



UFF Position Statement: Fire and Smoke as a Weapon

According to the United States Department of Homeland Security, international terrorist groups and violent extremists have shown interest in using fire as a weapon for several reasons. These reasons include the low cost and limited technical expertise required, the potential for causing large-scale damage, and the low risk of being caught.

A large scale fire has the potential to strain public safety resources during response and recovery efforts. For terrorists however, setting fires has several advantages over other methods of attack including duration of fire, potential long-term effects, potential for casualties, economic damage, media coverage, and the accompanying psychological effects of fear and terror on civilians.

Since the equipment and materials necessary to use fire as a weapon are common and easily obtainable, preparation for an attack is difficult to detect and makes disruption and capture challenging for law enforcement.

Terrorists who are intent on using fire as a weapon may target locations in proximity to populated areas or large structures to maximize damage and casualties. Many residential and commercial buildings have unique characteristics that can be exploited by terrorists, including height with limited means of egress, built-in fire protection systems, high occupancy, occupants not familiar with structural layouts and evacuation procedures, and construction features that promote combustion and smoke travel.

Because terrorists may use fire and smoke in combination with firearms and other weapons, mitigating this complex threat will require pre-planning, repetitive training, and a coordinated fire service and law enforcement response.

Given the threat, fire departments and law enforcement agencies, regardless of size or capacity, should find ways to coordinate appropriate and effective responses to these events. Local fire departments and law enforcement agencies should educate first responders and establish standard operating procedures to deal with these unusual, highly volatile, and extraordinarily dangerous scenarios. Education materials and standard operating procedures should include at a minimum the following information and objectives.

Mumbai Style Attack – this style attack method includes multiple attackers and targets, combined weapons (typically firearms and explosives), and prolonged operation to maximize media coverage. The scene may include fire, intense smoke, low to no visibility, and the threat of firearms and explosives.

Integrated Tactical Response Teams combine law enforcement, fire and EMS personnel to enhance the capability, capacity and operational performance of first responder resources.

Role of the Fire Service – To deliver subject matter expertise on building systems, floor plans, elevators, as well as enhanced response capability including fire suppression, extinguishment, and emergency medical care.

In coordination with law enforcement activity, conduct victim care and rescue, fire suppression and extinguishment, and control of building systems.

- Victim care and Rescue –with law enforcement escort, conduct victim triage, treatment and removal. (See also UFF Active Shooter and Rescue Task Force Position Statement)
- Fire Suppression and Extinguishment – with law enforcement escort, conduct search, evacuation and fire control.
- Control of Building Systems - with law enforcement escort, restore damaged or disabled fire protection systems, create a water supply. Where possible, use positive ventilation/ HVAC systems to eliminate smoke to increase visibility.

Training for Response

Police and Fire Departments should meet and train together. Initial and ongoing planning, coordination, training and practice are imperative to successful operations.

All Fire and EMS personnel should be trained to recognize and react appropriately to violent incidents involving fire (*See UFF Position Statements: Active Shooter and Mass Casualty Terrorist Events and Rescue Task Force for Active Shooter/Terrorist Events).

If fire and EMS personnel encounter an active shooter or multiple shooters in conjunction with explosives, fire and smoke prior to law enforcement arrival, they should immediately withdraw from the scene. When withdrawal is not possible, personnel should seek hard cover/concealment and request an immediate police response.

All responding personnel should be aware of the difference between concealment and hard cover. Concealment is an obstacle that hides your exact location but can be penetrated by ballistic weapons. Hard cover is an area impenetrable to ballistic weapons.

Due to the chaos of a multiple hazard terror event, fire department personnel should be informed that during scene operations, a law enforcement officer may confront a firefighter or EMS personnel to verify their identity. In this situation, the firefighter or paramedic should: 1) comply with the commands of law enforcement personnel; 2) remain motionless (no sudden movements); 3) not turn their body unless instructed to do so by the challenging officer; 4) verbally identify themselves as a member of the fire department by rank and name; and, 5) await the command of law enforcement to resume current operations.

Threat Designation for Operations

Areas within the scene of these complex attacks should use the hazardous materials concept of Hot, Warm and Cold Zones.

- **Hot Zone** – the area where terrorist or other threats are present. Threats may be perpetrators roaming free or engaged by law enforcement or the presence of improvised explosive devices (IED). No firefighter or EMS personnel should operate in the Hot Zone.
- **Warm Zone** – the area determined by law enforcement to be “cleared”... meaning that there are no identifiable suspects or IED threats. Firefighters and EMS personnel wearing appropriate ballistic protection may be assigned to operate in this area with close law enforcement escort. Operations may include treatment or rescue of victims, repairing damaged or disabled standpipes/sprinkler pipes, routing bypass systems for water supply, etc. This zone may be smoke filled but without active fire and may extend for several floors below or as cleared pockets within the Hot Zone.

- **Cold Zone** – the area determined to be devoid of perpetrators, suspects or IEDs. Firefighters and EMS personnel may operate in this zone without ballistic gear. Operations that may be established in this zone may include the unified command post (UCP), personnel and equipment staging, tactical operations center (TOC), logistics, casualty collection points, and patient transfer and transportation points.

Command

Command should be consistent with the National Incident Management System (NIMS), in particular the Incident Command System (ICS). In accordance with NIMS guidance, Fire and Police should establish a single Command Post (CP) and establish Unified Command (UC).

