Dyer continued. The fire department units abandoned their vehicles and waited for the police to stabilize the situation. The fire continued to burn unabated, destroying the house. At least four fire department vehicles suffered damage from gunfire during the attack. (KMBC-TV, TheKansasCityChannel.com., Feb 24, 2004.)

In 2004, the six members of the Kansas City Fire Department who extracted Seymour from the incident were awarded the Benjamin Franklin Fire Service Award of Valor.

## Data and Discussion

In addition to case study reviews and pertinent historical data, recent research offers confirmation of the breadth of the problem of firefighter exposure to violent incidents, as well as suggestions for solution.

Several recent studies have quantified the problem of violence against emergency responders. A study conducted in California and published in 2002,

indicated that some sort of violent behavior occurred at 8.5 percent of all EMS calls during the research period (Grange & Corbett, 2002). The violence was directed at care providers 4.5 percent of the time. Of those violent encounters, physical violence occurred in 48.8 percent of the violent incidents (Grange & Corbett, 2002). While the study focused in general on prehospital emergency care providers, sixty percent of the organizations represented in the study were fire departments. This trend is not unique to the United States. Official figures from Northern Ireland indicate there were 1,500 attacks on fire and ambulance crews in the last three years. In the United Kingdom, during a nine month period in 2005 (among 18 of 50 brigades) there were 388 hostile incidents in Scotland and 393 in England and Wales (Labor Research Department for the Fire Brigades Union, 2005). The numbers reported are thought to be significantly less than the actual number of incidents. As with most crime, underreporting is suspected in incidents involving emergency responders.

In the United States, between 1982 and 2002, 13 firefighters were shot and killed by gunfire while on duty. There were two multi-fatality incidents during that period (USFA, 2002). United States Fire Administration data shows one firefighter was killed by gunfire at the scene of a domestic violence-related incident in 2004, and the NFPA reports another killed by gunfire the following year (NFPA 2005).

There are no specific Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations that relate specifically to fire department response to incidents of violence. However, Section 5(a)(1) of the OSHA Act, often referred to as the General Duty Clause, requires employers to "furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees" (US DOL, 1970).

A final contribution is found in the NFPA Technical Standard 1500, Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program (2007). In this most recent version, the section dealing with response to scenes of violence, civil unrest or terrorism has been significantly expanded. Pertinent to our discussion are the following:

- Fire Department members shall not become involved in any activities at the scene of domestic disturbance ... where there is ongoing violence without the confirmed presence of enforcement personnel who have deemed the area secure.
- The fire department shall (develop) an interagency agreement with its law enforcement agency counterpart to provide protection for fire department members at situations that involve violence.
- Such violent incidents shall be considered essentially a law enforcement event.
- At such incidents the fire department incident commander shall

communicate directly with the law enforcement incident commander

- In such violent incidents, the fire department incident commander shall stage all fire department resources in a safe area until the law enforcement agency has secured the scene.
- When violence occurs after emergency operations have been initiated, the fire department incident commander shall either secure immediate law enforcement agency protection or shall withdraw all fire department members to a safe area.

## Solutions and Recommendations

Based directly upon the data accumulated during research, and the historical perspective offered by the case studies reviewed, methods to reduce the likelihood of firefighter death and injury from the response to incidents of violence exist. It should be noted that these solutions are largely adaptive work. With the possible exception of ballistic armour or arming firefighters, there exist few product or engineering related solutions. The provision of body armor was recommended in at least one NIOSH Firefighter Line of Duty Death Investigation Report (F2004-11). It should be noted that the arming of firefighters is neither suggested nor recommended.

There are existing programs at the local level aimed at raising the consciousness of firefighters and paramedics when responding to violent incidents.

The Chicago Fire Department has been conducting what it calls "street sense training" which teaches defensive tactics to paramedics. The fire department says it has been effective, but urged policy changes which would result in the "police to arrive as fast as they do." In 2004, seven Chicago Fire Department personnel, paramedics and firefighters, were assaulted. Thirty more were battered. An internal study noted that 92% of Chicago's paramedics reported being assaulted at some point during their careers. (KABC7-Chicago, 2005, <http://abclocal.go.com/wls/story?section=News&id=3203155>).

