

 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>MANUAL OF PROCEDURE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>DETAIL PROCEDURE</b></p>	SECTION	EMERGENCY SERVICES
	SUBJECT	FIREGROUND OPERATIONS VACANT BUILDINGS

## OVERVIEW

Vacant buildings present an immediate “Life Safety” concern to firefighting personnel due to weakened and unstable floors, walls, and roofs, due to previous fires, exposure to weather, age, neglect, and vandalism.

The Baltimore City Fire Department defines a VACANT BUILDING as a structure that is not maintained, in an obvious state of disrepair or neglect, and has no legally connected operating utilities. Vacant buildings are not legally occupied however, they may be occupied by unauthorized persons.

## POLICY

The **Life Safety** of its employees is a primary concern for The Baltimore City Fire Department. With that in mind, an interior attack of a known vacant building **will not** be commenced until the following have occurred:

- A proper size up and report of conditions on Side Charlie. If a 360-degree size-up can be performed by the initial Incident Commander, these findings will be reported via radio and an interior attack can commence. Fire Suppression should not be delayed during this time with an exterior, indirect or transitional attack being used.
- **At no time will an interior attack of a known condemned building or a building identified as CODE X be initiated except in the instance of persons trapped.** If a credible report of people trapped exists, the incident commander may choose to limit the number of members on the interior of the building.

## PURPOSE

This policy and related procedures are established in order to better prepare for, respond to and recover from incidents occurring in vacant buildings. It will be the responsibility of each member to exercise the appropriate discipline and control dictated by their rank in the implementation of this policy and procedure.

The Life Safety concerns firefighters face in vacant structure fires cannot be overstated. Strict adherence to this policy will be strongly enforced. Incident Commanders, Company Officers and those Acting Officers that choose to deviate from this policy will be required to complete a Special Report with thorough details of the incident and the reasons involved with their decision to deviate. This Special Report will be addressed to the Assistant Chief of Operations.

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The report will then be reviewed and investigated by the Assistant Chief of Operations who will decide whether the deviation was warranted. Initial deviations that are deemed to be unwarranted can result in coaching, evaluation and/or training. Multiple unwarranted deviations to this policy can result in disciplinary action up to and including demotion.

**Company Officers or Incident Commanders will be subject to immediate suspension for a Severe Safety Violation, if they fail to comply with this policy and that failure is a result of negligent decisions or actions as determined after the immediate preliminary suspension hearing [MOP 312-1].**

### **COMMAND CONSIDERATIONS**

The member in charge of the first suppression unit to arrive at the scene of multiple unit responses shall assume Command until relieved by a higher-ranking officer, Battalion Chief's arrival or until the incident is terminated. [MOP 601]

Appropriate transfer of Command is crucial to the safety of members operating at the scene of incidents involving vacant buildings. The initial Incident Commander must ensure that all pertinent information is passed on to the ranking officer who is assuming Command. This is often missed if the initial unit initiates a Fast Attack Command Mode.

The Incident Commander must be mindful of the possible need for special resources in the event of a collapse or MAYDAY situation.

It is important when the fire involves a vacant structure to slow down and assess all the variables to allow for good strategic and tactical decisions. Prior to making a tactical decision the initial Incident Commander will evaluate the following:

- Stability and condition of the structure
- Smoke and fire conditions to determine survivability of an occupant
- Openings for security devices to include plywood, metal screens, metal bars or VPS systems. Security devices can delay ventilation and contribute to rapid fire progression.
- Conditions on Side Charlie

### **INITIAL REPORT**

The initial report will be in accordance with **Fireground Operations and Command [MOP 601]**

### **SIZE UP**

Vacant buildings require a thorough more cautious risk assessment and size-up. Below will be considered before initiating an interior attack and if identified, will be reported via radio.

1. The presence of a CODE X indicator [MOP 606-10-1}
2. Exposed wood joists that are free burning, sagging, or pulled away from the walls.

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3. Roof cornices that are missing, cantilevered, or not level.
4. Exterior walls that are out of line, cracked, bowing, bulging, or that contain loose brick.
5. Indicators of previous collapse
6. Signs of previous significant fires that may have involved floors, the roof, or structural members.
7. Obstacles to egress (Bars, security devices, plywood)
8. Condition of exposures (Code X, previous collapse, dangerous conditions)

### **SIDE CHARLIE REPORT**

The first unit to arrive on Side Charlie will provide a detailed size-up utilizing considerations listed above and report findings via radio. [MOP 602-1] This report **must** include:

1. The number of floors including basement. (Example: 4 floors in the rear with a walkout basement)
2. Fire conditions (including the burning of exposed wood joists if identified)
3. The presence of a CODE X indicator [MOP 606-10-1]
4. Obstacles to access/egress (Bars, security devices, plywood)
5. Basement openings or lack of.
6. Condition of exposures.

