



**Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service**

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE NO 9

Incidents Resulting from Civil Disturbance

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VERSION CONTROL

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All	04/03/2008	Revision of entire 01/07/2001 Policy	GC Synnott	Revised Civil Disturbance Procedures	AC Kerr

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE NO 9

INCIDENTS RESULTING FROM CIVIL DISTURBANCE

INTRODUCTION

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) personnel can sometimes be called upon to attend incidents as a result of civil disturbance. In order to contribute to a safer operating environment for personnel, the following procedures have been developed. These procedures reflect those issues identified from previous experience and current information regarding the potential hazards which personnel may encounter at operational incidents.

While previous personal experience will assist personnel, it should not be relied upon solely, as account must be taken of changing patterns of civil disturbance and Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) response to such incidents.

1 – SECTION A

1.1 OPERATIONAL STRATEGY

- 1.1.1 Where necessary, strategic command arrangements will be established which will provide the mechanism by which NIFRS resources can be controlled and deployed and ensure there is effective liaison between NIFRS and other agencies and between the Command Room and Area Commands.
- 1.1.2 It is anticipated that circumstances may vary, dependent upon time and geographic location, therefore, the particular arrangements for a given period shall of necessity be subject to review and amendment and reflect local circumstances. Detailed pre-planning arrangements for public order events or sustained public disorder can be found in NIFRS Contingency Planning for Public Order Events.
- 1.1.3 The following aide-mémoire constitutes the information which personnel **"must know"** in relation to incidents involving civil disturbance. A more detailed explanation of the points listed in the aide-mémoire can be found in the next section of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).

1.2 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 1.2.1 This commences when personnel are mobilised and the following factors should be taken into consideration:
 - is it possible to reach the incident without risk of serious attack?
 - is there a life risk? If not, can the risk be justified?
 - if unable to proceed – return to station - do not remain static;
 - vehicles/barricades/bonfires, etc, should be allowed to burn out if no life risk is involved;
 - where a decision is reached to begin firefighting – ensure adequate control measures are in place to protect crews and maintain safe egress from the scene
- 1.2.2 Unless there is life risk, tactical mode should normally be DEFENSIVE.
- 1.2.3 Remember that due to spate conditions, normal resources may not be available.
- 1.2.4 Update the risk assessment regularly to reflect changing circumstances, ie, disturbance escalating or de-escalating.

1.3 ORGANISATION

- 1.3.1 Use effective command supervision – no "freelancing".
- 1.3.2 Use the Forward Control Point for a defined area.
- 1.3.3 Try to balance crews to ensure experience/sufficient riders, where possible.
- 1.3.4 Avoid officer attendance only/lone working during serious disorder.
- 1.3.5 Try to keep at least one appliance able to re-deploy quickly in the event of any life risk calls/redeployment.

1.4 LIAISON

- 1.4.1 Remember liaison with PSNI, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) and other agencies is being maintained via the Regional Control Centre (RCC) and senior commanders.
- 1.4.2 Liaise with PSNI on the ground – agree cordons/safe areas for crews to operate.
- 1.4.3 **Do not** assist PSNI to remove barricades or fill water cannon.
- 1.4.4 Maintain NIFRS neutrality.

1.5 COMMUNITY

- 1.5.1 Remember the importance of maintaining everyday contacts.
- 1.5.2 Where possible, engage with community/elected representatives on the ground; take account of their advice.
- 1.5.3 Avoid making negative/subjective comments to representatives/media – do not discuss contentious issues, only crew safety.

1.6 CREW SAFETY

- 1.6.1 Hold regular briefings on what can be expected – what is actually happening.
- 1.6.2 Identify and secure safe access and egress from the scene of operations and establish clear evacuation arrangements, ie, a pre-arranged Rendezvous Point.
- 1.6.3 Have first aid kits, extinguishers and water available in crew cab.

