



## Rapid Intervention Crew (RIC) Regional Procedure #04

Adopted by:  
WCFA  
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### **PURPOSE**

To establish the roles and responsibilities of COMMAND, and the Rapid Intervention Crew (RIC) needed to safely and efficiently conduct firefighter rescue.

### **BACKGROUND**

Each year the fire service experiences several firefighter deaths, resulting from firefighters becoming lost and/or trapped while working inside of structure fires. Many Fire Departments have experienced several close calls where firefighters have rescued fellow firefighters. Some of these rescues were performed by Rapid Intervention Crews (RIC) and others were performed by firefighters who were “close by” the downed firefighter.

The Williamson County Fire Chief Association (WCFA) has developed a standard “RIC” approach to be used throughout Williamson County (Regional Guideline) due to the frequency of mutual and automatic aid responses to structure fires. Fire departments throughout Williamson County have adopted Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) which require that a backup line, normally assumed by the second arriving apparatus on scene, and a “2-in / 2-out” Initial Rapid Intervention Crew (IRIC) are in place to ensure that firefighters will be close by to recognize and assist with a rapid firefighter rescue, should the need arise.

Although the IRIC and backup team provide an elevated level of firefighter safety, they are not designed to adequately address the needs of a lost or trapped firefighter. To address this need, this guideline assigns a RIC at all structure fires. The idea is to ensure that there is a dedicated team whose only job is firefighter rescue. When activated to perform a firefighter rescue, the purpose of RIC is to locate and, when necessary, protect/support the firefighter in place. This protection must be performed until the incident is stabilized and/or the firefighter can be extricated. In order to perform this most important duty, the RIC must always remain diligent, disciplined, and ready to respond. The activation of a RIC to achieve firefighter rescue is an event of very low frequency, yet it is an extremely important fire ground function. In order for the RIC to function safely and efficiently the roles and responsibilities of all involved must be clearly defined, practical in nature, and practiced often.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Immediate Danger to Life and Health (IDLH) Atmosphere:** An atmosphere that poses an immediate threat to life, would cause irreversible adverse health effects, or would impair an individual's ability to escape from a dangerous atmosphere.

**Initial Rapid Intervention Crew (IRIC):** A minimum of two members to provide a rapid rescue of firefighters operating in an IDLH atmosphere in the initial stage of an incident (2-in / 2-out).

**Incipient Stage Fire:** A fire which is in the initial or beginning stage and which can be controlled or extinguished by portable fire extinguishers, Class II standpipe or small hose systems without the need for protective clothing or breathing apparatus. Any interior structure fire beyond the incipient stage is considered to be an IDLH atmosphere.

**Rapid Intervention Crew (RIC):** A rapid intervention crew shall consist of at least two members and shall be available for rescue of a lost or trapped firefighter. Each RIC shall be fully equipped with protective clothing, protective equipment, SCBA, and any specialized rescue equipment that could be needed given the specifics of the operation underway.

## **POLICY**

The Williamson County Fire Departments will make every attempt to establish and maintain a Rapid Intervention Crew at all incidents in which fire fighters enter an IDLH atmosphere. This RIC will be used for immediate deployment to effect rescue of trapped or lost firefighters. Due to the diverse staffing levels and response times of Williamson County Fire Departments, each jurisdiction will attempt to establish a RIC in the most timely manner possible with the use of jurisdictional or mutual/auto aid resources.

*The following guidelines should be followed at all firefighting and emergency scene operations, except where deviation can be justified by Fire Officers. Any significant deviation should be communicated to responding/on-scene units as soon as possible.*

## **GUIDELINES**

### **1) COMMAND Responsibilities:**

Following the arrival of additional companies, COMMAND will be responsible for the following (COMMAND responsibilities follow the assumption that an IRIC has been established as part of the 2-in/2-out rule by the first arriving company):

- a) Designate a Rapid Intervention Crew (RIC) at every event in which a crew enters into an IDLH atmosphere. COMMAND will advise by radio which company and, if applicable, which department is designated as the RIC. A potentially hazardous incident includes any of the following:
  - i) Working structure fire (defined as any fire where an attack line is deployed inside a structure with an IDLH atmosphere).
  - ii) Any incident having significant risk of entrapment or injury to firefighters. This includes defensive fires where potential for collapse exists.
  - iii) Any incident where firefighters enter an IDLH atmosphere.
- b) COMMAND will assume all Incident Safety Officer (ISO) responsibilities unless the decision is made to appoint an ISO.
- c) Once additional resources arrive on scene, the IC should upgrade to a full RIC.
- d) Once established, RIC will remain in place at least until the fire is under control. After this benchmark is achieved, the risks to firefighters should then be carefully assessed. Command will announce when it is deemed safe to deactivate RIC.
- e) Deploy RIC when needed for firefighter rescue.  
When doing so, COMMAND will:
  - i) Call for additional alarms as needed including additional EMS support.

