



In-Station Training

TM 23-37 Residential Fire-Reported Occupant



Author

Chief Ed Hartin

Purpose

Firefighters and officers should expect victims when responding to structure fires. However, a report of trapped occupants presents a higher level of stress and challenges the decision-making skill and tactical proficiency of the IC and all firefighters and officers involved. IC #1 faces several critical decisions including prioritization and sequencing of fire control along with search and rescue. Which comes first?

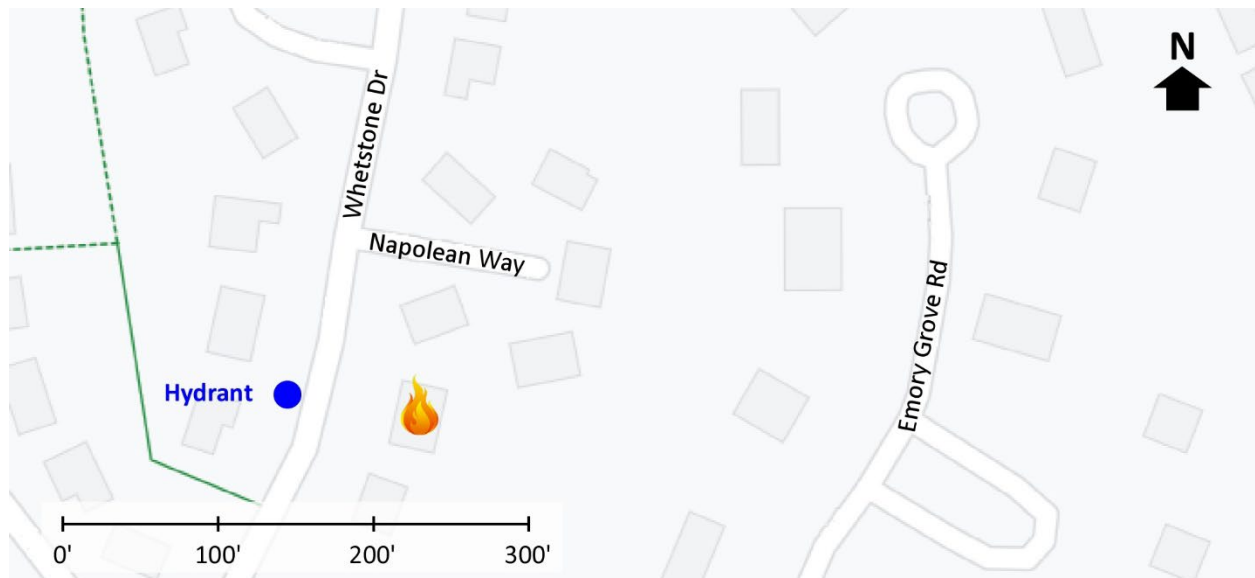
Learning Outcomes

Firefighters and officers perform an effective size-up, select an appropriate strategy, and implement tactics based on the strategic decision-making model.

Conducting the Drill

This incident involved a residential fire at 9628 Whetstone Drive in Gaithersburg, Maryland on April 9, 2023, at 00:57 (MCFR, 2023; 7News Staff, 2023; & Lyons, 2023). Review the map and photos (Figures 1-5) to gain an understanding of the area and building involved.

Figure 1. Map of the Incident Area



Note: Adapted from Google. (2023a). [Map, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD].

<https://bit.ly/3EmcR9i>.

Figure 2. Aerial View



Note: Adapted from Google. (2023b). [Aerial view, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD].
<https://bit.ly/3sAOJxh>.

There is a hydrant across the street from the main fire occupancy as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 3. Alpha/Delta Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2022a). [Street view, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD].
<https://bit.ly/3OVKILc>.

Figure 4. Side Alpha



Note: Adapted from Google. (2022b). [Street view, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD].
<https://bit.ly/44C5Dso>.

Figure 5. Alpha/Bravo Corner



Note: Note: Adapted from Google. (2022c). [Street view, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD].
<https://bit.ly/3sGtYzY>.

No pre-incident view of Side Charlie is available. There is a one-story 22' x 22' enclosed sunroom on Side Charlie behind the two-story section of the house (Side Bravo) and a similar sized open deck on Side Charlie behind the 1 ½ story section of the house (Side Delta).

