

Fireground Operations, SOG 3.21

Violent Scenes Response

1. Intent and Purpose:

Whether units have been dispatched to a violent scene or they are on an ordinary call that develops into a violent / threatened scene Union County Emergency Services need to work under a common guideline to increase safety and effectiveness.

2. Scope

This guideline is primarily for use by Union Counties Fire and EMS agencies. However without a common understanding by all Union County emergency services, (Fire, EMS, Law Enforcement, and EMA,) this guideline would become largely ineffective.

This guideline should be used under the following conditions:

1. As an intra-agency reference as a guide to policy makers.
2. As a guide for department training officers, company officers, and individuals, to promote safe operations.
3. As a framework for responding to violent or potentially violent scenes.

All Fire and EMS responders need to understand the legal ramifications of responding to violent scenes. Any violent scene is considered a crime scene until proven otherwise by the proper Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ). Any disruption / destruction of evidence whether intentional or accidental by first responders, **MAY** have civil or criminal consequences to the responders or their parent organizations. Crews actions should be **REASONABLE TO THE SITUATION.**

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Section 1: Firefighter In Trouble

In the past there has been some confusion as to the purpose and use of this phrase. For this reason it has been relocated from SOG 3.20 to SOG 3.21.

“**Firefighter In Trouble**” is a predesignated immediate action message that will set in motion a specific response by the dispatchers.

Firefighter in Trouble indicates an immediate need to dispatch Law Enforcement to the scene.

Example, “*Medic 123 to County Fire, Firefighter in Trouble!*”

1. Upon receiving the message the dispatcher will acknowledge and repeat the transmission.
Dispatch: “Medic 123 you’re clear on a Firefighter in Trouble”.
2. The dispatchers will Immediately send Law Enforcement to the scene.
3. Dispatchers will send the closest engine, medic, and chief officer. Fire and EMS units should stage a safe distance away.
 - a. Crews should make every reasonable attempt to back out of the scene if possible to a safe location.
 - b. Follow up information should be relayed to the dispatchers as the situation permits.

Firefighter in Trouble should have the same meaning as a **Code 44** in Law Enforcement. It is when there is an imminent threat to safety of first responders.

In addition to calling for help the dispatcher can use the phrase to clarify if the crew is in danger.

Example “ Medic 123 to County Fire this is a domestic dispute start a deputy to the scene.”

If the dispatcher is not clear on the level of response can ask.

Example “ County Fire to Medic 123 we will start a deputy, are you calling a **Firefighter in Trouble?**” Then the medic would answer, “Medic 123 to County Fire negative. We are ok! The parties are separated.”

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Section 2: Responding to Violent or Potentially Violent Incidents

On most calls, fire and EMS units usually go directly to the scene in order to begin immediate actions to preserve life and safeguard property. There are times when rushing in is not the wisest or safest tactic. In Haz-Mat situations we proceed with caution responding uphill and upwind. There are scenes that we have traditionally staged in a safe location until the scene is made safe by law enforcement. In the past, we have taken “a don’t go approach” to these incidents. Many times we sit for long periods of time waiting for law enforcement to arrive, while at the same time the victim remains in jeopardy. Add to this family members who are waiting pleading with dispatchers to get help there now. In an effort to be more appropriate in our response the following guidelines have been established. ***Crews need to realize that there is violence or the threat of violence the scene is a crime scene and steps need to be taken to preserve evidence for law enforcement.**

Response Levels:

The decision to respond directly to the scene will be broken down into **Two Levels**. These levels are a **Green Level** and a **Red Level**.

Green Level: Is considered an “**ok to go**” level provided the Officer in Charge (OIC) is comfortable with the information obtained through communication with dispatchers and or responding law enforcement.

Red Level : Is considered a “**not ok to go**” level which will be determined by the Fire/EMS OIC or responding Law Enforcement Officer.

Red Level :

At this level units are to stage at a safe location and await Law Enforcement’s arrival to secure the scene. Similar to level 2 staging in other incidents units will remain in this location until given clearance by law enforcement.

A **Red Level** incident is any incident that is not specifically outlined below or any incident where Law Enforcement has specifically requested Fire and EMS units to stage.

Green Level:

At this level the OIC believes that there is an acceptable level of risk vs benefit that; 1) A rapid arrival of public safety responders will improve the overall health and safety of the victims/patient, and possibly resolve the incident quicker. and, 2) The level of risk to fire and EMS responders is reasonably low.

Some examples of Go Level incidents are:

- Domestic Violence calls where the violence is known to be over.
 - Domestic Violence calls can be difficult to anticipate safety concerns. All parties involved will be in an state of heightened stress levels. Because of high stress levels their response to your presence or actions may cause unpredictable behavior.
 - Where is the offender?
 - If the offender still on scene, how will he/she respond to you helping the victim?
 - What aid is being provided by bystanders.