In addition to the Command Post, various post should be established for prolonged operations. These posts include:

- **Tactical Operations Center (TOC)**
 - This post should include a fire chief and a medical branch officer, as well as a law enforcement tactical operations officer so that unified command can be established.
 - TOC directs all special weapons and tactics (SWAT) operations and coordinates with UC.
 - TOC Fire Chief coordinates fire operations and acts as subject matter expert (SME) for coordination with the law enforcement counterparts.
 - Medical branch officer coordinates EMS operations and acts as emergency medical SME for coordination with the law enforcement counterparts.
 - Acts as a fusion point for inter-agency communication
- **Forward Staging for both law enforcement and fire/EMS assets**
 - This post should include a fire chief, as well as law enforcement officers trained in interagency response operations
- **Rear Staging for both law enforcement and fire/EMS assets.**
 - This post should include a fire chief, as well as law enforcement officers trained in interagency response operations

Communication

Use of common communications terminology is imperative. Fire department personnel must understand common police terms, such as Cleared, Secured, Cover, Concealment, and related terms. A list of terms should be shared between fire and law enforcement during planning /training and should be available at all times in the TOC.

In addition to law enforcement channels, fire department radio channels should include:

- Command
- Tactical
- EMS
- Building Communications Systems
- Interoperability

All communications should be fused at the TOC.

Initial On Scene Report

Upon determination of a complex Mumbai-style incident, initial responders should transmit conditions found on arrival, protective measures taken and additional resources needed on scene. All

communication should be transmitted in 'plain speak' rather than radio codes or typical fire or law enforcement jargon.

Fire suppression and EMS assets deployed should be directed to a designated staging area.

Operations

Upon consultation between post commanders and fire chiefs in the TOC and with UC, fire suppression and EMS personnel may be dispatched from designated staging areas and "blended" with SWAT and other law enforcement personnel at a joint staging area.

At the joint staging area, all personnel should be briefed on the situation with the most current information available. The information should include known hazards, intelligence, and other assessments. Law enforcement will fill the position known as Staging Area Manager. This position will oversee deployment of interagency entry teams and coordinate movement from the Cold Zone to the point of entry along a protected route. The protected route may use shielding from structures, tunnels, or vehicles.

Law enforcement officers will coordinate communication and manage resources needed in the incident Warm Zone.

Fire suppression teams may be inserted into the Warm Zone as part of SWAT or other law enforcement personnel to suppress or extinguish fire, search, ventilate, establish water supply, set up and use large master streams and/or re-establish fire protective systems. Fire suppression forces may be divided into assessment and breach control teams to address intentionally damaged fire protection systems. These teams will determine the tools and equipment needed and proceed with SWAT or law enforcement officers to repair a breach. As with any multi-story structure fire, suppression personnel should coordinate with building engineers to gather detailed information on sprinkler and standpipe systems, shutoff valves, and the HVAC system. During the operations, fire suppression teams may be asked to use these systems in concert with positive pressure ventilation to direct smoke away from victims while re-routing it as a tactical advantage toward perpetrators.

Fire suppression, EMS, and law enforcement personnel should coordinate to implement strategies for evacuation, sheltering in place or relocation as needed. These efforts may include the use of elevator systems.

The staging manager supervisor manages loading team members and equipment, dispatching to the entry point and then off-loading personnel and victims upon return. The staging manager will coordinate with the EMS and law enforcement Cold Zone Triage Managers for tracking casualties and prioritizing patients for transport.

Secondary assessment and treatment of victims should be completed by paramedics in the Cold Zone.

Equipment

Caches of EMS equipment (*See UFF Position Statement: Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC)), along with self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), air cylinders, PASS devices, thermal imaging cameras, rescue tools and rope and other essentials should be placed in the staging areas. Law enforcement personnel must be informed that PASS activation may compromise position for those searching for perpetrators. Alternatives may be considered for this operation. Extra SCBA, and thermal imaging cameras may be useful to law enforcement officers operating in environments immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH).

Urban Fire Pre-Plan Protective Measures

- In conjunction with law enforcement, review standard operating procedures and firefighting tactics for search, fire suppression, operations for smoke control and ventilation, and evacuation for those occupancies deemed as high-target areas.
- Review procedures and train for operations dealing with large-scale, advanced fire situations, as well as the procedures for developing large-volume firefighting streams, communicating multiple alarms, and coordinating incident command with law enforcement when unified command is established.
- Plan for use of emergency medical services in large scale events including triage, treatment and transport of patients, and surge capacity for local medical facilities.
- Coordinate, plan and train with local law enforcement agencies for scene security, force protection, and joint operations including teaching law enforcement officers to use thermal imaging cameras.
- Identify critical occupancies or infrastructure and review building plans, procedures for access, communications, search, evacuation, and control of fire including establishing water supply independent of building fire-protection systems.
- Coordinate with local facility managers to review building emergency action plans that provide for sheltering or evacuation of building occupants. Pay particular attention to large populated institutions, areas of public assembly, and institutional, educational, and critical infrastructure.
- Alert fire and emergency medical units to report any suspected acts of vandalism related to fire-protection systems, devices, or equipment.

DHS and the FBI encourage fire service leaders to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to the nearest State and Major Urban Area Fusion Center and to the local FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force.

Sources:

- NOTE: (U//FOUO) Terrorist Interest in Using Fire as a Weapon, IA-0140-12, May 31 2012.
- Interagency Tactical Response Model: Integrating Fire and EMS with Law Enforcement to Mitigate Mumbai-Style Terrorist Attacks, Version 1.0, June 29, 2012. FDNY Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness with International Partners.
- FDNY Tactics and Procedures, EMS OGP 105-01- ADDENDUM 1: Emergency Response Plan Addendum - 3A, August 5, 2014