



In-Station Training

TM 26-16a Residential Fire



Author

Chief Ed Hartin

Purpose

An incident commander's (IC's) command presence is their personal demeanor that conveys leadership and authority, engendering trust and respect through verbal and non-verbal cues. This includes clear, concise, and calm communication.

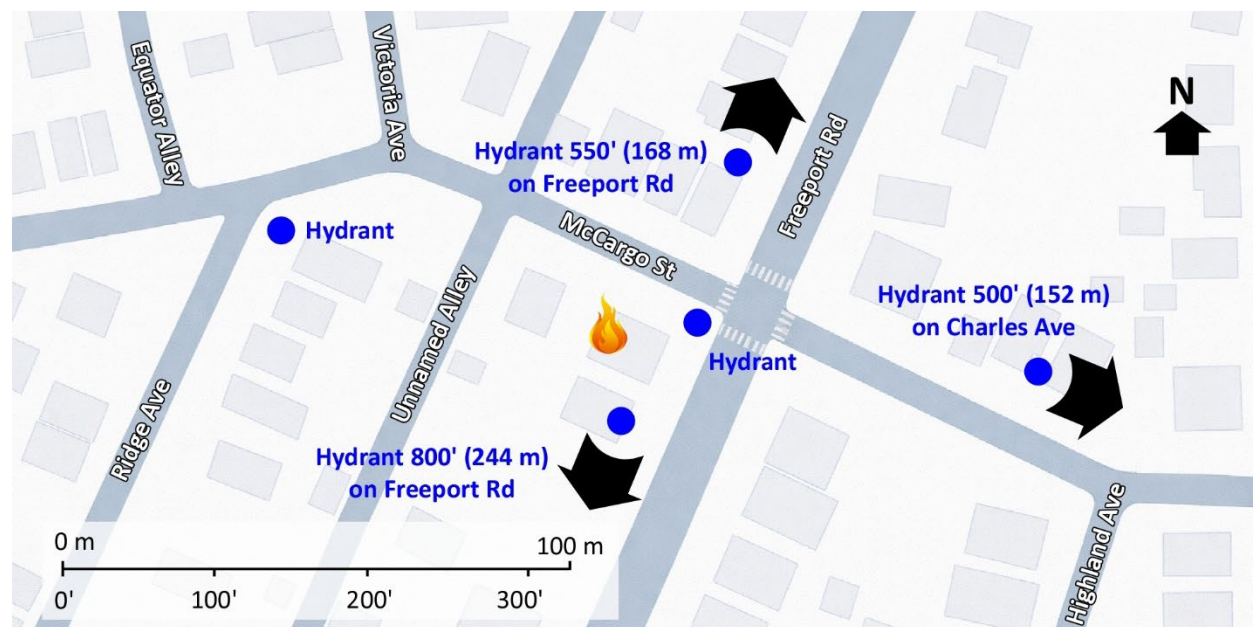
Learning Outcomes

Incident commanders demonstrate command presence, performing 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 495 McCargo Street/265 Freeport Road (duplex addressed of intersecting streets) in New Kensington, Pennsylvania on Sunday, March 29, 2026, at 07:58 (Matto, 2026a & 2026b; Napsha, 2026; Matoney & Scott, 2026; Broadcastify, 2026a & 2026b). Review the map and photos (Figures 1-6) to gain an understanding of the building and area involved.

Figure 1. Map of the Incident Area



Note: Adapted from Google. (2026a). [Map, 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. Map data ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/3OcNWxB>.

The closest hydrant is on the Alpha/Bravo corner of the Main Fire Occupancy and the Bravo 1 Exposure at the intersection of McCargo Street and Freeport Road as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. Other hydrants in the area are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 2. Aerial View



Note: Adapted from Google. (2026b). [Aerial view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. Imagery © Google, Imagery © Airbus Maxar Technologies, Map Data © 2026. <https://bit.ly/4chLXjB>.

Figure 3. Alpha/Delta Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025a). [Street view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/4md07qA>.

Figure 4. Side Alpha



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025b). [Street view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/3PVXGgk>.

