

ESTABLISHING COMMAND



This guideline is based upon the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1561 Standard on Emergency Services Incident Management System and Command Safety 2020 Edition; and the Firescope Incident Command System Publication, Structure Fire Operations ICS – 500, 2015. The most current version/revision is available from the Verdugo Communications Center.

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PURPOSE

To establish safe and effective guidelines for the initial setup of an Incident Command System (ICS). Establishing Command is designed to:

- Place the responsibility for Command on a specific individual through a standard identification system, depending on the arrival sequence of members, companies, and Chief Officers.
- Ensure that a strong, direct, and visible Command will be established from the onset of the incident.
- Establish an effective incident organization, defining the activities and responsibilities assigned to the Incident Commander (IC) and to other individuals operating within the ICS based on the three Command Mode options (Investigative Mode, Attack Mode, and Command Mode).
- Provide a system to process information to support incident management, planning, and decision-making.
- Provide a system for the orderly transfer of Command to subsequent arriving Officers.

INTRODUCTION

Effective Command and Control of any incident is dependent on the Incident Commander's ability to ensure that strategic objectives, tactical objectives, and tasks are all in alignment with each other. As such, a good understanding of how these operational concepts interact is critical to the overall success of the incident. One of the Incident Commander's primary duties is to determine the life safety priority of the incident and apply the most appropriate level of risk to first responders.

There are three operational levels at every incident: task, tactical, and strategic. Ensuring that all resources are operating at the appropriate operational level will reduce the chances of miscommunication and provide a safer and more effective response. Incident Commanders operate at the strategic level and are focused on the overall incident plan and developing strategic objectives. Division/Group supervisors operate at the tactical level and ensure that tactical objectives are being met. The task level is where individuals and companies perform the actual work required to accomplish tactical and strategic objectives. It is critical for Incident Commanders and Division/Group supervisors to understand and operate at the correct operational level. In doing so, we reduce the risk of task saturation and improve overall situational awareness.

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DEFINITIONS

Incident Priorities - Our Strategic Objectives and Command Mode will be based on our Incident Priorities: Life Safety (civilian and firefighter), Incident Stabilization, Property Conservation, and Protection of the Environment.

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Strategic Objectives - Short or long-term plan of action designed to achieve a goal based on Incident Priorities (what we are trying to accomplish). The Incident Commander operates strategically and should focus on the overall incident plan. Examples of strategic objectives:

- Provide for the safety of all civilians and firefighters in and around the incident
- Keep the fire contained to the unit/building of origin
- Reduce/limit the damage caused by fire and mitigation efforts

Tactical/Control Objectives - Tactical objectives are “how” we will accomplish our strategic objectives. Division/Group supervisors operate at the tactical level to ensure that tactics align with strategic objectives. They must maintain a high level of situational awareness for their division/group and are responsible for filling the tactical gap between the task and strategic levels. They are the “eyes and ears” of the Incident Commander for their respective divisions/groups. Examples of Tactical Objectives that would help us meet the following strategic objective to ‘Keep fire contained to the unit of origin’ include:

- Initiate an offensive fire attack
- Provide vertical ventilation
- Check for extension and protect exposures

Task - The task level is where individuals and companies perform the actual work required to accomplish tactical and strategic objectives. This work might include deploying hose lines, performing physical rescues, laddering a building etc.

Staging - That location where incident personnel and equipment are temporarily located and ready for an immediate assignment. The staging area should be identified early, and the IC may choose to assign an officer in charge, known as ‘staging’.

Strategy - Prior to engaging in firefighting operations, the strategy shall be clearly communicated to all personnel on the assigned incident tactical frequency. The incident strategy will be based on incident priorities and strategic objectives. The strategy will be either offensive or defensive.

Working Fire - A fire that will likely require all units on the first alarm to be assigned.

Leaders Intent - A clear, concise statement about what people must do to succeed in their assignments. It delineates three essential components:

- Task - what is the objective or goal of the assignment?
- Purpose - why the assignment needs to be done.
- End state - how the situation should look when the assignment is successfully completed.

Command Modes - The Command option that the first arriving officer will assume based on observed conditions and anticipated actions taken. These options include the Investigative Mode, Attack Mode, and Command Mode. **See 5. Incident Command Modes**

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COMMAND GUIDELINES

Responsibilities of Command

The Incident Commander is responsible for the overall management of the incident. The safety, welfare, and accountability of fire personnel and civilians are taken into consideration when establishing incident priorities. The following incident priorities shall be considered on all incidents:

1. Life safety
2. Incident stabilization
3. Property conservation
4. Environment protection

ICS is used to facilitate the completion of the tactical priorities. The INCIDENT COMMANDER is the person who drives ICS towards that end. The Incident Commander is responsible for building an ICS organization that matches the organizational needs of the incident to achieve the completion of the tactical priorities for the incident. The Functions of Command define standard activities that the Incident Commander performs to achieve the tactical priorities.