### **ROOF REPORT**

1. A report from the roof will be provided to include fire conditions, previous openings, and evidence of previous fires. This will not delay an interior attack but may be cause for a change of strategy.
2. The roof condition of the exposures will be reported if pertinent.

### **General Considerations:**

- **Life Safety** must be the first consideration when building the strategic direction during size-up. Vacant buildings are less likely to involve occupants; however, these buildings are a safe haven for many citizens that are homeless. Every consideration must be evaluated to make a good judgment to determine if the structure is occupied. The first arriving unit has the greatest opportunity to perform a rescue, but the initial tactics selected will set the direction of the incident. One of the observations that must play a strong influence in the initial strategic decision is the chance for survival of an occupant. The survival evaluation will be based on fire and smoke conditions. If the conditions have reached a

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point that there is no chance for survival, the benefit is significantly reduced and the risk to firefighting personnel must not be elevated.

- **Risk Assessment** will be performed by the initial Incident Commander and/or ranking officer on scene to ensure that the appropriate fire suppression strategy is being utilized (offensive, defensive, transitional). This includes selecting appropriate initial fire suppression attack. Consideration should be given to attacking with a 2 ½ (blitz) handline, RAM XD portable monitor pipe [TM 228-1, 418], or unit mounted monitor pipe. The level of risk assumed shall be directly related to the potential to save lives and property. Structural stability and fire condition/location in the building will be continuously evaluated by unit officers and the Incident Commander.
- **Personnel Safety** must be the highest priority when conducting the risk-assessment during size-up. There is additional consideration when confronted with a fire in a vacant building. Any concern that the fire conditions or the stability of the building could jeopardize the life or safety of a member will necessitate a defensive strategy.
- **Accountability** of members operating in, and around vacant buildings is paramount. Unit officers must maintain strict accountability of members and report progress and movement throughout the structure to incident command. A PAR must be conducted every forty (40) minutes during the duration of the incident. [MOP 602-9]
- **Structural Stability** is the major concern during the duration of the fire. Vacant buildings that were involved in a previous fire should be considered unsafe and provide an increased possibility of collapse. The observation of all exterior components must be conducted prior to selecting the best option for fire suppression activities. Every incident commander should have a strong knowledge of building construction. Members must establish a collapse zone during the early stages of fire operations, and the Incident Commander shall ensure that the Incident Command Post is outside of the collapse zone.
- **Fire Behavior** is of utmost importance, an understanding of the stages of fire progression should be added to tactical and strategic considerations. Smoke conditions play a vital role in how the fire is progressing and how the fire may expand. A rapidly evolving fire in a vacant building has the potential to spread to adjacent structures. Exposure issues should be protected, and the focus of suppression tactics should be directed to the adjacent buildings.
- **Communication** is imperative. Any immediate life hazard identified during operations must be immediately reported to the Incident Commander. This is not limited to unit officers. Any member who identifies an immediate life hazard will report it via radio at once. Members will utilize their emergency button if they are unable to get through due to heavy radio traffic.

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### Definitions/Examples

- **Immediate Life Hazards-** Any condition that creates a present, extreme, and immediate danger to life. Examples include change in the stability of the building, rapid progression of fire etc...
- **Risk Assessment-** A process to identify potential hazards and analyze the outcome of operating with that hazard(s) present.
- **Survivability Assessment-** Assessment in which a range of conditions are evaluated indicating if a specific entity could survive. Three descriptors are used during this assessment likely, marginal, and unlikely.
- **Vacant Building-** A building that is not maintained, in an obvious state of disrepair or neglect and has no operating utilities. Vacant buildings are not legally occupied however, they may be occupied by unauthorized persons.

### RELATED MATERIAL

[MOP 312-1] FILING AND INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS  
[MOP 601] FIREGROUND OPERATIONS & COMMAND  
[MOP 602-1] FIREGROUND OPERATIONS Standard operating procedure-Engine  
[MOP 602-2] FIREGROUND OPERATIONS Standard operating procedure-Truck  
[MOP 602-1] CODE-X UNSAFE STRUCTURE