

**SAN FRANCISCO FIRE DEPARTMENT  
DIVISION OF TRAINING**

**TRAINING BULLETIN**



**TRAINING BULLETIN 20-2**

**CIVIL UNREST RESPONSE PROCEDURES**

This page left intentionally blank

**SAN FRANCISCO FIRE DEPARTMENT  
TRAINING BULLETIN #20-2**

**CIVIL UNREST RESPONSE PROCEDURES**

**INTRODUCTION**

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) defines civil disturbance as “An unlawful assembly that constitutes a breach of the peace or any assembly of persons where there is a danger of collective violence, destruction of property or other unlawful acts.”

Civil unrest incidents have been and will continue to be a part of our society. These incidents escalate quickly, immediately creating danger to SFFD members and civilians.

Civil unrest incidents can escalate for a variety of reasons and are not limited to urban areas. They can occur in numerous situations (but not limited to):

- peaceful demonstrations that turn confrontational
- sporting event celebrations
- violence related to concerts or other events
- political convention disruptions
- protests at abortion clinics and research laboratories

**PURPOSE**

This training bulletin is intended for use as a guideline or reference for events or incidents of civil unrest. This is not intended to be used as a checklist or flow chart.

These events, as well as others, are examples of incidents which can place our personnel in dangerous situations.

## **DEFINITIONS – TYPES OF CIVIL UNREST**

### *Demonstration/Protest*

A demonstration or protest is a legal public assembly of persons exhibiting sympathy with, or opposition to, a political, legal, economic, or social condition or movement. A demonstration/protest may become illegal and dangerous when it includes active resistance and civil disobedience as a deliberate violation of the law.

### *Civil Disturbance*

A civil disturbance is any breach of the peace by a significant number of people assembled in one area or gathering of an unruly mob. This may include any situation which, in the opinion of the onsite law enforcement commander, could develop into a riot.

### *Civil Unrest/Riot*

A riot is civil unrest/disorder wherein crowds display a propensity for violence by setting fires, vandalizing, looting, attacking civilians, firefighters, or law enforcement, or engaging in other violent acts. Frequently such actions will not stop without the intervention of law enforcement personnel.

## **COMMAND CONSIDERATIONS**

Once an incident or potential incident of civil unrest has been identified, Division Chiefs shall communicate and coordinate an appropriate response plan. CD2 shall be advised of the plan. This plan may include any or all of the following:

- A modified response (scaled up or down)
- Establishment of “task forces” or “strike teams”
- Use of specialized apparatus (mini pumpers, gators, etc.)
- Relocation of resources and personnel
- Changes in tactics

Working with Battalion Chiefs, Senior Rescue Captain, and SFPD, establish an incident perimeter for response, identify target hazards and areas of concern, evaluate the size and attitude of the crowds, and note entry and egress challenges.

It is critical that our response is coordinated with SFPD. A liaison should be assigned to the SFPD command post to facilitate force protection and keep SFPD Incident Commander (IC) updated on incident situation status, as well as any current intelligence related to the incident.

It may be necessary for SFFD to establish a separate command post from SFPD. This Command Post should be located in a secure area (warm zone). Continuously evaluate the need to reposition resources for safety, expand or contract the incident perimeter, and consider when to scale the incident up or down. Remain in close coordination and communication with SFPD and other appropriate entities.

Once an incident perimeter has been established, notify the Department of Emergency Communications (DEC) of the Response area, and all calls for service inside the perimeter will be dispatched through the SFFD command post. This is critical to maintain accountability of all resources operating in the “hot zone”.

Battalion Chiefs will be the direct line supervisors of any units operating in the defined incident area. It is the responsibility of the BC to share the details of the response plan with the crews, ensure force protection for our personnel, and continuously maintain situational awareness for the safety of the responding crews.

## **COMPANY LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS**

At all times, company officers shall keep in mind the safety and welfare of their crew. Prior to responding, companies shall secure the station, secure all tools in compartments or inside the cab and ensure all members have full PPE. During response, PPE should be donned, doors should be locked, and windows rolled up. Respond with SFPD force protection. Consider the potential negative effect of red lights, sirens and airhorns in the affected area.

