

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND TACTICAL OPERATIONS MANUAL

SERIES 358

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINE

EMERGENCY ABANDONMENT SIGNAL

PURPOSE

To identify a universal signal to alert all personnel working at the emergency scene the situation has escalated beyond the levels of acceptable risk and they need to exit the structure or hazardous area in the quickest method possible, retreating to the Safety Zone.

Structure collapse, an explosion hazard, lost water supply to interior operations, wild land warning situations, or any other hazardous condition deemed imminent by the Incident Commander would be reasons to activate the signal.

DEFINITIONS

Abandon: The term “abandon” is used to direct companies or crews operating in the hazard zone to immediately exit via escape routes to a safety zone. For example, at a structure fire the order to “abandon the building” directs all companies or crews in the hazard zone to immediately exit to a safety zone. Companies or crews abandoning the hazard zone will take only the tools, equipment, and hose lines necessary to permit their emergency egress.

Emergency Traffic: The phrase “emergency traffic” is the code word used in radio communications to indicate a critical, life safety related message. Emergency traffic has priority over all other radio communications WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A MAYDAY MESSAGE.

Evacuation: Do not confuse with abandon. The term “evacuate” will be limited to removal of civilians who are exposed or potentially exposed to hazards presented by the incident.

Safety Zone: An area of safe refuge located outside the hazard zone.

Withdraw: Do not confuse with abandon. To exit the structure or hot zone area with equipment and hose lines, due to a change in strategy, i.e., offensive to defensive fire attack.

PROCEDURE

- I. It is improbable that one signal will guarantee effective alerting in every situation; therefore, it shall be the responsibility of the Incident Commander to accomplish it through both emergency traffic radio communication and audible signals. An order to abandon is broadcast to all companies at the incident, regardless of their assignment or position.

II. Scene Personnel

1. Any imminent danger or opinion that abandonment is necessary shall be reported immediately to the Incident Commander (IC) or Incident Safety Officer (ISO).

III. Incident Commander

1. Contact the Communications Center by radio requesting “emergency traffic” and stating what area of the structure/area needs to be abandoned, as well as the imminent danger. The proper term, “abandon” must be used and repeated at least twice.
 - A. “All Companies, Command, with emergency traffic. Abandon the building, abandon the building”.
 - (1). Note: The incident commander may need to provide specific instructions if normal exits are blocked, such as from a structural collapse.

IV. Communication Center

1. Transmit three (3) alert tones, followed by 5 seconds of warble.
2. Repeat the abandonment message as received from the IC or SO on primary, tactical and all other appropriate radio channels
3. Restrict the appropriate channel(s) for emergency radio traffic related to the abandonment or the personnel accountability report (PAR).

V. Apparatus Operators

1. Operators who are attending any of the engine or ladder companies that are operating at the scene shall activate the Hi/Lo siren for 10-15 seconds in duration with a 5-second pause. This procedure shall be repeated two times (2), adjusting durations so the multiple units send the signal in a uniformed rather than a chaotic pattern.

VI. Incident Scene Personnel

1. All personnel within the abandonment area, upon hearing either the radio or audible signal, shall immediately exit the structure/area, leaving hose lines and other equipment in place unless these items are required during the retreat.
2. Upon exiting the hot zone, all personnel shall immediately report to their supervisor to be accounted for and report, as a crew, to the person holding their passport. In the event that they cannot locate the person holding their passport following the order to abandon, they shall report directly to the incident command post for accountability.

VII. Follow Up

1. Following the order to abandon, the IC must account for all resources operating at the incident by initiating a Personnel Accountability Report (PAR). If all personnel are not accounted for, the “Abandon” order shall be repeated.
2. The IC shall advise the Communication Center when normal fire ground traffic may resume.

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3. If the IC is operating in a jurisdiction with different abandon procedures, it shall be his/her responsibility to assure that assigned personnel are aware of the signal that will be used.