The temperature is 37° F with no appreciable wind from the north (Weather Underground, 2023). You have been dispatched to 9608 Napoleon Way for a report of a residential fire. You do not respond into this area frequently but recognize that it is a neighborhood of single-family homes. You are the company officer or AIC of the first arriving engine and have your company's typical staffing.

1. What critical factors would you consider when dispatched and during response and what conversations would you have with your crew while responding?

While responding you hear a command officer, another engine with typical staffing for your agency go enroute. The second engine will arrive shortly after you, followed by the command officer. All other units dispatched on the first alarm will arrive after the command officer. Dispatch provides an update with a corrected address of 9628 Whetstone Drive and advises that the call taker is on the phone with an occupant trapped in a bedroom above the garage. You are responding from the south on Whetstone Drive.

Watch the [9628 Whetstone Drive Side Alpha Simulation](#) (Hartin, 2023a) and examine Figure 6 representing conditions reported by the first arriving companies. Conditions illustrated may vary somewhat from the actual conditions encountered in this incident.

Figure 6. Conditions on Arrival



Note: Hartin, E. (2023a) 9628 Whetstone Drive Side Alpha Simulation [Fire Studio 7 digital simulation]. <https://bit.ly/3Z1mSIS>.

2. State your initial radio report (IRR) exactly as you would transmit it to dispatch.

3. What specific actions would you take (as the company officer) immediately upon arrival and exiting the apparatus and what task orders you would give your crew?

You do not encounter any occupants as you exit the apparatus. Conditions on Sides Alpha and Delta are as you observe in Figure 6. A window on Side Bravo (Alpha/Bravo corner) is slightly open at the bottom with a small volume of smoke discharge. Further access along Side Bravo is obstructed by a detached shed. Watch the [9628 Whetstone Drive Side Charlie Simulation](#) (Hartin, 2023b) and examine Figure 7 which represents conditions on Side Charlie based on conditions reported by first arriving companies and a photograph taken later in the incident (Lyons, 2023).

Figure 7. Conditions on Side Charlie Shortly After Arrival



Note: Adapted from Hartin, E. (2023b) *9628 Whetstone Drive Side Charlie Simulation* [Fire Studio 7 digital simulation]. <https://bit.ly/45RSvk7>.

4. Would you change the action you are taking or modify the assignments given to your crew? If so, what task orders would you provide?
5. State your update report exactly as you would transmit it to dispatch.
6. Engine 2 arrives and reports that they are Level 1. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.
7. Based on the anticipated effectiveness of your tactical operations, state your conditions, actions, and needs (CAN) report that you would provide to the first arriving command officer as part of command transfer to IC #2?
8. The first arriving engine stretched an attack line to Side Charlie (initial action) for fire control. Was this consistent with your incident action plan? If so, why did you choose this attack position? If not, why did you choose a different initial action or attack position?
9. The second arriving company in this incident was a truck (aerial tower). They elected to perform vent, enter, and search (VES) from Side Alpha. Was this consistent with your assignment to the second arriving engine in this 10-Minute Training? If so, why did you select this tactic? If not, what factors influenced your choice of tactical assignment?

Additional Learning: Montgomery County Fire and Rescue (MCFR) discussed this incident in a combined session of *Boss Talk* and *From the Command Post* (MCFR, 2023). Before watching this video presentation, take a minute to review some terminology and operational procedures in Montgomery County.

The term “wagon” refers to engine company apparatus or an engine company. The phrase “red popping up” refers to urgent information on the mobile data computer screen. The “Alpha Quadrant” refers to the interior of the building on the Alpha/Bravo corner (quadrants are lettered Alpha to Delta in a clockwise direction and in large buildings, the Echo Quadrant is used to designate the middle of the building where the Alpha through Delta Quadrants intersect) (MCFR, 2017a).

Montgomery County Fire and Rescue (MCFR) uses a resource type (engine or truck) and order of arrival system for company tactical assignments (MCFR 2017b) which differs considerably from the critical factors driven tactical assignments made by the IC within Blue Card. The first due engine and truck did not coordinate their actions over the radio but each anticipated that the other would take specific action.