- 1.6.4 Report any threats to an individual or crew to RCC personnel.
- 1.6.5 Control measures include:
- regular briefings on expectations;
 - regular risk assessments;
 - realistic mobilising;
 - operational tactics which reflect the available resources;
 - remembering the effect of burning time on structural integrity;
 - incremental deployment of personnel;
 - appropriate appliance positioning;
 - an awareness of the likely hazards/risks to which crews are exposed;
 - a balance of experience/skills and crewing levels on appliances.
- 1.6.6 Crews may operate in unfamiliar areas – try to provide local NIFRS guide or "pair" crews.
- 1.6.7 Emergency Recall can be used to provide further assistance to local crews.

1.7 COMMUNICATIONS

- 1.7.1 Use air time wisely – short, brief messages – further details can be supplied later.
- 1.7.2 Book available as soon as possible.
- 1.7.3 Mobile telephones may be carried in case of communications difficulties.
- 1.7.4 Carry TETRA radios – **do not** leave hand portables in the cab.

1.8 MOBILISING

- 1.8.1 Remember there may be a reduced attendance during spate conditions – re-assess Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA) process.
- 1.8.2 Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs)/secondary fires may be re-prioritised and not attract immediate attention.
- 1.8.3 Pre-determined attendance to premises may be changed, ie, Aerial/Special appliance/Command vehicle/additional officers may not be mobilised as per SOPs.

1.9 POST-INCIDENT

- 1.9.1 Maintain accurate records of any injury/damage/specific actions.
- 1.9.2 Consider welfare of personnel/debrief following attack/ transfer home in case of disruption.
- 1.9.2 Advise those reporting for duty - areas to avoid, etc.

2 – SECTION B

2.1 INCIDENT PLAN

- 2.1.1 It is imperative that Appliance Commanders/Incident Commanders (ICs) conduct an appropriate risk assessment at all incidents involving civil disturbance. This process must begin when mobilised to the incident and not solely when in attendance. Such an assessment should include the following issues:
- is it possible to reach the incident without risk of serious attack;
 - is there a life risk? If not, can the risk be justified?
 - if unable to proceed - return to station - do not remain static;
 - vehicles/barricades/bonfires, etc, should be allowed to burn out if no life risk is involved;
 - where a decision is reached to begin firefighting, ensure adequate control measures are in place to protect crews and maintain safe egress from the scene.
- 2.1.2 It is essential that ICs establish operational priorities, such as saving saveable life, saving saveable premises, etc, and set clear and achievable objectives for personnel. Unless life is known, or reasonably suspected of being in danger, the tactical mode during sustained civil disturbance shall be DEFENSIVE, with only external firefighting being conducted until such times as the risk assessment indicates that it is safe to commit personnel in an offensive mode. This may be some considerable time after initial attendance and the effect of burning time on structural integrity must be taken into account.
- 2.1.3 It is also important to ensure that operational tactics reflect the available resources. Given the anticipated demands upon NIFRS, it may not be possible to resource incidents initially with the number and type of appliances which would normally be requested/mobilised as part of the Incident Command System. This will require ICs to adopt operational tactics which are realistic and achievable and which take account of the limited resources available.
- 2.1.4 It is of vital importance that any risk assessment is frequently updated and the incident plan amended if necessary. Experience has shown that, while it is often difficult or impossible for crews to operate initially, the scale and severity of civil disturbance can gradually decrease and operational tactics may be amended to take account of this.