Functions of Command

The Incident Commander is responsible for all of these functions. As Command is transferred, so is the responsibility for these functions. The functions of Command at a structure fire include:

- Assume and announce Command.
- Rapidly evaluate the situation (size up).
- Establish and announce the location of an effective operating position (Incident Command Post).
- Initiate, maintain, and control the communication plan.
- Identify the overall strategy, develop an Incident Action Plan, and assign companies and personnel to include RIC, consistent with plans and standard operating guidelines.
- Request appropriate resources when necessary.
- Ensure accountability of all resources utilizing ICS 201 or other tactical worksheets.
- Ensure the utilization of a Time Clock when appropriate.
- Develop an effective ICS organization using divisions and/or groups to maintain the span of control.
- Provide tactical priorities and strategic objectives.
- Coordinate activities with other agencies and cooperators (Law Enforcement, Ambulance, Utilities, Building Department, etc.)

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- Continuously assess incident conditions and review, evaluate, and revise the Incident Action Plan.
- Provide for the continuity, transfer, and termination of Command. The Incident Commander is responsible for all of these functions. As Command is transferred, so is the responsibility for these functions.

Risk Management

One of the Incident Commander's primary duties is to determine the life safety priority of the incident and apply the most appropriate level of risk management. The Incident Commander should integrate risk management principles into the functions of command. Risk management is the process of identifying and evaluating risk. The goal is to control the probability and/or impact of unfortunate events or maximize the realization of opportunities.

Risk management should be based on the following principles:

1. Activities that present a significant risk to the safety of responders shall be limited to situations where there is a potential to save lives.
2. Activities that are routinely employed to protect property shall be recognized as inherent risks to the safety of responders, and actions shall be taken to reduce or avoid these risks.
3. No risk to the safety of responders shall be acceptable when there is no possibility to save lives or property.
4. In situations where the risk to responders is excessive, activities shall be limited to defensive operations.

These risk management principles should be employed by supervisory personnel at all levels of the Incident Command System. Remember when evaluating risk that the severity of the risk and the frequency of occurrence are of concern. High-risk events that occur infrequently pose the greatest threat to responders because of the likelihood they will have limited experience in dealing with such events.

There are varieties of actions available to assist in the management of risk. Together these actions provide a solid framework for protecting responders from the risks involved in emergency operations. Refer to FIREScope ICS-500 Structure Fire Document to review these actions.

1. ESTABLISHING COMMAND

1. Single company incidents (trash fires, EMS incidents, etc.) may only require that the Company or Unit acknowledge its arrival on-scene.
2. Multi-company incidents (two or more companies) require the first arriving Company Officer to verbally establish command and initiate an Incident Command structure appropriate for a working fire.
3. Subsequent levels of Command arriving on-scene shall declare their intent, declaring Incident Command, or remain as Agency Administrator.

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NOTE: Once on-scene, the Battalion Chiefs shall normally take Command. In any case, once on-scene, the Battalion Chief is responsible for all fire department operations.

2. NAMING THE INCIDENT

The radio designation "IC" will be used along with the geographical location of the incident ("Olive IC", "Victory IC"). For ease of communication, it is recommended that a one-word identifier be used when naming the incident. Do not use the name "Verdugo" or "Freeway" as part of an incident name to avoid confusion with Dispatch. Also, do not use a City name such as "Burbank IC" or "San Gabriel IC".

3. INITIAL ON-SCENE SIZE UP

When responding to a multi-company incident, the first arriving Fire Department member or Company Officer initiates the Command process by giving an "Initial On-Scene Size Up" to Verdugo Dispatch. Incident priorities will be implied.

