

FIREHOUSE[®]

Weekly Drill

DRILL #77: INCIDENT CRITIQUES

Introduction

Critiquing an incident is one of the most effective learning tools the fire service can use to help teach firefighters. This reflective action of the incident is not always considered to be a formal incident critique, unless the Incident Commander (IC) is running it. However, each individual firefighter in some way or fashion should perform this task. In general, many company officers will have a quick discussion on the incident at the scene or back at the fire station over a cup of coffee.

Why critique? We all are prone to making mistakes, however, in our line of work, some mistakes can be very dangerous (if not fatal) to the lives of the civilians who we have taken an oath to protect or, for that matter, to our fellow firefighters. Back in the day, critiques were used as a means of punishment. Always calling out the negative operational flaws and not really having any focus on the positive ones, or what can be done to improve upon the operations.

Over the years, the fire department leadership quickly identified the importance of these incident critiques and is now identifying them as an analysis of the incident, also known as Post Incident Analysis.

Just what is the purpose of the incident critique? It's a guide to how the incident operations ran. What worked, what didn't work and where can improvements be made?

As an individual firefighter, ask yourself if your performance was done safely and efficiently or could you have done something different with a better outcome. Did you incorporate the proper techniques and communicate them. Was the placement of the apparatus a help or a hindrance?

At the company level, the officer should consider the actions of the company and what impact they had on the overall operations. Get feedback from your crew and find out what their thoughts were. Sometimes, this discussion will take place at the incident scene while things are still fresh on their minds and, if need be, a visual of the discussion can take place, but more often these company critiques take place at the coffee table back at the fire station.

The more in-depth critiques are generally overseen by the IC of a major event and will take place once all inci-



dent action reports are turned in and the information has been analyzed. The IC will give a brief synopsis of the incident and discuss both positive and negative aspects of the operation.

Then each company officer will have an opportunity to highlight their company's operation upon arrival as to what they observed, information they were able to gather and whether they had any personal knowledge of the situation that helped them in their decision making.

The fire investigation unit can shed some light on the incident, as long as this information will not jeopardize any legal aspects of the case. Cause and origin information can help the firefighters understand why the operations took the course they did.

The IC can finish up the critique with a quick summary. A formal report in writing, which can be distributed to all stations and divisions, should soon follow. Information on this report should include a diagram of the building, resources utilized and lessons learned or reinforced.

—Prepared by Russell Merrick