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- An assault where the offender has left the scene.
- An incident where children less than 13 have been injured.
 - In general the younger the child is their capacity for self preservation is more dependent on their parents or caregivers. When evaluating the risk vs. benefit of entering the scene the victims age and their ability to act in their own best interest should be considered.
- Accidental overdoses.
- Accidental cuttings / shootings.
- Suicidal subjects **without** deadly weapons.
- Shootings and stabbings where it has been confirmed that the assailant has left the scene.
- 911 unknown* (limited, see Section 3)

***Note: Every scene has the potential to escalate quickly, and even if an assailant has left they can still return.**

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Section 3: Responding to 911 Unknown.

At this time 911 unknown's / 911 Hang Up's are covered under individual Department policy. This is mainly due to the demographics that are unique to each agency. The following section is included as a reference for a common framework to guide departments that decide through local policy that they should respond to 911 unknowns.

911 Unknown Response:

In general, equipment responses to 911 unknown's should be at the flow of traffic. Unless there are extenuating circumstances. For example;

- Distance from response location will exceed 20 minutes.
- There is information available that this could be a fire or EMS incident.
 - Second call of smoke in the area.
 - History of medical emergency,
 - Other pertinent information obtained by the dispatcher or law enforcement.

Fire and EMS units should stage at locations that are out of site of the incident location. If possible they should stage at a location that provides ballistic protection. The staging area should be close enough to be less than a 2 minute response time. If the incident location is within 2 minutes of the responding units station then units may stage on station while maintaining a condition that is ready to respond.

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Section 4: Active Shooter Response.

Active or Mass shootings are by their nature a Law Enforcement lead incident. Law Enforcement will have primary incident command responsibilities. For the purposes of this section this does not cover all shooting incidents. Regardless of the final scope of an active shooter incident there are three things that will positively affect the final outcome. 1) Clear and effective command and control early on in the incident. 2) Effective and integrated communications. 3) Good judgement and coordinated tactics by all responders.

The goal of this guideline is to provide a framework for a single incident with multiple victims and with either a single shooter or multiple shooters that are still in the immediate area.

Initial Notification. The first notice of an active shooter will typically go to Law Enforcement through the 911 center.

1. When it is determined that there is an active shooter / multiple shooting Law Enforcement should notify Fire and EMS as soon as possible.
2. Unified Command needs to be established as early as possible.
 - a. The incident commander needs to evaluate the potential severity of the incident along with all possible hazards created by the shooter (s) (ex. Improvised Explosive Devices, Haz-mat, ect.) and mobilize the resources necessary to resolve the incident.
 - i. Activate LERP and Fire ERP. Notify EMS and Fire for Mass Casualty plan activation.
 - ii. EMA notification.
 - iii. Local School system notification.
 - iv. Consider Community Notification (Code Red, Nixle.)
 - v. Notify FAA or local airport for air space restrictions (TFR).
 - b. The incident command structure should be expanded quickly to support necessary functions and allow for quicker establishment of vital areas of responsibility.(See Also Appendix I for UCSO Sample Command Structure.)

Response: Fire and EMS responders should respond quickly and safely to the scene when dispatched. Responding prior to dispatch or calling the dispatch center to be dispatched could lead to confusion. Clear command and control through disciplined communications will greatly improve overall scene management.

Fire and EMS responders should be clearly identifiable as such. In the confusion of the incident first responders may be misidentified if they are not clearly marked. Response with Privately Owned Vehicles (POV) should be avoided. POV's can add to congestion and confusion at the scene. If they are necessary they should be staged away from the response route and outside of the outer perimeter.

The first arriving Fire / EMS vehicle will establish liaison with law enforcement and take charge of communicating with other responding fire and EMS units, and establishing Level 1 and Level 2 staging for Fire and EMS units. Level 1 staging should be close enough to allow quick access to the scene for rescue and treatment and transport. Level 2 should be set up far enough away to not pose a traffic congestion issue and to allow units a safe area to form up as needed. All areas should be located where they are safe from weapons fire and any hazardous materials release.

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Rescue: Rescue involves removing the patient / victim from where they are found to the Casualty Collection Point. Crews should be equipped for light rescue and search. Forcible entry to access the victims and then any light portable litters or patient transport devices that are available. (The use of cots / gurneys is counter productive in the initial stages.)

Rescue teams should be formed up as soon as possible. The team should consist of four people at a minimum. Teams will consist of at least two LEO's and two rescuers. Crews will only deploy from the staging area, and then only at the direction of the incident commander. The Rescue Team Chief will direct rescue teams to the areas where; 1) victims have been located and 2) no active shooting is happening and none is expected. They will enter the inner perimeter in a single file formation with one LEO at the front and one at the rear of the line and move in that configuration for the remainder of the incident. If there are four LEO's available they will form the points of the diamond and the rescuers will be inside the diamond. With each position comes specific responsibilities. The point position is at the front and is the team leader. The LEO at the rear of the formation is responsible for rear security and communications. The rescue members should have basic patient movement skills and basic patient assessment training. (EMT-B) **Only treatment that is absolutely necessary to prevent death should be performed. (Tourniquet application, or insertion of a Nasopharyngeal airway.)** Only patient packaging equipment (backboards, scoop stretchers) should be taken into the inner perimeter. Care should be taken to protect spinal injuries but full C spine control with collar and back board will not be used until they arrive in the Casualty Collection Point.. If any patients are located that are in need of heavy rescue skills their location will be marked and command will be notified as to the type of rescue equipment needed and the status of the victim. This will allow the IC to prioritize heavy rescue equipment deployment.