- ii) COMMAND should also consider assigning individuals to serve as the ISO, Rescue Group Leader/Supervisor, or any other needed function.
- iii) Once the RIC is deployed, COMMAND will designate another RIC to standby. If shortage of manpower prevents designating another RIC, additional resources should be called.
- iv) Ensure that the Operations Officer primary responsibility remains focused on fire control operations after RIC activation. A Rescue Group Supervisor can be assigned to assist the IC with rescue operations.
- v) Ensure that an additional EMS unit and EMS commander are dispatched to the scene.
- f) At structure fires, if the fire is quickly knocked down by one fire attack hose line and the IRIC team is in place outside the IDLH atmosphere, COMMAND may still choose to assign a RIC to increase firefighter safety. This decision is often based on building size and/or occupancy, operation complexity, smoke conditions, or other higher risk situations.
- g) Williamson County EMS crew support. Williamson County EMS responds to working structure fires to support both civilian and firefighter medical needs. For large events, such as a working multiple alarm fire or specialized high-risk rescues, it is recommended that the IC request a second EMS unit and a Williamson County EMS District Commander. Williamson County EMS crews will report to the COMMAND for assignment and placement.

## **2) Initial Rapid Intervention Crew (IRIC)**

- a) If the first-arriving company determines that the incident involves an IDLH atmosphere; a minimum of four firefighters must be present, two for the initial attack team and two for the IRIC, before entry is made into an IDLH atmosphere.
  - i) An exception is allowed in an imminent life-threatening situation when immediate action could prevent the loss of life or serious injury before the team of four fire fighters is assembled.
- b) If a decision is made by the initial attack team to enter the IDLH atmosphere before the team of four firefighters is assembled and an IRIC has been established, after completing a search of the structure and rescue of the occupants (if any), the initial attack team shall withdraw from the structure until an IRIC can be established with the arrival of additional personnel.
- c) Nothing in this policy is intended to preclude firefighters from performing emergency rescue activities before the team of four firefighters is assembled, if in the opinion of the first arriving officer there is an imminent life-threatening situation. Company Officers shall not; however, use the exception as a means to circumvent the policy. Each situation must be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- d) Once an IRIC is established, it shall not be discontinued until a full RIC is established, or firefighters are no longer operating in an IDLH atmosphere.

## **3) Rapid Intervention Crew (RIC) benchmark considerations:**

- a) Ensure that the RIC function is properly activated.

- b) Ensure that the RIC remains available.
- c) Ensure that all RIC duties listed under “RIC Officer Responsibility” section are being performed.
- d) Ensure that the RIC is properly located.
- e) Request additional resources when required to assign multiple units to satisfy the RIC function.
- f) Ensure that in the event of a downed firefighter requiring RIC activation, that all fire ground traffic not associated with RIC is restricted to *emergency traffic only*. The downed firefighter and crews assigned to the rescue will remain on the original fire ground channel; however, strict radio discipline is required. Crews remaining assigned to fire suppression and not actually part of rescue operations should be moved to a different radio channel, which should be managed separately.
- g) Ensure that the designated RIC is not assigned additional fire ground duties that would hinder immediate response to a downed fire fighter situation.
- h) If resources are available, consider assigning an additional officer to direct the firefighter rescue effort. Whenever possible, an officer should be assigned to direct the rescue group(s) and rescue operations. Depending on the size of the rescue area and the complexity of the operations, more than one rescue officer may be needed to fill additional support positions. If the size and scope of the operation escalates, a Rescue Group Supervisor will be required to make specific assignments to each crew assigned a rescue responsibility before entering the building. Search efforts must be closely coordinated, and COMMAND must be kept informed.
- i) Transmit over the radio that RIC is deployed, where they are deployed and the RIC action plan. (When the RIC action plan is formally announced over the radio other units conducting fire control activities are less likely to abandon their assigned duties and join the search effort.)
- j) Consider the resources necessary for RIC support. This can be very personnel intensive. Enough personnel may need to be requested in order to:
  - i) Support the activated RIC rescue teams. This should include assigning a person as an Air Manager who would monitor and record the SCBA air levels of the RIC teams.
  - ii) Expand the rescue operation, if needed.
  - iii) Provide additional relief resources for RIC personnel. In the event of extended “protect in place” operations have at least two firefighters staged for every one firefighter involved in the rescue effort, as resources permit. It is not uncommon for large and/or complex rescue efforts to result in multiple “Maydays” being called, the system should be built to prepare for that contingency.

