

Strategic Priority Action Plan Template (APT)

BC Mark Emery

The strategic priority *Action Plan Template* (or APT) is an easy to learn tool that will quickly produce an appropriate incident action plan. A strategic priority *Action Plan Template* can be developed for virtually any type of incident.

Apt

adj.

1. Exactly suitable; appropriate.
2. Quick to learn or understand.

*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition
Copyright © 2000*

Strategic Priority *Incident Action Plan Templates* provide just about everything you need on one-side of single 8½” x 11” page. Having everything at your fingertips frees you to be a head-up strategist— thinking, listening, and observing—rather than head-down pencil pusher, sketching and scribbling.

Because the Strategic Priority *Incident Action Plan Template* is easy to understand and quick to implement, it will streamline how you plan at an incident. (If you currently *don't* plan at an incident, now there's no excuse.)

A man who does not think and plan long ahead will find trouble right at his door.

Confucius

At *any* incident you have three strategic priorities:

1. Life Safety
2. Incident Stabilization
3. Property Conservation

Each strategic priority is addressed by the **Action Plan Template** (APT). Used as a guide, nothing can be overlooked or delayed.

QUICK REVIEW

In case you missed the June 2003 issue, FireRescue readers were introduced to Strategic Priority *Sizeup*. As a quick refresher, Strategic Priority *Sizeup* is a three-step mental progression: *Identify*, *Classify*, and *Prioritize*.

At the majority of incidents you will encounter, these three-steps provide a consistent secondary sizeup that will work at *any* incident:

1. *Identify* incident problems,
2. *Classify* each problem strategically,
3. *Prioritize* classified problems tactically.

Identify ⇒ Classify ⇒ Prioritize

In the June issue I used the example of a car versus pole traffic accident. Strategic Priority *Sizeup* produced the following mental progression of the situation:

STEP ONE: *Identify* Incident Problems

- Two unconscious teens in the front seats
- Fuel leaking
- Power line down and draped over the hood of the car
- Vehicle and pole stability?
- Traffic control
- Responder safety
- Bystander safety
- Personal belongings strewn around vehicle and within vehicle

STEP TWO: *Classify Each Problem Strategically*

Life Safety: Two unconscious (“red”) teens in the front seats; responder safety

Stabilization: Fuel leak; power line; traffic; bystanders; vehicle

Property: Personal belongings

STEP THREE: *Prioritize Classified Problems Tactically*

1. Stabilization: of traffic, scene, vehicle
2. Life Safety: Patient extrication, treatment, transport
3. Property: Secure personal belongings (usually done by law enforcement)

To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires some of the same courage that a soldier needs.
 Ralph Waldo Emerson

Step Three—*Prioritize Classified Problems Tactically*—refers to the order that strategic problems will be addressed tactically. In other words, at the car versus pole incident described earlier, *stabilization* activities (power line, fuel leak, bystanders) will be performed before *life safety* activities (patient care). Thus, after performing Strategic Priority Sizeup, an incident action plan will emerge—specifically an incident action plan based on strategic priorities, the *Strategic*

Priority Action Plan.

As described above, the key to Strategic Priority Action Planning is to *identify* incident problems, *classify* each problem strategically, and then *prioritize* classified problems tactically.

In other words, as problems are identified, each problem is classified as a *life safety* problem, a *stabilization* problem, or a *property* problem. After performing Strategic Priority *Sizeup* you have established a logical connection to the Strategic Priority *Incident Action Plan Template*.

FIREGROUND APPLICATION

Consider a *routine* house fire. ‘Routine’ infers that there is neither a civilian life safety problem nor an exposure problem. (A civilian life safety problem would require the tactical objective *Rescue* or *Search and Rescue*.)

During a routine house fire....

You will address the strategic priority *life safety* with the tactical objective:

- *Primary Search.*

In other words, if the arrival situation is ‘unknown if occupied,’ life safety will typically be addressed with the completion of *Primary Search*.

