

# Development of Operational Command Skills

## Kent Fire and Rescue Service's formula for training success



Kent Fire and Rescue Service is one of only two Tier 1 fire and rescue services in the UK. In addition to preparing for the usual firefighting duties, the service also faces the unique challenge presented by fires in the Channel Tunnel.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service has made incident command training a key priority, and is recognised throughout the UK as one of the leading training providers. When firefighters start to move up the promotional ladder within the service, one of the first things they do as part of their Kent FRS incident command training is look hard at the distinction between correct procedures for incident management and the 'kneejerk', 'newspaper headline' approach to viewing fire and other emergency incidents - the approach that emphasises 'have-a-go-hero' activities and impulsive responses to life threatening situations. Instead, they are encouraged to think about the deeper issues associated with incident command, and to adopt a much more analytical approach to the assessment of risk, and the protection of life, at incidents.

When Nick Bennett, a highly experienced firefighter and incident command trainer at Kent FRS, begins his courses, he draws on his own personal experiences attending fires over many years, highlighting key issues and lessons learned - how a massive fireball could have killed firefighters and civilians at one incident, for example, if personnel had been incorrectly managed on the fireground.

Bulletin asked Nick to outline the principles and structure underlying the service's incident command training.

### What are some of the key topics that are addressed within the curriculum?

At all levels the Incident Command System is addressed appropriately. Other areas depend on the level being taught/ discussed.

#### Level 1

- The emphasis is on the system itself, the importance of health and safety, and how an Incident Commander can achieve putting the fire out, for example, but still maintaining safety. It is recognised that due to the initial workload the IC is most likely to use Recognition-Primed Decision Making (RPD)

#### Level 2

- The emphasis is to move away from RPD towards a more analytical approach.

#### Analytical skills

- Collect information through observation and consultation with current Incident Commander.
- Draw conclusions and agree further action with Incident Commander to progress the resolution of the incident.

#### Planning and problem-solving skills

- Produce plans to resolve incidents, taking account of all influencing factors and complexity of the situation.

TCT - Fire is used exclusively (at Level 1) to assess each candidate, and additionally to revisit the qualification for those who want practice or evidence.

Top Right: Watch Manager, Nick Bennett, Training Centre, Kent Fire and Rescue Service;

Top Left: Candidates discuss risk assessment.



- Generate solutions to meet actual and anticipating problems.
- Liaise with other services to identify all relevant issues and generate combined solutions, including deployment of joint resources.

#### Leadership skills

- Provide support and direction to incident and sector commanders and support officers.
- Develop and improve skills and competence of others.

#### Level 3

#### Analytical skills

- Collect information through observation and consultation with current incident commander.
- Draw conclusions and agree further action with incident commander to progress the resolution of the incident.

#### Planning and problem-solving skills

- Produce plans to resolve incidents, taking account of all influencing factors and complexity of the situation.
- Generate solutions to meet actual and anticipated problems.
- Liaise with other services to identify all relevant issues and generate combined solutions, including deployment of joint resources.

#### Leadership skills

- Provide support and direction to incident and sector commanders and support officers.
- Develop and improve skills and competence of others.

#### How is the training structured? What are the levels?

The below doesn't include support pumps or other vehicles

#### Level 1

Crew or Watch Manager in charge of a pump, usually the first attendance, and remains in charge up to 3 pumps. Generally Operations leaning towards Tactics.

#### Level 2

Generally Station Manager A/B, takes over from level 1 in charge of incidents from 4 pumps to 6 pumps. Should be exclusively Tactical but may have to lean towards Operations or Strategy

#### Level 3

Generally Group Manager, can be Station Manager B, takes over from level 2 IC who generally becomes Command Support Officer, 7 to 9 pumps. Should try for an equal mix of Tactical and Strategy.





**Level 4**

Generally Area Manager or Brigade Manager, can be qualified Group Manager. Should only be working at a Strategic level.

**What are key sites and threats that the Kent service must prepare for?**

We have a system in Kent known as the S2 process; coming as it does from Technical bulletin S2. This process causes all stations to examine their turnout area for specific risks, i.e. tall buildings, factories or industrial areas etc. They then have to visit the site/area and work out what the Hazards are and what risks they pose. They then formulate a plan that generically covers the site/ area. At present we have 261 identified sites, and there are still more to come.

**The 2008 Channel Tunnel fire presented a major challenge for the service. What specific training has the service done to prepare for such an eventuality?**

The tunnel is a particular risk in its own right. It has its own dedicated station known as E66 and the crews there have only the tunnel to deal with. All the training they do is directed towards fires etc in the tunnel.

There are currently 2 levels of response to incidents in the tunnel. The initial response provided by E66 and the second, larger response from those stations closest to the area. Those local stations carry out regular training in that regard.

**How many Kent FRS staff (and other service staff) receive command training at Kent each year?**

For the year April 2008 to end April 2009 we trained either initially (or as a refresher) around 220 students. That breaks down to:

|                   |    |
|-------------------|----|
| Level 1           | 90 |
| Level 1 refresher | 40 |
| Level 2           | 40 |
| Level 3           | 30 |
| Level 4           | 20 |

Roughly 20% of these were external students

**How long are particular courses?**

- Level 1 is 2 days long
- Level 2 is 3 days long
- Level 3 is 3 days long
- Level 4 is 3 days long.

**How is the VectorCommand Tactical Command Trainer - Fire system used by Kent FRS to support its incident command training?**

We use TCT - Fire on all of our ICS training courses. At level 1 it is used exclusively to assess each candidate, and additionally to revisit the qualification for those who want practice or evidence. At levels 2, 3 and 4 it is used to provide a timeline with all the injects, as well as using Team Trainer to provide visual prompts for the Incident Commander, the safety officer, the water officer etc.

It is also used on the Crew Commander's course as an exercise tool using a single master and all clients as sectors.

**How important is TCT-Fire to Kent's training programme? What benefits do you believe the system delivers to Kent FRS?**

Extremely important. All of the level 1 assessment is dependent on TCT - Fire. The other levels can be run without it, but they are less effective. The main benefit is that it is a validated assessment tool, giving reliable and effective evidence, and that because it has been developed in association with the UK fire service, fire fighters can relate to it and consequently spend only a short amount of time getting used to it before being able to interact with it.

Top: Channel Tunnel fire damage, 2008.  
Bottom: Kent FRS and French firefighters confer during Channel Tunnel fire, 2008.

