Fire Ground Basic Size-Up for the First Due Engine

So your arriving on scene, many things are going through your head but you got to “Paint the picture” for the arriving companies. No one wants to sound incompetent on the radio but you have to have clear, concise and accurate information so everyone understands what the situation is. Having a standard approach to initial scene size up is paramount to start of a successful operation. This article will focus on giving a scene size up and some points to consider, staying with your departments S.O.P. regarding size up these tips hopefully will help your overall radio report.

We all have that adrenaline rush, but the best thing we can do is keep it under control. Thinking clearly and controlling our personal behavior with not only help you do to your job better but will set the example for others to follow. DO NOT yell, scream or rush your size up, this will get everyone else “excited” and also show that you, as the initial incident commander may not be thinking clearly which may cause you to lose your command and control of the incident. When approaching the scene, have your driver slow down. This will give you a better overall picture of the scene. It also allows both you and the driver to visualize hazards, such as overhead wires, exposure problems, potential rescues, hydrants, or parked cars that could limit outrigger spread on a ladder truck. Many departments have their drivers pull past the structure to give a three sided view. Whatever your department S.O.P.s are, follow them, this will give the engine the room it needs to deploy hand lines and gives the truck the front of the building for proper aerial placement.

When beginning your size-up, think about what you’re going to say before you say it. Based on your S.O.Ps your size up should be methodical, quick and to the point evaluation of what you see, what you’re going to do and possibly what you need. First announce your arrival “Engine 1 to dispatch”, let them answer you, “Engine 1 is on location”. Describe the building in regards to residential vs commercial, height, type of construction and occupied vs vacant. “2 ½ story wood frame-balloon frame, occupied (or vacant), residential structure”. Now, what do you see?? Nothing showing, Fire Showing, Smoke Showing. I never understood when officers would say “smoke and fire showing”. If you got fire showing, you got smoke showing, don’t over word it, keep it basic. Also tell where you have the condition showing, second floor, through the roof or whatever the situation shows. Next, do you have an exposure problem, if so, give a quick description. “Exposure problem on Side 2 (Side B)”, “no exposure problems” etc. Give your strategy, Offensive or Defensive. Name your command, every single incident must have a named command, “Main St. Command”. If needed, as for additional resources, whatever they may be. Describe what your actions are going to be “stretch an 1 ¾” for fire attack second floor”, “stretch a 2 ½” for a defensive attack” etc. I’ve heard some departments where they say “stretch an 1 ¾” for fire attack and primary search”, well a single engine company cannot do both jobs effectively, its one or the other. Then give other companies assignments based on their arrival. Example “Engine 2, lay a supply line from Main and Front St. to supply Engine 1”, “Truck 1, primary search” etc. It doesn’t stop there, you as the first due officer must complete, as best as possible a 360 of the fire building. If anything regarding the building, fire conditions, life hazard or safety hazards has been found, you must report these over the radio. So lets look at a sample Size-Up, again this is one way, whatever your department uses make sure it is easily understood by other responding companies.

Engine 1 to Dispatch

Go ahead Engine 1

Engine 1 is on location of an Occupied 2 1/2 story wood frame/balloon frame residential structure, we have fire showing on the second floor, Side 2 with an Exposure problem on Side 2, this will be an offensive fire. Engine 1 will be “Main St. Command” give me an additional 2 Engines and a Truck. Will be stretching a 1 ¾” hand line for fire attack, Engine 2 lay a supply line from Main and Front St. for Engine 1, Truck 1 perform primary search on Main Fire Building.

Dispatch should repeat this back so everyone hears it again

With this statement, the wheels are in motion for a successful start to an operation. Obviously more orders must be given if dictated by your department or your department S.O.Ps on standard company assignments must be followed. Remember also that a transfer of command should be made face to face but sometimes a radio transfer of command may take place. There are several other size up acronyms that some departments use such as “COAL WAS WEALTH” or “Blue Card Size Up”. Whatever your department uses, be good at it, be calm with it, speak clearly and also have a strong command presence.