



LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN



FIRE INCIDENT RESPONSE: ESSENTIAL NEW SAMPLE POLICY PROMOTES OFFICER SAFETY

Police officers may arrive at structure fires before the fire department and face immediate life-or-death decisions. A new sample policy, *Fire Incident and Scene Procedures*, is available in the [Law Enforcement Accreditation Plus Portal](#) to help Chiefs of Police establish strong policy guidance that promotes safer decision-making and increases the safety of officers, civilians, and other first responders. It recognizes that an extraordinary rescue may sometimes be necessary and that officers may occasionally consider entering a structure to locate an animal, or to extinguish an incipient-stage fire only under certain conditions. Chiefs of Police should provide clear guidance for such situations. Interior firefighting remains a fire service function, and officers should not enter highly hazardous conditions without a credible, immediate threat to human life and a reasonable chance of success.

The Need for Balanced Guidance

Two recent incidents illustrate the difficult balance officers face. On April 18, 2025, Waco, Texas officers broke into a burning motel room and rescued an occupant; one officer was treated at the scene for possible smoke inhalation.¹ On July 15, 2025, a Fort Lauderdale officer entered a smoke-filled apartment after learning that a dog was trapped inside. The officer was overcome by smoke and hospitalized; firefighters later located and rescued the dog.² These events underscore the need for policy guidance that supports reasonable, time-critical life-saving action while discouraging unnecessary entries likely to injure officers and create an additional rescue emergency.

Firefighters have protective clothing, breathing apparatus, specialized tools, team accountability, and rescue resources—yet they are still injured during interior operations. Police officers generally lack those protections. An unnecessary police entry can create a second emergency and place firefighters at additional risk.

Sample Policy Critical Framework

- Define the police role: Protect life, request resources, provide an initial size-up, support evacuation, maintain emergency access, control the scene, and coordinate through the Incident Command System.
- Set entry criteria: Require a credible, immediate life threat, a tenable route, a clear escape path, prompt notifications, and withdrawal when conditions exceed the officer's training or equipment.
- Train for extinguisher Use: Address only small, incipient-stage fires, and provide guidance for entry under limited circumstances to extinguish incipient-stage fires.
- Protect fireground operations: Keep apparatus routes and hydrants clear, establish traffic and perimeter control, maintain accountability, and prohibit officer self-deployment.
- Require follow-up: Document officer entry, extinguisher use, injury, exposure, evacuation, and near misses; obtain medical evaluation and conduct an after-action review when appropriate.

Chiefs should collaborate with local fire officials, OEM personnel, the Municipal Attorney, and the County Prosecutor when reviewing and implementing the policy. Local fire officials should also assist in developing and conducting police training on initial size-up, assessment of smoke, heat, fire behavior, and structural conditions, recognition of immediate life threats, apparatus and hydrant access, portable fire-extinguisher capabilities and limitations,

responder accountability, communications, evacuation support, collapse zones, hazardous exposures, and the conditions requiring officers to withdraw and await properly equipped fire personnel.

October, Fire Prevention Month, Serves as a Primer for Action

Reinforce fire-incident procedures, verify that all officers are trained, and incorporate the policy and referenced topics into the Field Training Program. Agencies should consider each year during Fire Prevention Month, facilitating or requiring agency-specific training concerning this policy, which may include:

- A review of this policy.
- Training presentations or training products developed or delivered by local fire officials.
- The results of agency or other agency After-Action Reviews concerning fire incidents and police response.
- Completion of courses in the MEL Safety Institute Learning Management System:
 - [MSI LIVE](#)
 - Fire Extinguisher Safety
 - Fire Safety and Emergency Action Plans
 - [MSI NOW](#)
 - Fire Safety and Emergency Action Plan Refresher
 - Fire Prevention in the Office
 - Hazardous Materials Labels
 - HAZWOPER: Fire Prevention
 - [MSI VIDEO BRIEFINGS](#)
 - Fire Prevention Week Video Message
 - Fire Watch Best Practices
 - Fire Extinguisher Inspections
- Additional training resources that agencies may consider incorporating into their training programs include:
 - [Flashover Demonstration](#) (Approximately 6 minutes)
 - [Flashover Fire: When to Evacuate](#) (Approximately 2.5 minutes)

Clear policy and recurring training will help officers act when a rescue is reasonably possible without unnecessarily endangering themselves, civilians, or firefighters.

If you have any questions, please contact your Law Enforcement Risk Control Consultant, or if you need assistance in accessing the Law Enforcement Accreditation Plus Portal, contact the J.A. Montgomery Law Enforcement Team at lawenforcementteam@jamontgomery.com

¹KWKT–FOX 44, *Waco police officer rescues man during motel fire*, April 18, 2025 — <https://www.fox44news.com/news/local-news/mclennan-county/waco-police-officer-rescues-man-during-motel-fire/>

²CBS Miami, *Fort Lauderdale police officer injured trying to save dog during apartment fire*, July 15, 2025 — <https://www.cbsnews.com/miami/news/fort-lauderdale-police-officer-injured-trying-save-dog-during-apartment-fire/>.