
S.O.P. #: Tactical Operations Manual #17

SUBJECT: Civil Disturbances

DIVISION: Emergency Operations

Introduction: As with any large community, Baltimore County faces the potential for large scale civil unrest. Such a situation may result from discontent with social issues, might follow a weather event such as a hurricane or blizzard or may be initiated by a sporting event. Baltimore County, although not experiencing unrest itself, may also be called upon to provide mutual aid assistance to other jurisdictions unable to maintain resources during such a disturbance.

The following procedure is meant to provide the incident commander and company officer with a guideline for operations. This S.O.P. has been developed following the extensive research into previous civil disturbances throughout the United States. Information has been assimilated from the operational guidelines of many other fire departments which have experienced civil unrest.

This procedure has been developed with the safety of fire department personnel in mind. It is the responsibility of each company and command officer to evaluate each situation to insure the safety of their personnel. Should that safety be in question, appropriate action should be taken to allow for a timely retreat from the area.

Section 1: Incident Command

A. Command requirements

1. As command is established and a command post designated, it is imperative that the Incident Commander determine the geographical boundaries of the disturbance. This information is forwarded to Fire Dispatch for dissemination to all stations and apparatus via in-station computer and KDT.
 - a) This information may be best obtained by aircraft reconnaissance.
 - b) Command should update Fire Dispatch on the perimeter boundaries as the incident progresses.
 - c) Companies should be configured into Task Forces or Strike Teams.
2. Once command has been established, Fire Dispatch will not dispatch units into the disturbance area.
 - a) All information relative to any incidents within the perimeter will be forwarded to the Command Post.
 - b) Strike Teams and Task Forces will be dispatched by the Command Post.
 - c) The Command Post will provide Fire Dispatch with the identity of each Task Force or Strike Team responding to each incident. Should incident information be provided by a source other than Fire Dispatch, the Command Post will provide the incident location and responding Task Force to Fire Dispatch.
3. Command, through the Police Liaison Officer, will ensure that no task force leaves the Command Post on a mission without police escort.

4. Requests for additional resources from an operating Task Force or Strike Team within the impact area will be directed to the Command Post.
5. In the event of disturbances occurring over a widespread area or numerous areas within the county, staging locations may be necessary.
6. In selecting a site for the Command Post, the Incident Commander should attempt to locate a structure capable of housing a large contingent of fire, law enforcement and national guard personnel.
7. The area must provide security against destruction of vehicles by rocks, bottles, etc.
8. Each Base/Staging area will require a Police Liaison Officer to coordinate police escorts for each task force.

Section 2: Personnel Assignments

A. Police Liaison

1. Many times civil disturbances can be forecast. The police liaison officer should remain abreast of current trends and potentialities. Intelligence information provided by the police department should be forwarded to the Chief of the Fire Department for dissemination as necessary.
2. Since a civil disturbance is a dynamic situation, intelligence obtained by law enforcement will constantly be updated. The police liaison officer should remain in constant contact with his counterpart in the Fire Department allowing for a free flow of information between agencies.

Section 3: Strategy

The strategy for a civil disturbance is significantly different from routine operations. Command level officers must quickly adjust to the limited resources that will be available. Resources are generally not available to respond to dumpster, rubbish or vehicle fires. Fire Department forces will be responsible to contain and extinguish the main body of fire within a structure quickly and efficiently, and move to the next assignment. Below is the strategy under which the Baltimore County Fire Department will operate during a civil disturbance. The safety of personnel is the primary concern in any decision.

- A. Provide firefighter safety.
- B. Mitigate potential for conflagration.
- C. Should the incident exceed available resources, companies will protect exposed buildings with emphasis on habitable structures.

Section 4: Operational Concerns

A. Pre-Deployment

1. Remove axes, ceiling hooks, etc., mounted on the exterior of apparatus and place in compartments.
2. All available batteries for portable radios should be placed on apparatus along with radio battery charger.

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3. Personnel should consider keeping a change of clothes and safety shoes on the apparatus.
4. Ensure that fresh drinking water and cups are available on apparatus.
5. Ensure that oxygen is full and medical supplies are stocked.
6. At no time will fire department personnel have any type of firearms with them.

B. Tactics

1. Arriving at an incident, the Incident Commander will evaluate the following:
 - a) Safety of personnel.
 - b) Rescue potential.
 - c) Type structure (commercial vs. residential). Residential occupancies will take higher priority than commercial occupancies.
 - d) Fire conditions and exposures.
 - e) Structures well involved will be allowed to burn if resources are scarce.
 - f) Companies will not attempt to extinguish fires other than those involving structures.
2. Whenever possible, companies will avoid placing an engine on a hydrant.
3. Companies will employ defensive operations, utilizing large handlines and master streams.
4. Ladderpipes should be used sparingly as they decrease the ability to quickly retreat.
5. To avoid being a target, personnel shall not be placed on an aerial ladder to operate a master stream device.
6. No personnel will be placed on the roof of any structure to perform ventilation.
7. Companies will extinguish the main body of fire and will not become heavily involved in overhaul.
 - a) It is generally appropriate for Commanders to by-pass fully involved structures allowing units to respond to a structure that can be saved.
8. The natural gas in fire damaged structures should be shut-off if possible. Baltimore Gas & Electric may not be allowed into the impact area.