Words are important!

Rescue, Search and Rescue, and Primary Search are NOT synonymous. Look for more information in the January 2005 issue of *Firehouse*.

During a routine house fire....

You will **stabilize** the incident by completing the *tactical objectives*:

- Confine,
- Ventilate, and
- Extinguish.

During a routine house fire...

You will address *conserve property* by completing the tactical objective:

- Salvage.

When *life safety* will be addressed with the tactical objective Primary Search, it could be said that the *overall strategy* is ‘incident stabilization.’ A *stabilization priority* action plan implies that fire fighters are the *only* fireground life safety problem.

TWO-PHASE ACTION PLAN

Fundamental to the concept of Strategic Priority incident action planning is the separation of an incident into two distinct ‘phases,’ the *Primary Phase* and the *Secondary Phase*. An incident divided into two phases streamlines action planning. During the ‘Primary Phase’ of the fireground Action Plan Template (APT), there are just *nine* ‘tactical objectives’ that will *directly* address each of your *three* strategic priorities.

Along with nine tactical objectives there are important ‘support objectives’ to consider. These nine *tactical* objectives and accompanying *support* objectives can be classified as follows: (Thus the link to your Strategic Priority Sizeup!)

What do you want to achieve or avoid? The answers to this question are *objectives*. How will you go about achieving your desire results? The answer to this you can call *strategy*.

William E. Rothschild

THE PRIMARY PHASE

Strategic Priorities & Commensurate Objectives

LIFE SAFETY Objectives	STABILIZATION Objectives	PROPERTY Objectives	SUPPORT Objectives
Rescue	Evacuate	Primary Salvage	Water Supply
Search & Rescue	Exposure(s)		Access/Entry
Primary Search	Confine		FDC Support
	Ventilate		Standby Team
	Extinguish		Backup Team
			Rapid Intervention
			Utilities
			Egress/Ladders
			Fire Extension
			Traffic Control
			Lighting
			Rehabilitation
			[add your own]

KEY CONCEPT
 Once a problem has been classified strategically there are specific tactical objectives that will directly address each problem.
 On the fireground these strategic priorities and commensurate tactical objectives don't change.

In case you missed it, this is important: On the fireground, during the *Primary Phase*, there are just nine *tactical objectives* that will directly address your three *strategic priorities*:

- Life Safety:** 1) Rescue, 2) Search and Rescue, 3) Primary Search
- Stabilization:** 4) Evacuation, 5) Exposures, 6) Confine, 7) Ventilate, 8) Extinguish
- Property:** 9) Primary Salvage

In addition, appropriate (and important!) *Support Objectives* must be completed so that *Tactical Objectives* can be performed safely and effectively.

Used as a guide, the **APT** requires that you determine how many search Teams will be required, how the building will be ventilated, which exposure is the priority, how many hose streams will be necessary to confine and extinguish the fire, etc.

(Hang in there...the *Secondary Phase* will be discussed in a moment.)

There are three tactical objectives that will *directly* address a fireground life safety problem:

- 1) Rescue
- 2) Search and Rescue
- 3) Primary Search

If there is nobody to Rescue, and there is no compelling evidence indicating the need for Search and Rescue, your life safety plan is simple: *Primary Search*.

There are *five* tactical objectives that will *directly* address problems that you have classified as *incident stabilization* problems:

- 1) Evacuation,
- 2) Exposure protection,
- 3) Confine,
- 4) Ventilate, and/or
- 5) Extinguish.

If there is nobody to evacuate and no exposure to protect your stabilization plan is a piece of cake: Confine, Ventilate, and Extinguish.