1. Designation of the company arriving on-scene (Unit ID).
2. Confirmation of the incident location/address (avoid "dispatch location" whenever possible).
3. Occupancy information: size, stories, occupancy type, construction type.
4. What is visible (or smell if applicable):
 - a) Nothing showing
 - b) Smoke showing (location, color, velocity), indicates a working fire
 - c) Fire showing (amount, location), indicates a working fire
5. Initial On-Scene Size Up information/format will vary and be incident-driven (ex. vehicle accidents vs. wildland land vs. structure, etc.)
6. Action being taken, "initiating fire attack", or "protecting exposures", etc.
7. State initial "Command mode" (see Sec. 5)
8. Consider ordering additional resources if you are holding all first alarm resources to work at an incident

NOTE: Initial On-scene Size Up will be followed by a Follow-Up Report on Conditions after a 360 is completed and additional information is gathered.

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Radio Etiquette

- Listen/Think before you talk
- Avoid unnecessary phrases such as 'at this time' and 'be advised'
- Use clear text such as 'one story' instead of 'single story'

Fire Response Example:

"Verdugo...Engine 11 on-scene at 811 East Orange Grove, I have a 2 story house with nothing showing from the Alpha side. Engine 11 will be in the investigative mode."*

- "A" or Alpha normally indicates the address side of an incident.

Working Fire Example:

"Verdugo...Engine 11 on-scene at 811 East Orange Grove, I have a 2 story house with heavy grey smoke showing from a second floor window on the Alpha side. Engine 11 will be initiating fire attack, Command is mobile. This is a working fire."

NOTE: An Officer engaged in Attack Mode remains the Incident Commander, unless or until they pass Command to an Officer that is on-scene of the incident.

Multi-Vehicle Accident Example:

"Verdugo...Engine 11 on-scene, north bound 5 Freeway, north of the Burbank Blvd overpass, I have a 5 vehicle traffic collision with one vehicle on its side and it appears we have multiple patients."

After the On-scene Size Up is given to Verdugo Dispatch and other incoming units, Verdugo will acknowledge and repeat the On-scene Size Up over the Incident TAC Channel. This provides the initial CO/IC with time to **perform or assign a 360 assessment**, assign tasks to his/her crew, further size up the incident, define a strategy, develop a follow-up report on conditions, and determine best access and where to best place additional incoming resources.

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4. FOLLOW-UP REPORT ON CONDITIONS

Once Verdugo Dispatch has repeated the On-scene Size Up, the IC should give a “Follow-Up Report on Conditions, Actions and Needs” (CAN) containing the following information:

1. Conditions

- Life Safety status
- Rescue or confirmed entrapment should be announced on the follow-up report and should not delay attack, but provide arriving companies with an assignment priority upon arrival
- Detailed building description, construction type, DBA (type of business)
- Index the building if the Alpha is not the dispatched address or not obvious
- Exact location and extent of the fire
- Exposures
- Update smoke and fire conditions (color, density, velocity of smoke)
- Any obvious safety hazards for fire personnel
- Best access/egress for incoming resources and staging location if identified

2. Actions

- Update on action being taken

3. Needs

- Assign resources on-scene
- Request additional resources; if additional resources are requested, the responsible Officers shall designate a staging area.

Fire Response Follow Up Report Examples:

Engine 12: “All units, Engine 12, I have heavy fire with pressurized black smoke showing from multiple windows on the first floor, Alpha side, Alpha being the front door. Engine 12 will be in attack mode in an offensive strategy.”

Fire Response Follow Up Report Example:

Engine 21: “All units, E21 is assuming Command as Orange Grove IC, Command post is in the front yard of the involved structure. The 360 is complete, I have Fire showing from a window on the alpha side, E21 will be using transitional attack in an offensive strategy. Give me a second alarm, staging will be at Lake and Colorado.”

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5. INCIDENT COMMAND MODES

These modes define the Company Officer's direct involvement in tactical activities and the modes of Command that may be utilized. Once the first arriving Company Officer or Fire Department member establishes Command, they shall manage the incident in one of the following ways:

1. Investigative Mode

These situations generally require investigation by the initial arriving company when the location of the fire is not immediately known (units remain in a staged position). The officer may go with the company to investigate while utilizing a portable radio, or they may remain stationary and assign other resources to support the company.

2. Attack Mode

This mode is applied when quick, immediate action can prevent life loss or injury. These situations require immediate action to stabilize and require the Company Officer's direct involvement in the attack. In this mode, the Company Officer accompanies the crew to provide the appropriate level of supervision. Where fast intervention is critical, utilization of the portable radio will permit the Company Officer's involvement in the attack without neglecting Incident Commander's responsibilities. Command may be passed to the next arriving officer, upon their arrival. Command shall not be passed to an officer who is not on-scene.