Figure 5. Alpha/Bravo Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025c). [Street view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/4mjcT7c>.

Figure 6, Bravo/Charlie Corner



Note: Adapted from Google. (2025d). [Street view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. ©2026 Google. <https://bit.ly/4tActf8>.

The incident is in a small-city residential neighborhood with closely spaced housing and proximity to former industrial corridors. The surrounding area consists primarily of older detached single-family homes, duplexes, and small multifamily structures, many constructed between the early 1900s and 1950s, reflecting historic industrial-era development. The community has a mix of owner- and renter-occupied housing, with owner occupancy still common but with a notable rental presence. The population reflects generally stable, long-term residency with some turnover in rental units. The predominant language is English with a small percentage of households speaking other languages. (Open AI, 2026). Fire and emergency medical call volume in this area is typical of other areas of the community.

The temperature is currently 34° F (1° C) with wind from the south at 5 mph (8 kph). (Weather Underground, 2026). It is Sunday, March 29th and you are dispatched to a **residential fire with entrapment** at 495 McCargo Street along with three engines, a ladder company, and medic unit at 07:58. The engines and ladder have four-person staffing¹. **You are first arriving command officer.**



Time starts now! Answer the first 11 questions within the next 10 minutes. Save discussion until after you have answered these questions.

¹ If your first alarm deployment is different, use your own resource assignment and staffing.

While responding, dispatch provides an update that there are **multiple calls and that callers are reporting “there is a fire downstairs with multiple children trapped on the roof”**. You hear the engines, ladder, medic unit, go enroute.

1. What critical factors would you consider when dispatched and during response?

2. Based on the dispatch information and what you know about this occupancy and response area, what do you anticipate finding on arrival?

During your response, **dispatch reports that law enforcement advises that “the children are out”**. Medic 1 arrives and provides the following report.

We have been flagged down and have multiple patients across the street from the fire on McCargo Street.

You anticipate that you will arrive after the medic unit and the first three companies (two engines and a ladder). The third arriving engine will arrive after you.

Engine 1 arrives and provides the following initial radio report.

On-scene, small two story duplex, working fire on floors 1 and 2, stretching an attack line through Side Alpha for fire control, on a hydrant, offensive strategy, give me a second alarm and two additional Medic Units with Level 2 Staging at McCargo and Ridge, Engine 1 is McCargo Command.

McCargo Command provides the following follow-up report:

360 complete, look out basement not involved, two stories all sides, likely have extension into the attic of the Main Fire Occupancy and the Bravo 1 Exposure, quick hit with good effect, stretching through Alpha, Medic 1 is treating multiple patients continuing offensive, Engine 1 is accountability on Alpha.

Ladder 1 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on McCargo at Victoria, Command provides the following tactical assignment:

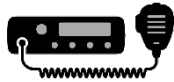
Position on Side Alpha and stretch an attack line off Engine 1, through Side Bravo of the Bravo 1 for fire control and primary search.

Engine 2 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant on McCargo at Victoria, McCargo Command provides the following tactical assignment:

Park out of the way and stretch an attack line off Engine 1 through Side Alpha and backup Engine 1

You approach the incident location from the east on McCargo Street and position on Side Alpha.

3. What actions will you take prior to contacting IC #1 (Engine 1) to begin command transfer? Consider if you would exit your command vehicle to perform reconnaissance before initiating a command transfer with IC #1.



Important! Answer questions 3 through 11 in the form of communication you would have with dispatch and the companies operating at this incident. State the communications exactly as you would say them over the radio. Save explanation or discussion until after you have completed these questions.

Watch the [incident video](#) (Matto, 2026) from 05:00 to 05:30 and examine Figure 7 illustrating conditions on arrival. Click the link above or scan the QR code to access the video.

Figure 7. Conditions on Arrival



Note: Adapted from Matto, S. (2026a). *Structure fire multiple entrapment (pre-arrival)* – New Kensington [video]. <https://bit.ly/47Ilp8E>

4. State your command transfer communication after IC #1 acknowledges your radio contact (exactly as you would transmit it).

