

FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD STUDY NOTE

EXAMINATION

SUB-OFFICERS EXAMINATION

PAPER

OPERATIONS

SUBJECT

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES AND INCIDENT
COMMAND

ITEM

ANALYSE & EVALUATE AN INCIDENT

STUDY NOTE No.

2101

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY NOTE

This study note has been prepared as the basis of study in connection with the qualifying examinations for promotion.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of the information contained in the study note and understand how it should be applied:

The 'References' made at the end of the Study Note are included for information only and candidates will not be expected to study these as part of the bibliography.

ANALYSE & EVALUATE AN INCIDENT

1. Introduction

Under the terms of "The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992", employers shall make such arrangements as are appropriate for the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of preventive and protective measures.

As part of the process of review it is recommended that an effective system should be in place to analyse and evaluate performance at incidents, ie 'Incident De-briefing'. This study note introduces 'Incident De-briefing' and the issues that should be considered.

2. The Basis of Incident De-briefing

It is widely accepted that the firefighter's competence is greatly enhanced through the experience gained from their attendance at operational incidents. Unfortunately it is not possible to transfer experience from one more experienced to one less experienced firefighter. It is however possible to learn from the experiences of others.

Without a structured method of pooling and analysing the experience gained through attendance at incidents, it is likely that any learning from the experience will be at best localised and haphazard and at worst non-existent.

An effective procedure is required to ensure that a brigade's performance at operational incidents is constructively monitored, analysed and reviewed in the light of the structured de-briefing of significant operational activity.

The de-brief is a generic tool applicable to most functions and roles and is a key to assessing competence in the application of skills underpinned by knowledge and understanding. It forms an integral part of the assessment of firefighters within the training for competence framework.

Operational de-briefing procedures should ensure the following:

- (a) A facility exists to de-brief all operational incidents.
- (b) The level of de-brief is appropriate to the significance of the incident.
- (c) The de-brief is structured, systematic and comprehensive.
- (d) All relevant personnel are represented at the de-brief and receive feedback.
- (e) Significant findings are made available to all personnel.
- (f) The significant findings of the de-brief are analysed and acted upon in order to improve operational performance and minimise risks to personnel.
- (g) De-briefs are conducted in a constructive environment tolerant of a level of individual failure to ensure honest and open discussion and thereby identify and address more important underlying issues.

3. Culture and Ethos

To exploit the benefits of de-briefing to the absolute limit, an honest, open and frank exchange is essential.

The perception of traditional de-briefing tends to be one of:

- (a) Confrontation.
- (b) Blame allocation.
- (c) Criticism.

Such methodology will not fully exploit the enormous potential of an effective de-brief.

Strengths should be identified and, when recognised praise given.

The benefits of this include:

- (a) Creating a balance which will prevent an inaccurate negative picture of operational performance evolving as a result of "criticism only" analysis.
- (b) To highlight best practice and subsequently identify sound foundations upon which future operational policies, procedures and techniques can be developed.
- (c) Enhance morale and enthusiasm of those participating in the de-briefing process.
- (d) Encourage openness and honesty and develop trust in the system.

Officers chairing or participating in de-briefs should do everything in their power to develop a relaxed, non-accusation based, open and honest exchange. This should be stated clearly at the beginning of each de-brief so no one is left in any doubt.

4. De-brief Focus

All incidents should receive a de-brief, unless absolutely no benefit will arise from such an analysis.

Where a de-brief is conducted it should principally aim to identify:

- (a) Strengths - issues which can be maximised and built on.
- (b) Weaknesses - problems requiring remedial action.
- (c) Development needs - areas in which a potential for enhancing an existing system exists.

5. Types of De-brief

It is vital that the level of de-brief corresponds to the nature and not the size of the incident. A relatively small incident may involve valuable task, tactical and command lessons.

The four levels of de-brief are:

- (a) Self Analysis.
- (b) Task.
- (c) Tactical.
- (d) Command.

(a) Self Analysis

Following all operational incidents, individuals should be encouraged to take time to reflect upon their personal performance, evaluating their actions and determining their own strengths and development needs. If needs are identified action must be taken to address them.

(b) Task

The purpose of task de-briefing is to identify, analyse and evaluate individual and team performance at incidents with regards to task functions. Examples include:

- (i) Topography.
- (ii) B. A. Procedures.
- (ii) Communications.
- (iv) Ladder work.
- (v) Pump work.
- (vi) General teamwork etc.