3. Command Mode

Many incidents, by virtue of their size, complexity, or potential for rapid expansion, **may require immediate formal Command such as a wildland fire or a hazardous materials incident.** In such cases, the Company Officer will initially assume an exterior, safe, and effective Command position and maintain that position until relieved by a higher ranking Officer. When the Company Officer selects the Command mode, the following options are available regarding the assignment of the remaining crew members:

- a) The Company Officer may place the company into action with two or more members under the supervision of a crew member, who will serve as the acting Company Officer and must carry a portable radio. The acting Company Officer shall be identified and communicated to all crew members prior to engaging in an assignment. The crew's collective and individual capabilities and experience will regulate this action.
- b) The Company Officer may assign the crew members to work under the supervision of another Company Officer. Both company officers must acknowledge the reassignment of crew members.
- c) The Company Officer may elect to assign the crew members to perform staff functions to assist him/her as the Incident Commander (Dedicated Incident Command Support Company).

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NOTE: A Company Officer establishing Command has a choice of modes and degrees of personal involvement in the tactical activities but continues to be fully responsible for the Incident Commander functions. The initiative and judgment of the Company Officer are of great importance. The modes identified are guidelines to assist the Company Officer in planning appropriate actions. The actions initiated should conform to one of the above-mentioned Command modes.

6. STRATEGIES

1. Offensive

An offensive attack involves taking direct action to mitigate the problem with an aggressive interior attack based on the Incident Priorities and completing a risk management analysis. High priority will be given to life safety when operating in the offensive strategy. In this strategy, interior operations must be in coordination with ventilation.

NOTE: Transitional Attack is a tactic of opportunity within the Offensive mode. Transitional attack should not take precedence over the placement of an interior hoseline.

2. Defensive

A defensive operation is initiated when fire conditions prevent an interior attack. When the incident Commander believes the structure is unsafe for firefighters to enter, no civilian lives can be saved, and when the fire is beyond the control of hand lines.

NOTE: Any change in strategy shall be communicated to all personnel on-scene by the Incident Commander via requested VFCC long tone on the incident Command and tactical frequencies. All Division/Group Supervisors shall acknowledge the change in strategy. A face-to-face PAR should be conducted within groups or divisions, and that group supervisor or division supervisor should report the PAR back to the IC with acknowledgment of the change in strategy and PAR on the Command frequency. This would reduce radio traffic on the tactical frequency so that a mayday is not missed during the transitional period.

7. PASSING COMMAND

Command can be passed from a first arriving Company Officer to the next arriving Company Officer who is **ON THE SCENE**. This is indicated when the initial commitment of the first arriving company requires an entire crew (e.g., high-rise or an immediate rescue situation requiring attack mode) or the incident complexity prohibits the first arriving Company Officer from fulfilling the responsibilities of the Incident Commander.

“Passing Command” to an officer not on the scene creates a gap in the Command process and situational awareness. To prevent this “gap”, Command shall **not be** passed to an officer who is not on the scene.

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Command shall remain with the first arriving officer until assumption of Command is acknowledged and established by the next arriving officer. Whenever Command is passed, the Officer assuming Command shall announce their assumption of Command, name the incident, and identify the Command Post location.

If the second arriving Company or Chief Officer cannot locate or communicate with the IC engaged in the Attack mode (after several attempts), they should assume Command, announce their assumption of Command, and initiate whatever actions are necessary to confirm the safety of the unaccounted crew.

8. ASSUMPTION/TRANSFER OF COMMAND PROCEDURES

Command is transferred to improve the quality of the ICS organization. The local departments must predetermine the transfer of command through their various ranking officers. The following guidelines outline the transfer of Command process.

- The first fire department member arriving on the scene will establish Command if warranted. This will normally be a Company Officer, but could be any fire department member up to and including the Fire Chief.
- The first arriving Officer will assume Command after the transfer of Command procedures have been completed (assuming an equal or higher-ranking officer has not already assumed Command).
- The first arriving Chief Officer should assume Command of the incident following transfer of Command procedures.
- Command SHALL only be transferred to another Officer who is physically on-scene of the incident, not one who is still enroute to the incident.
- Command may be transferred over the radio; however face-to-face transfer is preferred.
- The person being relieved of Command will communicate by radio or face-to-face an updated report on conditions (CAN) including the following:
 1. Transfer of the Tactical Worksheet/IAP (if initiated)
 2. The new IC will communicate that they are on-scene, assuming Command as well as improve or confirm the size up, incident priorities, and strategy over the Incident TAC Channel to Verdugo Dispatch and all companies operating on the incident.