Following your confirmation of the location and assignment of Engine 1, Ladder 1, and Engine 2 and request for a conditions, actions, and needs (CAN) report, IC #1 provides the following CAN:

Engine 2 has stretched to Floor 2 for fire control and primary search. All clear and fire knocked down on Floor 1, checking for extension. No needs.

5. State the communication you would have with IC #1 and dispatch to complete the command transfer exactly as you would transmit it.

6. What action would you take based on the CAN from Engine 1 (IC #1) and your observation of exterior conditions? State the communications you would have with the operating companies exactly as you would transmit them.

Engine 2 contacts you with the following communication.

McCargo Command Engine 2 with Priority Traffic.

We have a working fire in the attic and are applying water with limited effect, need an additional company with hooks to assist with fire control and a company in the Bravo 1 for fire control in the common attic.

7. Engine 3 arrives and reports that they are Level 1 on a hydrant on Freeport Road to the south. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

8. Engine 4 arrives and reports that they are Level 2 at McCargo and Ridge². State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

9. Chief 2 arrives and reports that she is Level 2 at McCargo and Ridge. State the tactical assignment you would give her exactly as you would transmit it.

10. Ladder 4 reports that they are Level 2 at McCargo and Ridge. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.

11. Engine 5 arrives and reports that they are Level 2 at McCargo and Ridge. State the tactical assignment you would give them exactly as you would transmit it.



Reflect on your strategic decision-making and responses to questions 1 through 11 before answering the next eight questions. Think about what cues, patterns, or anomalies (differences from conditions that you would anticipate) informed your answers.

12. What information most influenced your expectations?

13. Did anything in the incident post-arrival challenge your initial expectations?

14. What was the actual problem once you arrived?

² If you assign a company or command officer to manage Level 2 Staging, they will advise you of the resource in staging or respond to resource requests. Once you assign a Level 2 Staging Manager, companies will no longer report their arrival to you as the IC.

15. What were your tactical priorities and what was getting in the way of achieving them?

16. During initial operations, was there an immediate threat of serious injury or death to you, your crew, or other companies?

17. Was it reasonable to believe that the Main Fire Occupancy or Exposure Bravo 1 was occupied?

18. Was there searchable space?

19. If you believed it was reasonable that there was searchable space, what could you do about it?

Important! In some cases, videos and incident audio used in 10-Minute Trainings show less than ideal emergency operations. Remember that no firefighter or fire officer goes to an incident wanting to do a poor job. There are many factors that may influence incident operations and video or a still photograph seldom, if ever provide the entire story. Keep in mind that videos or photos of real incidents are used to provide a learning context.

The actions of the first arriving resources in this 10-Minute Training differed in from the actions taken during the actual incident in several respects. In this incident, the chief who served as the incident commander arrived first. Some of the firefighters and officers at this incident responded directly to the scene and others arrived on fire apparatus. The first arriving engine stopped short of the Main Fire Occupancy, on McCargo Street, deployed a portable master stream on Side Alpha and an attack line through Side Bravo into the Bravo 1 Exposure and then repositioned to Side Alpha of the Main Fire Occupancy. 100' of 5" hose was hand stretched to the hydrant on the corner of McCargo Street and Freeport Road. The first arriving truck was positioned on McCargo Street behind the engine and the second arriving engine positioned on Freeport Road and stretched an attack line through Side Bravo into the Bravo 1 Exposure.

20. If, as in the actual incident, you arrived prior to Medic 1 and Engine 1, what actions would you have taken prior to their arrival?

Watch the incident video from 00:30 to 10:00 to gain perspective on initial incident operations. If you watched this video as part of completing 10-Minute Training 26-16, rewatch it with a focus on command, control, communications, and accountability.



21. The incident commander (chief) deployed the portable master stream and engaged in a range of task level activity to assist the first arriving companies. How does engaging in task level action impact on the ability of the IC to manage incident operations?

22. The IC remained mobile throughout the incident. While this provided an opportunity to observe operations from different positions on the fireground, how does operating from a mobile, rather than a fixed command position impact the ICs ability to manage incident operations?