The following recommendations are put forth to support Initiative # 12:

**Recommendation #1:** Improved Dynamic Risk Management for incidents involving violence. "With incidents where there is a threat of, or actual violence, it must be remembered that a judgment is required to ensure that risks to personnel are not out of proportion to the benefits to be gained from achieving a given task" (Labour Research Department, 2005). Risk Management is not new to the fire service. The balance of perhaps limited potential benefit in light of substantial risk should be foremost in every responder's mind.

**Recommendation #2:** Initiate and/or improve communications and relationship(s) with law enforcement responders in your jurisdiction. As noted by the Columbine Review Commission (2001), familiarity of personnel and roles prior to an incident through training and planning exercises provides for better communication and operation during the event.

**2.1** Fire Department personnel should have access to, and use, law enforcement intelligence information in order to preplan response to incidents. This may include information regarding domestic terrorism, gang violence, as well as known or suspected drug factories and/or houses.

**Recommendation #3:** Define the role of dispatchers in reducing the hazards to firefighters. Response to an incident of violence carries significant uncertainties. The ability of the dispatch staff to reduce the uncertainty while increasing the level of information provided is critical. As noted in the Kentucky case study, responders should recognize and process the information provided. Jurisdictions that still use any form of 10 codes should, at a minimum, ensure that fire responders are aware of certain critical law enforcement codes. The preferable, and alternative method, would to abolish all 10-codes and inform the responding firefighter in plain language.

**3.1** It is also helpful for responders to have the ability to communicate on a specific, shared, common, radio frequency to remove the potential for message corruption as it is passed through another person.

**3.2** Dispatch staff should critically and carefully monitor the operations radio channel of personnel responding to and operating at incidents of violence and perform Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) checks on a prescribed interval.

**Recommendation #4:** Prohibit single resource (individual) response to incidents of violence. Many jurisdictions have response and deployment plans that include the dispatch of individual first responders and/or a single person in a response vehicle. This should be prohibited or at least limited to the extent possible. The ability of a single person to react to an act of violence is limited. It may not even be possible to retreat. Responding and deploying in a group provides added protection, awareness, and visibility.

**Recommendation #5:** Require all Law Enforcement responders that may respond to a violent incident in your community to use an Incident Management System (IMS). In several of the case studies listed above, communication was listed as an area for improvement. Use of **one** IMS can help meet this goal. Each agency should strive to ensure that the IMS used in that community is applied as uniformly as possible. Fire departments should take a leadership role in assisting their law enforcement compatriots, particularly at the street or service delivery level, to understand and apply the IMS.

**Recommendation #6:** Fire department personnel should communicate, face to face, directly with the law enforcement component on scene. Direct face to face communication, with clear understanding of the hazards, risks associated, potential outcomes, and planned actions on the part of each agency should precede any fire department response into a hazard area.

**Recommendation # 7:** Decommit personnel and equipment and leave if violence commences or reoccurs during fire department operations. If fire department operations have commenced and violence erupts, fire service personnel should consider leaving the scene until the law enforcement component has stabilized the situation.

**Recommendation #8:** Obtain stakeholder understanding and buy-in of response and deployment policies including non-response and non-engagement at incidents of violence. The first strategy listed is the increased application of dynamic risk management. An outcome of that strategy may be fire department responders not responding into a hazard area due to the potential for additional violence or because the situation is not yet under control. Some responders and organizations fear this will be viewed in a negative light by their constituency. As noted in Rosegrant, (2000) the Los Angeles Fire Department tailored a special and specific message to the public to increase their understanding of the department's actions during the riot. Perhaps more important, the Labour Research Department (2005) report stated 'the key issue here is the extent to which fire crews can make decisions when dealing with an incident and with the confidence that they will be backed up by senior management if criticized by the local community or in the press for leaving a fire to burn or holding back from attending (responding to) an incident.' It is imperative for the department leadership to establish relationships with key stakeholders in the community to ensure they understand and support the response protocol.