Example:

“Olive IC, Battalion 1, I copy your assignments: Engine 11 as Division Alpha with Engine 16 working for them, Engine 13 as Division Charlie with Engine 14 working for them, and Truck 11 as Roof Division.”

Followed by:

“Verdugo, Battalion 1 will now assume Olive IC, the Command Post is located on the Alpha side of the structure.”

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9. DIVISION AND GROUP RESPONSIBILITIES

The Divisions or Groups are tactical level management units that organize companies. **Divisions represent geographic operations, and groups represent functional operations.** Generally, Division/Group responsibilities should be assigned early in the incident, **typically** to the first company assigned to a geographic area or function. This early establishment of Division/Group provides an effective Incident Command organization framework on which the operation can be built and expanded.

NOTE: Division/Group supervisor WILL NOT be operating at the task level. Operating in an IDLH atmosphere greatly reduces one's ability to maintain good situational awareness and operate effectively as a Division/Group supervisor.

The establishment of Divisions/Groups helps maintain an effective span of control, and ensures unity of Command. Establishing appropriate organization also helps reduce the overall amount of radio communications. If possible, most routine communications within a Division/Group should be conducted in a face-to-face manner or on the Division/Group tactical frequency between Company Officers and their Division/Group Supervisor. This process reduces unnecessary radio traffic and increases the ability to transmit critical radio communications.

As an incident escalates the Incident Commander should organize companies to work in Division/Groups, which allows the Incident Commander to prepare for change or escalation of an incident. Verdugo is using this common method of ICS terminology to effectively organize an incident scene. At a minimum, if an Incident Commander holds a first alarm assignment to operate at an incident, they shall use ICS terminology.

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DIVISIONS:

1. Division assignments should be based on the indexing of the building (Figure 1). Division "Alpha" will **typically** be the address side of the building and the other Divisions follow in a clockwise rotation around the building in alphabetical order, (**Any exceptions or deviations from this practice shall be clearly communicated on all Command and Tactical radio channels**). Use of Interior Division may be used for smaller occupancies. In large 2 story residential homes or 2 story townhomes Division 1 and Division 2 may be more manageable for interior crews.



Figure 1. Indexing of a structure (Photo: Captain Donnelly GFD)

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2. In multi-story occupancies (Figure 2), divisions will usually be indicated by floor number (Division 5 indicates fifth floor). When operating in levels below grade such as basements, the use of subdivisions is appropriate (Figure 3).

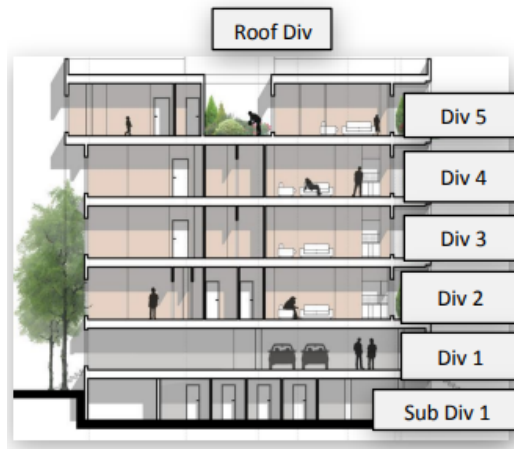


Figure 2. Multi-story occupancy (Photo: ICS 500)

A structure can appear from the front as having fewer levels than it has. The illustrations in Figure 3 and Figure 4 emphasize the importance of a 360 assessment.



Figure 3. Multi-level residential structure (Photo: ICS 500)

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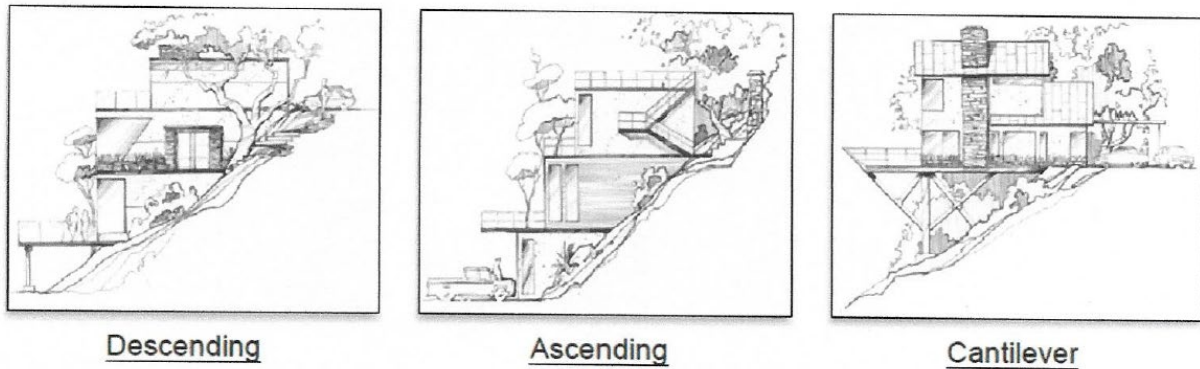