Strike Team/Task Force Leaders and Company Officers should consider the overall environment of an incident and the potential of violence to firefighting and EMS personnel or damage to apparatus and equipment prior to committing resources in a hostile area. Items for consideration shall be, but are not limited to:

- Type of Incident
- Size of Crowd
- Crowd Activity
- Adverse reactions to the fire fighting force by the crowd
- Lack of adequate law enforcement presence at the scene

Operations during civil unrest are influenced by the necessity to ensure the safety of personnel and the public, and the security of apparatus and equipment. These considerations require tactics commensurate with risk.

- The “Buddy System” shall be utilized whereby no member or unit operates or works alone at an emergency. Pump operators shall not be left alone.
- Apparatus shall be parked at an emergency in such a manner as to facilitate rapid withdrawal from the area.
- Apparatus shall be positioned in such a manner as to afford maximum protection to personnel.
- Fire suppression actions may be fast attack and withdraw or defensive with the use of deck guns and limited hand lines.
- Operations involving the use of breathing apparatus should be kept to a minimum. Use of breathing apparatus shall be reserved for life safety situations.
- Use of ladders should be limited to life safety situations only.

Strike Team and Task Force resources are to stay together when responding. Exceptions are assignments to cover stations and assignments with Task Forces of another requesting agency.

## **TACTICS TO CONSIDER**

- Stay mobile, knock down the fire and move on (prioritize)
- Minimize hose leads when possible, consider deck guns when possible
- When possible, limit laddering of structures or putting personnel on the roof – life safety and rescue only
- No overhauling
- Prepare to abandon a scene quickly
- Do not engage or entice the crowd
- Do not allow civilians in or on apparatus
- NEVER use hose streams for crowd control
- Do not rush to engage a fire if it is not threatening to life or structures
- Turn off utilities to damaged buildings (if possible)
- Do not talk to the media or post anything on social media

## **SITUATIONS THAT MAY BE ENCOUNTERED**

- Barrels filled with water or cement and used to block roads or roll down hills toward responders
- “Super Soaker” squirt guns may be used to spray ammonia, gasoline, and other chemicals; Molotov cocktails
- Rocks, bricks, bottles and fireworks used as projectiles

- Use of “locking devices” consisting of steel and plastic PVC pipe may be used to lock arms. Buckets, bicycle locks, drums, and other methods may be used to anchor individuals to each other or fixed objects

### **IF UNDER A THREAT OF AN ATTACK**

- If responding, keep moving until you are out of the hostile area
- If committed, take cover or withdraw when possible
- If forced to abandon a vehicle, disable the vehicle and the communications equipment. Cut battery cable, cut microphone, etc.
- Request SFPD immediately

### **EMS RESPONSE**

EMS response assigned in the affected area must exercise exceptional situational awareness and consider risk versus benefit in providing care and extracting patients from the area. All EMS units dispatched must be accompanied by appropriate law enforcement support. EMS units shall confirm law enforcement support through dispatch.

Upon arrival at the scene, personnel should not slam doors of the vehicle and should keep handheld radio volume low. EMS personnel should assess all patients quickly and avoid excessive on-scene times. This directive is especially applicable where large groups or crowds are present or beginning to form.

In situations where on-scene safety becomes a concern, EMS personnel may practice the load-and-go philosophy. In the event of a mass casualty incident, EMS shall use the appropriate ICS procedures for triage, treatment, and transport if conditions allow and in coordination with the Incident Commander.

- When responding to incidents, report directly to the Incident Commander or designee.
- Never stage or operate alone.
- EMS personnel should wear helmets and clearly marked EMS jackets or road vests at all times on-scene and when responding to and from events.

## **RESCUE TASK FORCE (RTF)**

During a civil unrest event, there could be long delays in EMS deployment to injured civilians, law enforcement officers, or other responders. These delays could persist for significant periods if the expectation is that an area must be entirely secured prior to any EMS entry. Consideration of RTF deployment for Civil Unrest events can provide for a balance of risk vs. benefit, where limited additional PPE and direct, dedicated law enforcement protection of a small team of EMS providers can lead to immediate care of victims injured during the event.

Rescue task forces are deployed with law enforcement personnel to provide point of wound care to victims where there is an on-going but indirect ballistic or explosive threat. Indirect threat care is rendered once the casualty is no longer under fire (i.e. warm zone).

Further description of Rescue Task Force operations can be referenced in the *Fire Department Operations at Tactical Law Enforcement and Active Shooter Incidents* - July 2016 Policy.