Team movement will be directed by the team leader. Team members should not “hug “ the walls. It reduces your field of view and ricocheting bullets will travel along walls. You should stay about an arms length away from any wall. Teams should not spend any more time in hallways or doorways than absolutely necessary. Also teams should avoid silhouetting themselves against sharply contrasting backgrounds and / or windows. Do not touch obviously dead victims. They may be boobytraped and they are also considered evidence. If explosive devices are located, note their location avoid them. The rescue team leader will report the location of the explosive device when safely away from the device.

Heavy rescue operations will be conducted by specially formed teams. They will remain in Level 2 staging until deployed by order of the IC. At the time of deployment they will be given their operational briefing describing the location and situation. They will then be escorted to the location by a LEO Rescue Team.

Casualty Collection Point: A centralized and secure location where casualties can be taken. This is where the patients will be triaged and packaged for movement. The treatment area may or may not be located in the same area. If the treatment area is not located at the CCP then only life sustaining procedures will be performed. (insertion of nasopharyngeal airway, application of tourniquet)

The Union County MCI protocol will begin at the CCP. Those specific operations are not covered in this SOG.

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Glossary:

A.L.I.C.E. The acronym for a program taught by law enforcement. It is designed to aid occupants (primarily schools and businesses) in their response to an active shooter situation.

- A: Alert
- L: Lockdown
- I: Inform
- C: Counter
- E: Evacuate

Casualty Collection Point: A secure area that casualties are moved to allow for Triage. The area should have armed law enforcement at the entry and exit points. When choosing a location the CCP should restrict access to prevent unauthorized persons from entering the CCP. Also try to choose locations that will reduce the risks from hazardous materials release and sniper fire.

Contact Team: A group of two or more law enforcement officers that are organized with the sole responsibility of stopping or neutralizing an active shooter. They are instructed not to deliver any first aid.

Cover: Any object or terrain feature that provides substantial ballistic protection for personnel and equipment. Examples of good cover is behind a hill or dirt mound of sufficient size to cover the entire person or vehicle, or behind a concrete reinforced structure. Quality of cover also depends on the type of hazard faced. Some slow velocity rounds or shrapnel may be stopped by the pages of a book while large caliber high velocity armor piercing ammunition can penetrate reinforced concrete and plate armor.

Concealment: Any object that conceals your position but doesn't offer any ballistic protection. Some examples are ordinary construction walls, car doors, bushes, tall grass.

Diamond Formation: The physical shape of a group of law enforcement officers. Each member of the group is assigned a specific set of responsibilities.

ERP: Emergency Response Plan. or Ohio Fire Chiefs Association Emergency Response Plan. Is the statewide mutual aid system that provides command operational and logistical support for local fire and EMS jurisdictions. It is maintained and operated through Ohio Homeland Security.

LERP: Law Enforcement Emergency Response Plan. Is the Law Enforcement statewide emergency mutual aid system.

Modified Diamond Formation: (Triangle) Formation: An alternate to the Diamond Formation that is used due to manpower requirements. Members still have the same responsibilities as the Diamond Formation.

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Perimeter: A zone around a law enforcement incident that is similar to an exclusion zone used in HazMat response. There may be more than one perimeters established. These perimeters are staffed by law enforcement personnel. Any movement inside or between various perimeters are solely at the discretion of the law enforcement IC or his / her designee and may require an armed escort.

Soft Targets: Individuals or groups that are vulnerable and do not pose a significant threat of injury to the active shooter.

Appendix I

Law Enforcement Incident Command Structure and Responsibilities

Once sufficient command staff is in place, the agency with jurisdiction over the location of the shooting will assume Incident Command responsibilities. The following operational branches should be established as soon as staffing allows.

1. Contact Team Chief: Responsible for coordinating the contact teams and keeping the incident commander aware of their progress.
2. Perimeter Team Chief: Responsible for coordinating the perimeter units and ensuring that all entrance/exit points are covered.
3. Rescue Team Chief: Responsible for organizing rescue teams, mapping the entire structure to ensure a thorough search is conducted for victims, identifying a triage area, and coordinating EMS staging areas.
4. Communications Team Chief: Responsible for logging communications in the command post, ensuring adequate radio communications (channel assignment, mobile cell towers, etc.) and staffing tactical dispatch positions as needed.
5. Investigations Team Chief: Responsible for organizing a team of investigators and planning the initial investigation.
6. Legal Team Chief: Responsible for notifying and briefing prosecutors and other legal entities.
7. Logistics Chief: Responsible for locating portable toilets, rest areas for units on scene, food service areas, tents and other structures for the command team, fuel, etc.
8. Social Service Team Chief: Responsible for assigning an area for clergy and mental health officials to meet and plan their approach for dealing Critical Incident Stress and other mental

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health needs created by this event.

9. Reunification Team Chief: Responsible for identifying a reunification area for family members, relatives, co-workers, etc. that were involved in the incident and those coming to check on them.

10. Any other branches or sections needed may be designated by the incident commander or team leader.