Figure 4 Describing a hillside home (Photo: ICS 500)

3. In multi-unit occupancies, exposures can be indicated by alpha letter identifier for the side of the extension followed by a number that starts adjacent to the unit on fire (Figure 5). For a one story strip mall and/ or a one story apartment or condominium complex, where fire attack is being initiated on the Division A (Alpha) side, and fire is extending to the Division B (Bravo) side, the IC will start with Bravo 1, then Bravo 2 and so on to address units requiring assigned resources. If the fire extends to the Division D (Delta) side, the IC will start with Delta 1, then Delta 2. In a multi-story strip mall with a fire on the second floor and a Division 2 is established, similarly to the one story structure, exposures to the Division Bravo side would be identified as Bravo 1, Bravo 2, and so on. Any exposure problems to the Division Delta side would be identified as Delta 1, Delta 2, and so on. The identifier for an exposure occupancy may be used for identification only and may not necessitate the assignment of an additional supervising Officer. The Incident Commander is responsible for clearly identifying areas of responsibility at multi-unit incidents.

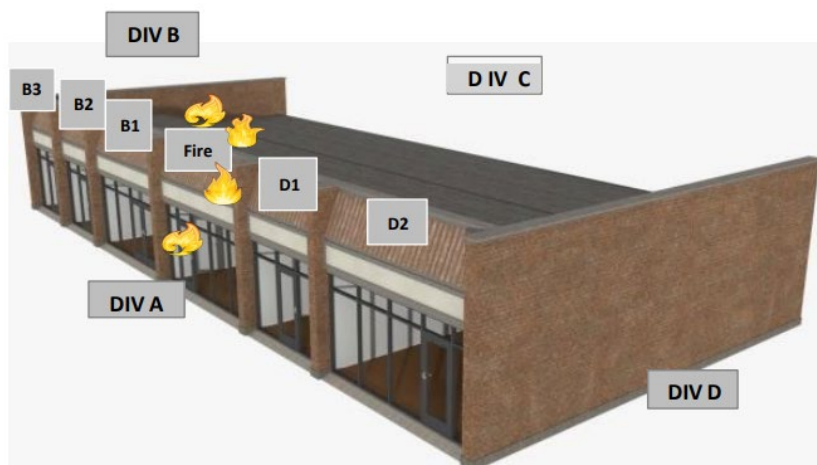


Figure 5 Multi-unit occupancy strip center (Photo: ICS 500)

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GROUPS:

Groups will be identified by their function (Salvage Group, Medical Group, Ventilation Group, Rapid Intervention Group etc.). When establishing a Division/Group, the Incident Commander will assign:

1. A Division/Group supervisor
2. Tactical objectives, including leader's intent
3. A radio designation (Roof Division, Division Alpha etc.) and assigned frequency if multiple frequencies are in use.
4. The identity of resources assigned to the Division/Group

Example:

"Engine 11 I am assigning you Division Alpha, your tactical objectives are Fire Attack and Primary Search, you will have Engine 12 working for you."

10. INCIDENT COMMAND POST (ICP)

A fixed and visible ICP should be established whenever possible. For example, this may be inside the cab of an Engine/Truck Company, the Battalion Chief's vehicle. A fixed Command Post provides reduced noise, improved communication, better lighting, tactical worksheets, etc.

1. An ICP should be established in a safe location that provides a good view of the incident. At a structure fire, this would ideally be at a corner allowing the IC to see two (2) sides of the structure.
2. When an ICP is established, the location should be identified and broadcast over the incident TAC Channel to Verdugo Dispatch and all members on the incident.

Key Considerations

- **Responsibilities of Command:**
 - LIFE SAFETY
 - Incident stabilization
 - Property conservation
 - Environment protection
- **Utilize RISK MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES to determine the life safety priority of the incident and apply the most appropriate level of risk to first responders. Gain SITUATIONAL AWARENESS.**
- **Consider establishing Unified Command when the incident may involve multiple agencies or jurisdictions.**