#### **4) RIC Officer Responsibilities:**

The RIC Officer is the Team Officer assigned to the RIC function. They will be responsible for the following:

- a) Report to the Command Post fully bunkered with SCBA and with appropriate forcible entry tools. Each RIC member should have a flashlight and radio.

- b) Report to the ISO and Command to obtain a briefing with respect to tactical operations and team assignments.
- c) Attempt to obtain the RIC equipment necessary to locate and support the downed firefighter. Check RIC equipment, SCBA function and air level (must be over 4000 psi for high pressure cylinders and over 2000 psi for low pressure cylinders), ropes, light sticks, etc. Each department should make every effort to develop and carry a “RIC Bag” which would include dedicated equipment for RIC team deployment. **IMPORTANT: Due to the likelihood of RIC being assigned to a mutual/auto aid company, due diligence must be taken to insure that SCBA equipment is compatible with the equipment being worn by the downed fire fighter. The best way to ensure compatibility is to use a RIC Bag from the home department of the trapped/missing firefighter.**
- d) *Conduct an initial reconnaissance of the structure.* Check for secondary egress on all floors, terrain conditions, smoke conditions, and tactics employed, request ladders to be set if applicable. Confer with COMMAND on your findings.
- e) If relieving the IRIC with a dedicated RIC, have one member, usually the dedicated RIC Officer, talk to and relieve the IRIC member at the door. Then assume the IRIC monitoring responsibilities according to 2-in/2-out. This person should be dedicated to monitoring the fire scene which includes being aware of tactics employed, changes in fire conditions, etc.
- f) Report to Command when RIC is established and report the location. The RIC radio designation may be the team unit designation plus the word “RIC”. For example, “Engine 1 RIC”. In the event of a multi department response, or where multiple RIC companies are assigned, Command may choose to assign nomenclature such as “Cedar Park Engine 1 RIC”, or simply RIC 1, RIC 2, etc. This system will allow for multiple assigned RICs at a single incident.
- g) Dedicate a separate pumping apparatus and handline for RIC.
- h) Perform any necessary proactive tasks. These could include additional forcible entry, laddering, etc.
- i) Ensure RIC remains fully intact after being established.
- j) Ensure the RIC is ready to immediately deploy. RIC should be bunkered to the extent they are “30 seconds ready” when activated. This means, at a minimum, bunker pants on, bunker coat on, SCBA on, face piece not donned but in a readiness state for rapid donning.
- k) Have one RIC member dedicated to monitoring the primary fire ground channel. Their radio should be set to “no scan”.
- l) If staffing allows consider having an alternate RIC team in order to cycle those assigned to RIC for rehab, especially during hot weather.

##### **5) RIC Tactical Information:**

###### **The A.W.a.R.E System**

- a) Most firefighters have been trained to use the “grab and go” style of rescue. This may work well with civilian rescue but becomes more difficult when you add the weight of a firefighter’s gear, entanglements, or structural collapse entrapments. A system has been developed and proven to save

the lives of firefighters. This system is given the acronym **A.W.a.R.E.** This stands for Air, Water, A Radio, and Extrication.

- b) The first two needs are the most important. First, provide the downed/trapped firefighter with a redundant (primary and secondary) air supply. Then create a defensible space with water, using hose lines. Meeting these two needs can buy several hours of extrication time. Ensure that the dedicated channel is monitored by a firefighter whose only responsibility is to monitor the downed/trapped firefighter. In extreme cases, where the downed/trapped firefighter must be left alone, leave air, water, and a functioning radio (this could happen if rescuers are running low on air and still not relieved by relief rescuers). Extrication is the final step, which may take only minutes or several hours.
- c) The strategic goal of the **AWaRE** system is to provide a survivable environment for as long as it takes to perform the rescue.
- d) The RIC will use the “**AWaRE**” principle after locating the trapped firefighter(s) that cannot be removed by grab and go means:
  - i) **Air Supply** – The RIC should assure downed/trapped firefighter have an adequate air supply.
  - ii) **Water** – to create a defensible space by use of hose lines. Make sure that the pump operator of the RIC Engine is on the same radio channel as the RIC.
  - iii) **aR** – a radio and rescue channel for use of the RIC and the trapped/missing firefighter(s), if conscious and directed by the Incident Commander. Ensure that the downed fire fighter’s radio has a backup battery in the event of a prolonged extrication.
  - iv) **Extrication** – of the trapped individuals

### References

NFPA 1500: *Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program*, 2013 Edition

NFPA 1561: *Standard on Emergency Services Incident Management System and Command Safety*, 2014 Edition

NFPA 1221: *Standard for the Installation, Maintenance, and Use of Emergency Services Communications Systems*, 2010 Edition; [Component II, A. 2. Interoperability]

NFPA 1407: *Standard for Training Fire Service Rapid Intervention Crews*, 2015 Edition