

REGIONAL STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

After Action Review

#: 102.06

REV: 06/2015

SCOPE:

This policy will relate to the After Action Review (AAR) process utilized for post-incident analysis.

PURPOSE:

To identify the responsibilities of all members in ensuring a comprehensive AAR process is maintained and utilized within our system.

SAFETY:

AAR has a direct impact on firefighter safety.

PROCEDURE:

After Action Review (AAR) is a tool for assessing what happened during an activity and whether any lessons from it would help in the future.

As the number of fires we respond to continues to decline, even as our demand for service increases, and while that is certainly a positive trend, fewer fires lead to less actual firefighting experience for our personnel.

Conducting routine after-action reviews is one way to bridge the experience gap.

The goal of AAR is to compile and catalog problems encountered and successful actions taken and then draw from the lessons learned to improve plans and procedures, evaluate the effectiveness of training, and ensure firefighters are correctly applying the skills they have learned.

The following are examples of the inherent value of AAR and what it can accomplish:

- Provide our personnel with a clear indication of the impact our actions had on the general outcome of an incident.
- Analyze and compare how different applied strategies and tactics affect the outcome of incidents.
- Identify trends and patterns in errors during emergency operations so that immediate action can be taken to prevent them from reoccurring.
- Identify positive outcomes that reflect proper attention to procedures, good decision-making, and leadership skills.
- Serve as a catalyst for revising flawed tactical plans and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).
- Help identify the need for additional or remedial training for personnel.
- Serve as technical reference material to be cataloged for retrieval and examination during any similar future incidents.
- Disseminate critical lessons learned during an incident to personnel throughout the fire department(s).
- Identify fire prevention and code enforcement deficiencies.
- Identify environmental and operational challenges that contribute to civilian and firefighter injuries and fatalities

Informal AAR -

Informal AAR shall occur at the company level **after every incident**. The goal of informal AAR is to drive the overall improvement of fire department operations, identify training needs, and help build resiliency in our personnel. Informal AAR is simple, quick, and immediately responsive to the situation and the people involved. Whenever possible, informal AAR should be conducted shortly after the completion of the incident. It is the Company Officer's responsibility to ensure informal AAR is conducted and journal any lessons learned. Informal AAR will be conducted by seeking to answer the following five key questions:

1. What was our mission/intention?
2. What went well?
3. What could have gone better?
4. What might we have done differently?
5. Who needs to know?

During informal AAR, the Company Officer serves as the moderator to ensure the discussion stays on track. Each crew member should be given the opportunity to explain his/her assigned tasks, any problems encountered, and actions taken during the incident.

The officer should take the time to recognize exceptional performances by personnel.

Any adverse performance-related discussion with employees should be conducted in private, **but they should take place**, especially since mistakes can place other firefighters at greater risk. The rest of the crew needs to know that all problems will be addressed, even if some are handled behind closed doors.

If operations failed to go as planned, the problems need to be identified and corrected.

It is important that officers include themselves in this exercise by explaining their responsibilities and actions during the incident, and admitting to any tactical mistakes they may have made. Once firefighters know the officer is willing to acknowledge a less-than-perfect performance, they will more readily admit their own or identify mistakes by others.

If a unique situation is encountered that might affect emergency operations in either a positive or a negative way, the Company Officer should forward the information gleaned to the next level in the chain of command for further consideration.

Additionally, informal AAR should be conducted at the company level prior to any formal critique. This will add value to the formal critique and the AAR process as a whole.

Formal AAR (Critique) -

The formal critique is a detailed review and analysis of any complex or tactically-challenging incident. The formal critique is used to reconstruct an incident to determine if we had an appropriate tactical plan and procedures and if they were followed, as well as how effective they were in mitigating the incident. Every aspect of the incident is carefully reviewed and analyzed to determine what went well, what could be improved, and why. The results of such analysis can suggest changes to our plans and procedures that may be necessary. A formal critique shall be held for the following incident types:

- All working structure fires.
- Any fire (regardless of severity or complexity) in a high-risk building; or in a building where fire protection features influenced event outcomes.
- All hazardous material incidents that exceed the level of "Still Hazmat".
- All technical rescues.
- Any multiple patient or mass-casualty incidents.

- Any other incident type as deemed appropriate by the shift commander (BC or AC).

The shift commander (BC or AC) is responsible for scheduling the formal critique.

The formal critique should be limited to relevant personnel (those directly involved in the incident), and scheduled as soon as possible and practical after the incident (if possible, within a few days of the original incident; any longer a delay and personnel may forget important details concerning the incident). Relevant personnel shall be notified of the date, time, and place where the critique is to be conducted.

Invitations to the critique should be extended to any other public safety agencies involved in the incident. In some cases, it may not be possible for agencies to send everyone involved in the incident to the critique. In this case, at least the agencies' personnel who served in key positions during operations should attend.

If possible, the critique meeting should be held at a central location in an effort to reduce travel distances, and to permit as many people as possible to attend. The facility should be large enough to accommodate everyone comfortably, and have the necessary audiovisual equipment and other necessities on hand.

The meeting should last long enough to accomplish its intended goal, but not beyond a reasonable point. Two to three hours of focused discussion and review, with a short break in the middle, should generate a lot of good information.

Once a determination has been made to critique an incident, a critique officer shall be identified. This will typically be the shift commander (BC or AC) or his/her designee. The critique officer plays a critical role in the critique process and his/her selection should not be taken lightly. The critique officer is responsible for the overall preparation and coordination of the critique, and ensuring that the information and equipment necessary to conduct the critique is assembled in a timely manner. Emotions can run high during a critique, and things can get out of hand if control is not maintained. The critique officer should maintain firm control over the exercise by establishing and conveying the ground rules, and by encouraging personnel to participate openly in the process.

Following the critique, the critique officer shall complete an informational summary report for general distribution to all department personnel. All findings listed in the summary report shall be reviewed by department leadership to evaluate the need for operational changes.

In certain instances and in addition to the dissemination of the informational summary report, it may be determined that the findings of the critique should be distributed/shared by additional means. Such means may include video interview of relevant personnel or presentations/briefings conducted by the critique officer.