2.2 ORGANISATION

- 2.2.1 It is essential at such incidents that unity of command is maintained with clear direction from the IC as to operational tactics and expectations. Crews must not be allowed to self-deploy at incidents or to "freelance" on the incident ground. Full use should be made of supervisory officers to effectively close supervision of crews and to provide vital operational information to the RCC.
- 2.2.2 Experience has shown that for incidents involving sustained civil disturbance in a defined geographical area, it is often beneficial to establish a Forward Control Point where appliances, many of which will have been mobilised to separate incidents in the same area, can rendezvous and be deployed by a supervisory officer. In multi-agency command terms, this officer is often referred to as the Bronze Commander. This will normally involve liaising with PSNI and/or local community representatives to ensure that personnel can operate safely in the area. In such situations, operational tactics will be dictated by the prevailing circumstances and whether PSNI are willing and/or able to provide a secure cordon within which personnel can operate.
- 2.2.3 It is essential that during shift changes on Wholetime stations and at time of call at Retained stations that Crew/Watch Commanders ensure that crew composition reflects the available experience and skills of personnel. Where possible, crews should be balanced to ensure such experience is available.
- 2.2.4 Where a Retained station responds with reduced crewing levels on the second appliance and additional personnel are available on the first appliance from that same station, supervisory officers are authorised, for the duration of sustained civil disturbance, to balance crews for health and safety reasons. An example would involve where the first pump has 6 riders and the second pump has 3 riders. In such circumstances the crews may be balanced to 5 riders on the first and 4 on the second until the appliance returns to station and additional personnel may subsequently become available. In addition, where a second appliance fails to respond due to the absence of a driver, it may also be necessary to balance crews to maintain appliance availability.
- 2.2.5 For health and safety reasons, NIFRS has terminated the practice of having an "*officer attendance only*" to civil disturbance calls for assessment purposes. However, officer attendance only may be used for secondary fires/AFAs in areas believed to be free from civil disturbance where appliances are not immediately available or in proximity to the incident in order to provide an initial NIFRS resource and to determine if appliances are required.

- 2.2.6 Supervisory officers have an important role to play in providing close supervision of crews and accurate information on prevailing circumstances, road closures and whether or not it is safe for appliances to operate in defined areas or circumstances. Experience has shown that there may be a delay in mobilising officers who are on pager or available by telephone contact and that officers are more easily mobilised and can monitor the situation in their areas more effectively by remaining on radio watch. Many officers are proactive in this respect and attend incidents to monitor the ongoing situation.
- 2.2.7 All Flexible Duty Officers should ensure that they have a TETRA radio fully charged. Officers should also ensure that their staff car is equipped with a fire extinguisher and first aid kit and that safety goggles are carried in the vehicle, which may prove beneficial when driving through flashpoint areas. Bottles of water may also be carried with first aid kits for use in the event of caustic substances being encountered.
- 2.2.8 A feature of NIFRS activity has been that when crews are widely stretched attending incidents involving commercial property there is a potential for a delayed attendance at fires involving residential property. To address this, it is important that at fires involving commercial property or secondary fires where there is no life risk, that an appliance is kept at readiness, with the crew in close proximity, in case it becomes necessary to make up quickly and re-direct to a residential fire. Crews should bear in mind that the RCC may not be aware that they are able to do this and it is the responsibility of the Appliance Commander/IC to prompt the RCC that they are in a position to respond quickly, should they be required. Supervisory officers can also assist in this process, given their local knowledge of crew locations.

Clearly, the operational priority must be to attend residential property with known or potential life risk, rather than remaining at incidents where commercial property or vehicles are beyond saving.

2.3 LIAISON WITH POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND (PSNI)

- 2.3.1 Liaison with PSNI during sustained civil disturbance may be effected from the:
- RCC;
 - Area-based Command Room;
 - Strategic Command Room at the RCC;
 - Forward Control Point.

Any liaison difficulties experienced by operational crews should be communicated immediately to the RCC. Personnel are reminded, however, of the need to avoid passing sensitive information via radio – particularly when appliance rear-mounted radio speakers may be switched on.

- 2.3.2 Liaison on the ground with local PSNI officers should provide valuable information on the prevailing circumstances and PSNI response and this will assist ICs with their risk assessment and operational tactics. Experience has shown that during periods of sustained civil disturbance in a defined area it is often necessary for PSNI to provide a secure cordon within which personnel can operate. Should PSNI, after consultation, be unable or unwilling to provide such a cordon, then serious consideration should be given to returning to station or remaining in a safe area until the area is quiet and it is safe for crews to operate.
- 2.3.3 **On no account, even at the request of PSNI, should crews assist in the removal of road debris, vehicles, etc, or be seen to assist PSNI with their own equipment. NIFRS is aware that PSNI will have access to standpipes and hose lines and every effort should be made to avoid giving the impression that personnel and PSNI are working in unison.**
- 2.3.4 The continued safety of operational personnel is dependent on NIFRS's long history of neutrality and service to the entire community and nothing should be done to detract from that neutrality.