**Recommendation #9:** Fire Departments should strive to ensure their duty uniforms are not similar to, or could be mistaken for, those of law enforcement personnel. Uniform insignia, style, and color should be of sufficient difference that fire department personnel will not be mistaken for police officers.

### Implementation Timeline and Cost Analysis

The amount of time it will require an organization to implement these recommendations is contingent on a variety of factors. If the fire department does not have a productive relationship with law enforcement, it may take longer to accomplish real change. If the dispatch center is under the control of another organization, change at that level also may be more difficult.

If those parameters are present external of the fire department, efforts should be focused on applying the remaining recommendations internally. Training the members to apply dynamic risk management can be lengthy but will be beneficial on the fire ground as well. Many of the remaining recommendations can be simply applied as Standard Operating Guideline update coupled with didactic training.

Many of the recommended procedures are cost neutral. The majority of the items are training opportunities and organizations should look to their local law

enforcement component and the local educational system to assist with funding.

## Conclusion

Reduction of Line of Duty Death (LODD) causes is both difficult and complicated. The reduction of LODD from response to violent incidents is no exception. The very nature of violent crime makes them difficult to predict. Implementation of the recommendations listed above will reduce the likelihood of injury or death as a result of fire department response to a violent incident. Coupled with the sample Standard Operating Guidelines for response to violent incidents found in Appendix 'A', implementation of the solutions will impact the survivability of the large scale and every day incident. From the outset, it was noted that our primary goal is to respond, render service, and return safely—from every call, every day. Staging of personnel, the use of IMS, improved direct communication with other responders, and improved relationship with the law enforcement will help meet this goal.

Appendix A: Sample Policy pm Response to Scenes of Violence

### ***Fulton County Fire Department***

#### **Standard Operating Procedure**

#### **Subject: *Response to Scenes of Violence***

**Number: 4909**

**Effective Date: *July 1, 2003* Revised:**

#### **1.0 Statement of Policy**

- .1. The mission of the Fire Department:
  - .1.1. Requires its members to maintain neutrality during situations where violence may be occurring.
  - .1.2. Does NOT include the control of persons in excess of actions necessary to treat injured persons where the safety of responders is not obviously compromised.
- .2. Fire Department members shall NOT:
  - .2.1. Engage in inflammatory activities in public, while on duty or while visibly identifiable as a member of the Fire Department.
  - .2.2. Approach an uncrossed scene where the following or similar activities are on-going:
    - .2.2.1. Firearms actively being discharged;
    - .2.2.2. Persons held against their will, with or without confirmation of the presence of weapons;
    - .2.2.3. Large crowds engaged in property destruction or activities that could result in bodily injury to responders.
  - .2.3. Utilize Fire Department equipment or other resources, or take any offensive action to control crowds during civil disturbances.
  - .2.4. Engage in on-going negotiations without coordination with law

enforcement personnel with:

- .2.4.1. Persons holding hostages
- .2.4.2. Persons contemplating suicide
- .2.5. Utilize protective equipment that they have not been trained to use, specifically body armor, bullet proof vests or other equipment intended primarily for law enforcement personnel.
- .3. In addition to standard strategic goals at an emergency incident, the following shall be priorities for members at incidents involving violence regardless of the target.
  - .3.1. Protection of Fire Department and other public safety personnel and;
  - .3.2. Cooperation with law enforcement personnel to secure the incident, prior to taking action to mitigate the incident.
- .4. Scenes of violence are generally divided into three categories:
  - .4.1. Single point of violence:
    - .4.1.1. An individual threatening or engaged in violence against oneself, or others.
    - .4.1.2. An animal threatening or engaged in violence against a human.
  - .4.2. Multiple points of violence:
    - .4.2.1. More than one individual or animal threatening or engaged in violence against oneself, or others.
  - .4.3. Civil Disturbance:
    - .4.3.1. The number of individuals involved in the violence exceeds the number of responders.
- .5. A Fire Department Chief Officer shall respond or be requested to respond to any accident involving:
  - .5.1. Firearms, knives or other weapons reported at the scene;
  - .5.2. Persons being held against their will, with or without confirmation of the presence of weapons;
  - .5.3. Large crowds engaged in property destruction or activities that could result in bodily injury to responders.
- 1.6. This SOP or portions thereof may be suspended by order of the Fire Chief during times of declared war on domestic soil, enemy attack or other unforeseen situations that require Fire Department members to take specific actions to protect themselves or other public safety personnel.