During the Primary Phase there is just *one* tactical objective that will *directly* address *property conservation*:

- 1) Primary Salvage

‘Primary Salvage’ means that salvage will be performed *before* the incident is stabilized. For example, if the fire is on Floor-2, a Team would enter Floor-1, quickly deploy salvage covers, and then promptly withdraw. Primary Salvage is performed expeditiously; in other words in-and-out, no fooling around. Nothing is moved or sorted. During Primary Salvage it’s okay if a lamp is knocked over.

Using the Strategic Priority Action Plan ‘system,’ fireground planning couldn’t be easier; once tactical and support objectives have been selected all that remains is to assign the objectives to Teams and manage the plan. [Reality Check: Developing an action plan is much easier than doing the actual work that will accomplish the plan.]

SCENARIO DEMONSTRATION

Situation

Tuesday, 14:15 in the afternoon; Two-story house with basement on Main Street; fire venting from Side-A, Floor-2; lazy light smoke from attic gable vent and soffits; no exposure; called in by neighbor across the street; neighbor doesn’t know if home is occupied.

Strategic Priority Sizeup

Strategic Clarification
Why is ‘Evacuation’ listed as a *Stabilization* objective and not a *Life Safety* objective?
If civilians are not evacuated they could become a *life safety* problem which would *de-stabilize* your incident.

Life Safety Problems: Unknown if occupied (read: no compelling evidence that house is occupied).

Stabilization Problems: Fire and smoke venting from Floor-2, Side-A; evidence of developing attic extension.

Property Problems: Home owner's stuff (lava lamp, 8-track tape collection, nice sofa, high school yearbooks, 4th grade arithmetic papers, big screen TV, etc.)

Main Street Command has communicated that the fireground *operational mode* will be "Offensive from Side-A on Floor-2." The Primary Phase *strategy* for this incident is

simple:

Life Safety: Ensure building is unoccupied

Stabilization: Confine and extinguish the fire.

Property: Protect occupant's stuff

Corresponding to an Offensive from Side-A *mode* and the Primary Phase *strategy*, the Primary Phase *Action Plan* would be something like this:

Life Safety: Primary Search (Floor-2, then Floor-1)

Stabilization: Stabilize attic; Confine (to Floor-2), Ventilate (PPV if attic stable), Extinguish

Property: Primary Salvage (Floor-1)

Primary Salvage
Initiated during the *Primary Phase*—before the incident has been stabilized. Because the incident has not been stabilized, Primary Salvage is expeditious (in-and-out, no messing around).

Secondary Salvage
Initiated during the *Secondary Phase*, after the incident has been stabilized. Secondary Salvage is systematic and thorough.

Don't forget those Support Objectives! Commensurate with the needs of the incident, objectives that will *support the operation* must be addressed.

Support: Water supply, Standby Team [2-out], access (including forcible entry), utility control, rapid intervention, Backup Team, lighting, rehabilitation, etc.

Team Leaders and/or Division/Group Supervisors report objectives as 'complete' or 'in progress.' For example:

"Division-A Primary Search complete, nothing found." (Main Street Command would announce: "Main Street Command Primary Search all clear.")

"Primary Salvage complete."

"Fire Confined, Extinguishment in progress."

Fireground Risk Management
When the strategic priority life safety will be addressed by the tactical objective Primary Search there must be a 'two-out' Standby Team deployed before Teams enter the hazard area.

Stra

Once all Primary Phase *life safety, stabilization, and property* objectives have been reported as ‘complete’ the Incident Commander will make the following announcement:

“Dispatch and all personnel, Main Street Command *Primary Phase complete.*”

The announcement “Primary Phase complete” by the Incident Commander means that *all* Primary Phase tactical and support objectives have been completed.

THE SECONDARY PHASE

Strategic Priorities & Commensurate Objectives

LIFE SAFETY Objectives	STABILIZATION Objectives	PROPERTY Objectives	SUPPORT Objectives
Secondary Search	Overhaul	Secondary Salvage	Rehab Safety Survey Investigation Customer Support Lighting [add your own]

As each Secondary Phase objective is reported as ‘complete’ the Team Leaders and/or Division/Group Supervisors broadcast the completion of each strategic priority objective:

“Floor-2 Secondary Search complete, nothing found.”