2.4 LIAISON WITH THE COMMUNITY

- 2.4.1 NIFRS has taken a proactive approach to community consultation to re-affirm its neutrality and to highlight that, even during sustained civil disturbance, NIFRS will at all times endeavour to provide a high standard of service delivery to the entire community.
- 2.4.2 It is essential at operational incidents that crews attempt to explain NIFRS actions and negotiate safe passage into and out of troubled areas. Where it is apparent that NIFRS attendance is unwelcome or where information is received from the community that crews should leave for their own safety, such warnings should be observed and crews should leave the area immediately.

2.5 LIAISON WITH THE MEDIA

- 2.5.1 The relevant Area Commander shall be responsible for the development of a media strategy for any events within their Area Command, in consultation with the Corporate Communications Manager and the Duty Principal Officer, where necessary. In the event that there is sustained disorder across several Area Commands then the media strategy shall be co-ordinated by the Duty Principal Officer.
- 2.5.2 Where permission is granted to give an interview or make comment to the media, it is imperative that personnel re-affirm NIFRS neutrality and explain that NIFRS is attempting to provide a normal service in an abnormal situation without fear or favour. Every effort should be made to emphasise good work, such as rescues, etc, and to avoid making comment on contentious issues.

2.6 CREW SAFETY AND WELFARE

- 2.6.1 It is essential that prior to potential periods of civil disturbance and during such periods, personnel receive regular briefings on the situation, hazards to which they may be exposed and the control measures to mitigate against these.
- 2.6.2 Access and egress to and from the scene of operations must always be secured and pre-set evacuation arrangements made with an identified rendezvous point, should crews and/or crew members become isolated or the situation suddenly deteriorates.
- 2.6.3 Appliance first aid kits, with a supply of bottled water, should be immediately available in the crew cab and personnel advised of the potential injuries which may be experienced in civil disturbance situations.
- 2.6.4 Supervisory officers should be aware that the potential exists for individual personnel to be threatened, both on and off duty, as a result of attending operational incidents. All incidents involving abuse and/or threats to individual members of NIFRS must be reported to the RCC immediately and the Duty Area Officer should consider whether the individual should remain on duty. The wishes of the individual shall, of course, be the major consideration in such deliberations.
- 2.6.5 Control measures to ensure crew safety shall include:
- regular briefings on expectations;
 - regular risk assessments;
 - realistic mobilising;

- operational tactics which reflect the available resources;
- remembering the effect of burning time on structural integrity;
- incremental deployment of personnel;
- appropriate appliance positioning;
- an awareness of the likely hazards/risks to which crews are exposed;
- a balance of experience/skills and crewing levels on appliances.

2.6.6 Where supporting crews attend operational incidents outside their own station areas, it may be of benefit to deploy such crews at larger more protracted incidents and release appliances whose crews possess local knowledge. This is particularly important in areas such as Belfast and Londonderry where Retained crews providing operational support may not be familiar with the topography of the area which could impact on their safety. Experience has shown that, at Forward Control Points, there is benefit in "pairing" such crews with a local crew when attending incidents or deploying them to release a local crew from a protracted incident.

2.7 LOGISTICS

- 2.7.1 NIFRS has made arrangements to ensure that damaged fire kit and operational equipment can be replaced when the Stores Department is normally closed and the Transport Department has made the necessary arrangements to ensure that appliance defects and damage can be repaired as quickly as possible. Spare appliances are also positioned at pre-arranged locations in case appliances go off the run due to defects or damage.
- 2.7.2 Arrangements have also been made to ensure that radio defects can be addressed and the security of TETRA system is a priority.
- 2.7.3 Should the demands made upon NIFRS be of such intensity that existing resources cannot adequately deal with the volume of calls then arrangements have been made to initiate the emergency recall to duty system in order that additional appliances may be crewed to provide operational support.

2.8 COMMUNICATIONS

- 2.8.1 Personnel should be aware that air time on District Talk Groups will be extremely limited, therefore, messages should be brief, with only essential messages transmitted. Long and detailed informative messages should be dispensed with for the duration of sustained civil disturbance and "stop" message details brief.