Section 5: Personnel Safety Considerations

A. In quarters

1. Remain away from windows.
2. Draw window shades.
3. Close and lock all exterior doors.

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4. Consider withdrawing from station if situation deteriorates (see Section 6).
5. Secure all valuables.
6. Maintain one person at the watch desk at all times.
7. Stations maintaining fuel pumps should disengage power when pumps are not in use.

B. Out of quarters.

1. All personnel on apparatus are to wear turnout coat, turnout pants, and helmet or goggles.
2. Windows on apparatus will be kept closed and doors locked.
3. Avoid entering dead-end or blocked streets.
4. Spot apparatus for quick retreat.
5. Unit integrity will be maintained at all times. Personnel will not take any actions alone.
6. Do not enter the impact area without police escort.
7. Respond to and from incidents utilizing visual and audible warning devices.

Note: Some departments have reported success with only utilizing audible warning devices when approaching an intersection. This tactic may reduce the gauntlet effect of citizens lining the street pelting apparatus with debris.

C. If an attack occurs:

1. If responding, keep moving until out of the area.
2. If committed, the below listed items, depending on the caliber of weapon utilized, may provide cover in the event of gunfire:
 - a) Apparatus wheels.
 - b) Apparatus motor block.
 - c) Concrete block/brick walls.
 - d) Trees.
 - e) Telephone and light poles.
3. Withdraw, if possible; this is generally the preferred tactic.
4. Leave apparatus and equipment if necessary.
5. If seeking refuge from an attack, crew should attempt to gain entry into residential properties. (Mobs will usually target mercantile occupancies.)

Section 6: Abandoning quarters

A. Determination

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1. The company commanders of stations within or adjacent to the impact area should consider abandoning their stations.
2. Battalion Chiefs and Division Chiefs may order the abandoning of certain stations.

B. Procedures

1. Ensure all exterior doors are secured.
2. Shut off main electrical power switch.
3. Remove all reserve apparatus from the station and take it with the first line unit to a staging area.
4. Do not attempt to recover personal property from stations (i.e. microwaves, televisions, automobiles, etc.).
5. If time permits, personal vehicles may be placed inside of quarters.

Section 7: Mutual Aid

A. Mutual Aid Provided To Outside Jurisdictions

1. Should another jurisdiction request assistance at a civil disturbance, the on-duty Division Chief will determine an appropriate level of response.
2. Companies will be assembled at a pre-determined deployment area identified by the on-duty Division Chief.

B. Mutual Aid Received From Outside Jurisdictions

1. When requesting mutual aid assistance from another jurisdiction, Fire Dispatch will request a Task Force or Strike Team formation if utilization is expected within the impact area.
2. Fire Dispatch may request single stand-alone companies if the company will be utilized to fill-in a station outside of the impact area perimeter.
3. Task Forces or Strike Teams from outside jurisdictions will be supplied with a representative of the Baltimore County Fire Department at the Base/Staging area.
 - a) Department representatives will be supplied a portable radio to ensure uninterrupted communication.
 - b) Representatives will provide guidance to Commanders regarding the strategy and tactics delineated within this Standard Operating Procedure.
 - c) The assigned representative will remain with the Task Force or Strike Team until properly relieved or the units are returned to their own jurisdiction.

Section 8: Emergency Medical Services

A. General

1. Upon initiation of a civil disturbance, Baltimore County will be placed on Blue Alert.

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2. The Mass Casualty Incident (MCI) Protocol will be implemented.
3. Appropriate field units will be informed when Blue Alert and MCI Protocol are instituted.
4. Treatment groups should be established as needed. All casualties will be transported to the Treatment Area. The Medical Director/Fire Department Surgeon should report to the Treatment Area to assist with “treat and release” of casualties, so as not to overload local hospital emergency departments.
5. EMS Task Forces or Strike Teams will be provided an appropriate police escort.
6. A Medical Tactical Rescue Team will be assigned to each Base location.
 - a) The team will consist of one medic unit, one engine company and appropriate police escort.
 - b) The team's sole responsibility will be to standby for rapid response to injured firefighters or police officers.
7. Buses should be considered for the transportation of Priority 3 patients from the treatment area to local hospitals.

Section 9: Reporting for Duty

- A. Should police intelligence advise of the potential for civil unrest, the Chief of the Fire Department may elect to have personnel in stations within the potential impact area remove turnout gear from their station when going off-duty. This procedure will allow personnel reporting for duty to do so without entering the impact area to retrieve turnout gear.
- B. Personnel from stations within the impact area being recalled for duty should be routed to a reporting area other than their normally assigned station.