“Division-A Overhaul complete.”

“Secondary Salvage complete.”

Once Secondary Phase *tactical objectives* have been communicated as “complete” the Incident Commander will announce:

“Dispatch and all personnel at Main Street Command...*Secondary Phase Complete.*”

‘Secondary Phase complete’ informs anybody listening that the *Secondary Phase* is now complete; after the Secondary Phase is complete all that’s left to do is to finish (or initiate) the fire cause

determination investigation, perhaps deploy a fire watch, demobilize resources, and terminate Main Street Command.

THE ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

A plan is a list of actions arranged in whatever sequence is thought likely to achieve an objective.
John Argenti




The facing page contains my one-page *Incident Action Plan Template* (APT) for a building fire. This template will work for the majority of building fires you respond to.

I prefer to use a laminated **APT** that has Velcro affixed to the back. I simply pull the appropriate **APT** and attach it to my portable Command status board. I use a blue (for contrast) *permanent* marker (if it's raining grease pencil).

Shown below is an example of a Primary Phase action plan that is *in progress*:

LIFE SAFETY Objectives	STABILIZATION Objectives	PROPERTY Objectives	SUPPORT Objectives
Rescue	Evacuate	Primary Salvage	Water Supply
Search & Rescue	Exposure(s)		Access/Entry
Primary Search	Confine		FDC Support
	Ventilate		Standby
	Extinguish		Backup
			Utilities
			Rapid Intervention
			Standpipe Support
			Egress/Ladders
			Traffic Control
			Lighting
			[add your own]

LEGEND

-  = Needs to be initiated/assigned
-  = In progress
-  = Completed

Circled objectives need to be initiated or assigned. A single diagonal line is placed through a objective when it has been initiated. When an objective has been completed the diagonal line is crossed making an X. At least once every ten minutes you should glance at the Incident **APT** to quickly determine how your plan is progressing. If you don't know how things are progressing ask for status reports. (A good Primary Phase rule of thumb is to request Status Reports every 10-minutes.)

FINAL THOUGHTS

If you are the first officer to arrive at an incident you must quickly develop an *initial* incident action plan. Your initial action plan must dovetail with the plan developed by whomever establishes a formal Command presence. When

Planning without action is futile.
Action without planning is fatal.
Author Unknown

everybody is on the same page—literally a single 8½” x 11” page—passing the strategic baton to another officer will be simple, consistent, and logical. I believe the Incident **APT** is the most straightforward, consistent, and logical action plan ‘system’ available. Because the **APT** is based on strategic priorities, it is unlikely that important objectives and strategic considerations will be delayed or overlooked.

Used in tandem with Strategic Priority Size Up, you now have the ability to quickly develop an appropriate *Primary Phase* action plan.

Although no action plan will do the actual work, by using the **APT** you will know what work needs to be done. Once you know what needs to be done...do it! (The *action* part of your incident action plan.)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

A fourth-generation career fire fighter, Mark Emery is currently assigned as an Operations Battalion Chief in Woodinville (King County), Washington. BC Emery is a partner with *Fire Command Incorporated* (FCI) in Seattle; FCI has been providing incident management solutions to fire and life safety organizations since 1986. BC Emery is co-developer of the *Integrated Tactical Accountability System* (ITAC) and author of *The Ten Commandments of Intelligent and Safe Fireground Operations*. BC Emery is a graduate of the National Fire Academy *Executive Fire Officer Program*, is a National Fire Academy *Instructor Specialist*, and earned a *Baccalaureate Degree* in Education from California State University at Long Beach. BC Emery is also noted for founding and developing the six-week *Officer Development Academy* and the popular *Advanced Pump Operator Academy* in King County, WA. Feel free to email BC Emery at fci@usa.com.