## **2.0 Objectives**

- .1. The objective of this SOP shall be to establish protocols to be utilized when Fire Department members are faced with situations where there is a significant threat of violence affecting or being directed at responders.

## **3.0 Responsibility**

- .1. It shall be the responsibility of all Fire Department members to conduct themselves in a manner that will not escalate violent or potentially violent situations.
- .2. Officers on response capable vehicles shall be responsible for:
  - .2.1. Staging in a position that will minimize the unit's exposure to potential violence.

.2.2. Coordinating with law enforcement personnel to determine when an incident is secure.

.2.3. Monitoring incident conditions with priority placed on maintaining the safety of Fire Department and other public safety personnel.

#### **4.0 Procedures**

.1. General Considerations:

.1.1. When Fire Department members believe that violence is a realistic possibility at an incident they shall:

.1.1.1. Confirm known information about the incident with the Dispatcher.

.1.1.2. Ensure that both law enforcement and a Fire Department Chief Officer have been requested to respond to the scene.

.1.2. When response to an accident that involves violence is confirmed; in addition to the above:

.1.2.1. Stage in a location that will not subject the unit to violence at an uncontrolled incident scene.

.1.2.2. Only approach the incident scene when law enforcement personnel have confirmed that the scene is secure.

.2. Response Considerations:

.2.1. Members responding to known civil disturbances shall do so in full personal protective equipment.

.2.2. Units responding to scenes of violence shall limit the use of sirens and red lights in the vicinity of the actual location.

.2.3. No unit shall respond to a known civil disturbance alone.

.3. Command Considerations:

.3.1. In general, scenes of violence are law enforcement matters until they are secured.

.3.2. Command will generally be established by law enforcement personnel.

.3.3. Upon arrival at the scene, Fire Department members shall either:

.3.3.1. Report to the law enforcement Incident Commander; or

.3.3.2. Enter into unified command; or

.3.3.3. Establish a single command.

.4. Scene Control Considerations

.4.1. Fire Department members shall confirm with law enforcement personnel that a violent scene is secured prior to taking action to mitigate the incident by:

.4.1.1. Face to face communications with the law enforcement Incident Commander.

.4.1.2. By radio either from the Dispatcher or law enforcement personnel.

.4.2. The officer of the unit or a Chief Officer shall remain in a position to observe the scene including other potential sources of violent acts.

.4.3. If necessary, patients should be extricated to a more secure location to complete treatment.

.4.4. During civil disturbances, Fire Department vehicles shall not be left unattended or out of control of either fire or law enforcement personnel.

.5. Fire Control

.5.1. Small fires that are not in danger of spreading to structures or threaten lives shall only be extinguished without increasing the threat of violence to responders.

.5.2. Working fires in structures will not be attacked offensively if a large number of violent individuals are present and unwilling to allow access by Fire Department members.

.5.3. In areas with active large scale disturbances, fire suppression activities shall be of a primarily defensive nature.

.6. If violence is directed at Fire Department members:

.6.1. If possible, immediately withdraw from the area where violence is occurring.

.6.2. If withdrawal is not possible, activate the emergency button on one or more portable radios.

.6.3. If radio traffic would potentially draw attention or escalate the violence, members should use any method necessary to request assistance.

**5.0 Reference** – N/A

**6.0 Appendix** – N/A

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