All personnel attending task de-briefs must be fully aware that the aim is not to apportion blame. Both self analysis and task de-briefs are an effective tool for formative assessment and identifying specific individual learning or training needs.

(c) Tactical

A tactical de-brief is usually conducted informally, as soon after the conclusion of an incident as is practical.

On most occasions these types of de-brief need only take a few minutes. They should be carried out for every working incident however routine, even if only to review the actions taken and confirm that nothing of any significance or concern occurred that can be learnt from and/or should be reported to someone else.

Every attempt should be made to complete the de-brief during the same shift. Whenever this proves to be impossible, to be of any value, it must take place as early as practical during the following shift. Retained crews should initially de-brief on return to station, or should a more lengthy discussion prove necessary, this should be deferred until the next drill night.

The Incident or Crew Commander is to lead the de-brief giving a narrative of the incident, seeking opinion and promoting discussion. When appliances from more than one station attend the same incident, the Incident Commander should discuss any relevant points with each Crew Commander before leaving the incident so that these can be included in the de-brief discussion on return to respective stations.

The findings and conclusions arising from tactical de-briefing should be used by Incident and Crew Commanders to identify where improvements can be made and correctly focus local training.

Findings, events or recommendations arising from the de-brief of wider significance, should be reported through the relevant channels within the organisation.

(d) Command De-brief

A command de-brief is a formal structured de-brief arranged for all multiple pump incidents or of significant interest to justify a command de-brief.

It will normally be chaired by a senior officer within the Brigade.

A command de-brief is to be conducted as soon as possible after the incident but allowing sufficient intervening time for all the relevant information concerning the incident to be gathered.

All Crew Commanders attending an incident, that may be subject to a command de-brief, should conduct a tactical de-brief with their crew as normal. All relevant information about the involvement at the incident of themselves and their crew should be gathered for use at a forthcoming command de-brief.

Whilst gathering relevant information about the incident, an approach should be made to other agencies involved, to ascertain any relevant information or comments that may contribute to effective liaison and co-operation between agencies at incidents.

6. De-brief Methodology

Whether a command or tactical de-brief is to take place, the same broad areas must be considered. The de-brief should identify how performance in each area must be considered. The de-brief should identify how performance in each area contributed to, or detracted from, the safe conduct of operations and the outcome of the incident.

It is essential to the success of the de-brief that all participants are familiar with the whole incident. The de-brief organiser should carefully prepare information that will aid this process. Sources may include:

- (a) Reports from Fire Investigation Officers, Health & Safety representatives.
- (b) Accident Investigation Officers or other specialist officers who have attended.
- (c) Fire reports.
- (d) Photographs & video of the incident.
- (e) Turn-out instructions.
- (f) Details of messages sent and their time sequence.
- (g) Plans of the building or area showing the incident.

The organiser will have to determine the relevance and value of the information gained.

The following provide key areas that may be addressed at de-briefings.

Incident Time Information:

- 6 Times relating to call, messages and arrival to assistance etc.
- 6 Rescues and Injuries.

Command and Control:

- 6 Pre-planning effective and risk information utilised.
- 6 Action plan effective including the necessary levels of command.
- 6 Specialist advice available and specific task officers appointed.
- 6 Sufficient resources.
- 6 BA control.
- 6 Effective hand over between incident commanders.
- 6 Safety and Welfare of Personnel.

Operational Practices and Procedures

- 6 Response to call, appliance access and development.
- 6 Fire spread, risks protected and affected.
- 6 BA procedures.
- 6 Hazardous materials and decontamination procedures.
- 6 Safe working practices and health & safety of personnel.
- 6 Method of rescue, first-aid and casualty handling.
- 6 Environmental protection.
- 6 Fire investigation.

Equipment:

- 6 Use, failure and inadequacies.
- 6 Effective of rescue equipment.
- 6 Use of personal protective equipment and breathing apparatus.

Communications:

- 6 Use, failure and inadequacies of brigade equipment.
- 6 Other communication medium.
- 6 Communications between crews – incident commander control.

Service Liaison:

- 6 Emergency services.
- 6 Local authorities and government agencies.
- 6 Utilities and specialist organisations.
- 6 Transport providers.

Public Relations

- 6 Media
- 6 Local community
- 6 Impact on public and environment.

Upon completion any recommendations or findings should be submitted to Brigade senior officers for consideration and action.

Where problems are identified which have health and safety implications, or which identify unacceptable risk to Fire Service personnel or the public, these should be communicated immediately to all those concerned and appropriate safety measures initiated.

References

Fire Services Examinations Board