It is also essential that appliances book available as soon as possible at operational incidents.

- 2.8.2 Mobile telephones carried by officers may also be a useful means of communications and details of the direct dial index numbers for the Command Room shall be issued to provide for additional information flow.
- 2.8.3 It is vital to ensure that all hand portable radios are carried by personnel and not left in crew cabs. The potential for radio detonation of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) must also be considered where the risk assessment indicates the presence of IEDs is a possibility.

2.9 MOBILISING

- 2.9.1 During periods of actual or anticipated sustained civil disturbance the Duty Headquarters' Officer shall review the personnel available within the RCC and the Headquarters' Command Room to ensure that sufficient resources are available to address increased operational activity. Arrangements will be made to ensure that feeding and refreshments for these personnel are provided; experience has shown that they are unlikely to have sufficient time to arrange their own catering.
- 2.9.2 Critical periods of intense operational activity place a significant burden upon NIFRS resources and the volume of calls has, on occasions, created problems in the RCC. In order to ensure that sufficient appliances are available to respond to major fires and incidents where life is known, or may reasonably suspected to be in danger, it may be necessary to reduce attendances to some incidents and this shall be authorised by either the senior officer in the Command Room or the Area Duty Officer in the affected Area.
- 2.9.3 Personnel should be aware that, in the event of intense operational activity, attendances to some incidents may be reduced to one pump initially, based on an assessment of the risk and the availability of appliances. It is essential, particularly in such circumstances, that Appliance Commanders/ICs apply the principles of DRA prior to deciding the operational tactics to be employed. In addition, it may be necessary to mobilise an "officer attendance only" to secondary fires such as rubbish, skips, etc, where appliances are not immediately available or in proximity to the incident.

It must be emphasised that these measures are designed to ensure that NIFRS maintains the capability to respond to serious incidents, particularly those involving life risk and are an interim coping mechanism until appliance availability facilitates normal mobilising.

2.10 POST-INCIDENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.10.1 Personnel are reminded that, even after intense periods of sustained civil disturbance, records will need to be maintained for fire reports, litigation, accident investigations and possible PSNI investigations.
- 2.10.2 Welfare issues relating to personnel should also be considered in the post-incident environment. Arrangements to transport personnel to and from work may have to be made and facilities should exist in each Area Command to support this.
- 2.10.3 Supervisory officers should be aware of the potential impact of certain incidents on personnel, such as where crews have been subject to direct attack. There may be benefit in debriefing crews in the aftermath of such incidents and officers should be familiar with existing procedures.
- 2.10.4 It will also be important to ensure that any lessons learned as a result of operational incidents or liaison are communicated to the RCC/Command Room in order that NIFRS policy can be reviewed and if necessary, amended in the light of experience.

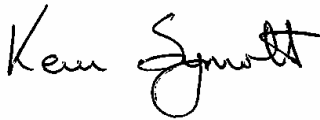
3 – SECTION C

3.1 RESEARCH DOCUMENTS

- 3.1.1 Association of Chief Police Officers: *Public Order Guidance - 2006.*
- 3.1.2 Brigade Command Course Research Report: *Conflict Management Model for Public Order - 2004.*
- 3.1.3 Briefing Notes: *Role of NIFRS during Community Conflict - 2005.*
- 3.1.4 Briefing Notes: *PSNI Public Order Procedures.*
- 3.1.5 Silver Command Training Note - Eastern Area Command - 2005.

CONCLUSION

NIFRS will attempt, in so far as is reasonably practicable, to continue to provide its normally high standard of service to the entire community during periods of sustained civil disturbance. However, it must be emphasised that the health, safety and welfare of its personnel remains NIFRS's first priority and every effort must be made by all personnel, particularly supervisory officers, to contribute to a safe working environment for crews by adopting and if necessary, adapting the operational guidance contained within this SOP.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kevin Synnott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'K' and 'S'.

Kevin Synnott
Group Commander (Operations Policy)

4 March 2008