Additional Learning

Serving as the incident commander at a structure fire in a system where you do not know if dispatched resources will respond or not and where you will only know the staffing level of the resources responding after the fact can be stressful. This is particularly true when confronted with challenging and dynamic incident conditions. This is also impacted by the incident commander’s training and level of experience.

Command presence is essential to effective incident operations. Key elements in command confidence include:

- Maintain a calm and confident tone. Avoid an over excited, hurried, and high pitched voice.
- Clear and concise tactical orders that specify task, location, and objective.
- Prepare before speaking, know what you need to say. Use the push to talk button on the microphone, not the “push to think” button.
- Use the order model to ensure that messages are heard and understood.

Listen to the [incident audio](#) (Hartin, 2026) from the residential fire at 495 McCargo Street and track the assignment of incident resources using the tactical worksheet used by your command officers.



This recording has been edited to remove blank airtime (reducing the first hour of radio communication to approximately 27 minutes). This recording includes both dispatch and tactical frequencies, as such

some communications on the tactical frequency were walked on by the dispatcher (e.g., the chief's initial radio report of heavy smoke showing (which can be heard in the background)).

While long, there are excellent lessons that can be learned throughout the audio recording. If you are pressed for time, listen to the first 10 minutes of the incident audio. As you listen to the incident audio, consider lessons that can be learned from this incident in the following areas:

- Command presence.
- Incident communications (e.g., initial radio report, follow up report, tactical orders).
- Incident organization.
- Situational awareness and dealing with anomalous information.

Consider the following questions as you reflect on lessons learned:

- How might tone and demeanor on the radio impact the officers and firefighters on companies that are responding and operating at the incident?
- How does face to face communications in making tactical assignments (particularly early in the incident) impact shared situational awareness.
- How do tactical assignments that are communicated through dispatch or broadcast orders with no specific company assignment impact on operational effectiveness?

References

Broadcastify. (2026a). *Westmoreland County Fire 03/29/2026 07:40 AM <--> 08:10 AM EDT*. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4ebhoOU>.

Broadcastify. (2026b). *Westmoreland County Fire 03/29/2026 08:10 AM <--> 08:40 AM EDT*. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4cful7M>.

Google. (2025a). [Street view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. ©2026 Google. [h](#) Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4md07qA>.

Google. (2025b). [Street view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. ©2026 Google. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/3PVXGgk>.

Google. (2025c). [Street view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. ©2026 Google. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4mjcT7c>.

Google. (2025d). [Street view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. ©2026 Google. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4tActf8>.

Google. (2026a). [Map, 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. Map data ©2026 Google. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/3OcNWxB>.

- Google. (2026b). [Aerial view 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA]. Imagery © Google, Imagery © Airbus Maxar Technologies, Map Data © 2026. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4chLXjB>.
- Hartin, E. (2026). *Residential fire incident audio 495 McCargo Street, New Kensington, PA, March 29, 2006*. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/48lb1Pw>.
- Hartin, E. (2009a). *Estimating Required Fire Flow: The Iowa Formula*. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4dGTv1l>.
- Hartin, E. (2009a). *Estimating Required Fire Flow: The National Fire Academy Formula*. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4dCBDVH>.
- Matoney, N. & Scott, C. (2026). *5 jump from burning home in Westmoreland County*. Retrieved April 10, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4edXl2r>.
- Matto, S. (2026a). *Structure fire multiple entrapment (pre-arrival) – New Kensington* [video]. Retrieved April 10, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/47lIp8E>.
- Matto, S. (2026b). *McCargo Street, New Kensington* [Facebook reel]. Retrieved April 10, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/3OwylZO>.
- Napsha, J. (2026). *Fire at New Kensington duplex injures 6*. Retrieved April 10, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4sm736t>.
- OpenAI. (2026). *ChatGPT 5.2* [Large language model]. Retrieved April 10, 2026, from <https://chat.openai.com/chat>.
- Weather Underground (2025). *Butler, PA weather history* [historical weather March 29, 2026]. Retrieved April 10, 2026, from <https://bit.ly/4ckW7ju>.
-

Build command competence through weekly practice.

Receive a link to each new 10-Minute Training tactical decision game by email.

[Click here](#) or scan the QR code to subscribe.