The “RID” referred to by the first in company officer is a rapid intervention dispatch with a standard assignment of one rescue squad, one aerial, one additional advanced life support (ALS) unit, and a second EMS transport unit if the ALS unit is not transport capable (MCFR, 2027c)

Important! *The MCFR personnel involved in this incident were faced with an extremely stressful situation and their actions in rescuing the trapped occupant demonstrated professional competence and a commitment to the citizens that they serve. The questions posed in this additional learning are not a criticism of decisions made and actions taken in the heat of battle but are intended to help the reader frame discussion with the advantage of hindsight, analysis, and reflection.*

Watch the [Boss Talk/FTCP](#) (MCFR, 2023) from 07:35 through the end and think about the following:

- The first arriving truck deployed ladders to both windows on Floor 2 Side Alpha and took both windows for VES operations (one person through each window). Conditions untenable, VES firefighters exited the windows on Side Alpha. The truck company officer stated that closing the bedroom door did not cross his mind and that he was unaware if his firefighter attempted to do so. How might taking two windows on Side Alpha and not closing the door (if it was possible to do so) have influenced the flow path, air track, and tenability of conditions in the bedroom after entry through the windows? How might conditions have been different if a single window had been taken for VES?
- The moderator asked IC #2, “did you know the plan”? Think about his answer and the conversation with the company officers of the first arriving engine and truck. What assumptions were made by IC #1 (engine officer), the truck company officer, and IC #2 (battalion chief) regarding the incident action plan? While in this case, these assumptions may have been

accurate enough, how might making assumptions about the incident action plan have resulted in an adverse outcome?

- A 2" attack line was stretched to the door on Side Alpha and placed into operation for fire control and once this line was in operation, one member from the truck went up the interior stairs to access the bedroom and the other returned to the ladder and entered through the window on Side Alpha to access the bedroom. What advantages might this have provided and what potential issues do you see with this course of action?
- Primary search located the victim in a bathroom off the bedroom and removed them out a second-floor window in the bathroom rather than taking them down the interior stairway. What factors made this removal path an excellent choice? What challenges were encountered in this process (see Figure 8)?

Figure 8. Victim Removal Pathway



- The firefighters and officers involved in this incident identified that they had not routinely practiced VES operations nor had they had significant practice in removal of trapped occupants through windows. Consider the challenges encountered during this incident (fire conditions, conditions in the house, and the configuration of the bathroom and window). How should these factors influence training on primary search and rescue of trapped occupants?

As you consider these questions, ask yourself how you and the members of your agency would have performed if confronted with the same situation. What can you do to improve your individual capabilities and those of the members of your crew! "Actio non verba" (action not words)!

References

- 7News Staff (2023). Multiple hospitalized in overnight Easter Sunday house fire in Gaithersburg. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3P1QVoT>.
- Google. (2022a). [Street view, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD]. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3OVKILc>.
- Google. (2022b). [Street view, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD]. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/44C5Dso>.
- Google. (2022c). [Street view, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD]. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3sGtYzY>.
- Google. (2023a). [Map, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD]. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3EmcR9i>.
- Google. (2023b). [Aerial view, 9628 Whetstone Drive, Gaithersburg, MD]. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3sAOJxh>.
- Hartin, E. (2023a) 9628 Whetstone Drive Side Alpha Simulation [Fire Studio 7 digital simulation]. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3Z1mSIS>.
- Hartin, E. (2023b) 9628 Whetstone Drive Side Charlie Simulation [Fire Studio 7 digital simulation]. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/45RSvk7>.
- Lyons, I. (2023). 4 injured, 1 critically, after Easter house fire in Montgomery Village. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3R3FEqG>.
- Montgomery County Fire and Rescue (2017a). Incident response policy appendix b incident command. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/44D2N6L>.
- Montgomery County Fire and Rescue (2017b). Incident response policy appendix d structure fires. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3EnegMV>.
- Montgomery County Fire and Rescue (2017c). Incident response policy appendix i rapid intervention and maydays. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3R5QUtv>.
- Montgomery County Fire Rescue (MCFR). (2023). Boss Talk/FTCP - Whetstone Dr - house fire w/ entrapment. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/45Pgy30>.
- Weather Underground (2023). Gaithersburg, MD weather history [historical weather April 9, 2023]. Retrieved September 2, 2023, from <https://bit.ly/3Ek3EOW>.