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**The Bill Blackwood
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Critical Incident Management for Law Enforcement

**A Policy Research Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Professional Designation
Graduate, Management Institute**

**By
Willis L. Corbin**

**Webster Police Department
Webster, Texas
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ABSTRACT

The Webster Police Department does not have a policy for handling critical incidents or situations that exceed the capabilities of the department. The research obtained from this project will allow for the development of a policy and system to protect lives and property, reduce liability to the city and allow a free flow of communication. The purpose of the research is to assist the command staff of the police department in developing and implementing a system in which police personnel will be able to activate during critical incidents. The research for this project was obtained by interviews with persons from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (F.E.M.A.), numerous books and publications. It is this officers recommendation the Webster Police Department develop and implement a policy for the incident command system (ICS). The incident command system is the system most all fire departments, federal, state and local agencies use when responding to incidents to disasters and other critical incidents involving multiple agencies and personnel.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is to develop a policy for critical incident response and Management for the Webster Texas Police Department. The Webster Police Department currently does not have a critical incident policy in effect. A critical incident requires all police units to work as one, not as individual entities. Attaining this teamwork is essential to successfully contain a crisis situation. One way is to implement Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and policies that foster teamwork through properly guided training programs, briefings, and sensitivity to feedback (Kiaser).

This reduces liability to the city and personnel involved, establishes lines of communication, and ensures that further lives are not lost or property jeopardized as a result of the departments actions. The following characteristics define a critical incident: they are abnormal, often unexpected has a potential for serious injury or loss of life, and/or serious property damage. Additional criteria for critical incidents also calls for a response above and beyond the response normally associated with everyday life and that response is rapid and there is likely to be a considerable increase in the volume and spread of upward and downward communication (Moore).

The information contained in this research will be obtained from numerous publications, periodicals, personal interviews, policy and procedures from various agencies. The information contained in this research project will be presented to the administrative and command staff to formulate a clear and concise policy. Upon receiving a call for service involving critical incidents each division of the Webster Police Department will know their respective responsibilities and respond in an efficient and professional manner.

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Historical, Legal, or Theoretical Context

Webster, Texas is located approximately 25 miles north of the Galveston, Texas coast and bay system. Webster is surrounded by numerous tourist attractions, large government facilities (NASA), along with chemical plants, refineries and two large airports. The city has a major interstate freeway, an electric generating plant (H.L.&P), an oil storage and pumping station, and a large number of pipelines, which carry a variety of chemicals from the Galveston and Texas City, Texas plants and refineries.

The City of Webster has experienced numerous critical incidents in its past. Luckily the incidents did not escalate to the point of mass destruction and loss of lives. Some of these incidents include railroad tank cars derailed leaking large amounts of vinyl chloride into the air and water. Several plane crashes have occurred just outside the city, which required assistance from the police and fire departments. Webster was in the path of hurricane Alicia in 1983. This storm caused wide spread flooding and damage to buildings from high winds and tornadoes. Another critical incident, which occurred and did not escalate into mass casualties and destruction, was a tank truck carrying liquefied oxygen. The truck was struck by a train and overturned leaking its contents. This incident occurred in the center of town on the main street. All of these incidents were serious in nature and had the potential to rapidly expand and be well above the capabilities of the City of Webster and the Webster Police Department.

In recent years there has been an overall decrease in terrorist activity in the United States but significant increase in destruction and casualties. As an example in 1986 there were 25 acts of terrorism reported in the United States resulting in 1 death and 19 injuries.

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In 1995 only 1 act of terrorism was recorded (Murrah building) which resulted in 168 deaths and over 800 injuries. (Freeh 1) Other incidents include the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, and the Branch Davidian conflict in Waco, Texas.

Terrorist targets may be categorized into five categories. These categories are:

- Prominent landmarks which include electrical utilities, pipelines, state and local government buildings, and businesses and industries involving animal research, forest or wood products, and refineries.
- Government owned or operated facilities.
- Military targets which have the potential to embarrass the government and military.
- Cyber targets include 911 networks; control systems for air traffic control computers, and other vital computer operated systems and networks.
- Individual victims which may involve kidnapping, extortion, assassination, members of the courts or judicial system, law enforcement, tax collectors and their families (Bodrero 15,16)

In many cases, police officers will be the first emergency responders to the scene. Their judgment and actions in the first minutes of arriving on the scene will be critical to the safety of themselves and others. If an extremely hazardous chemical or weapon of mass destruction is involved, improper actions by untrained officers may be virtually impossible to correct. (Mehl)

In 1996 the United States Congress passed public law 104-201, directing the Department of Defense to set up the Domestic Preparedness Program to enhance the capability of federal, state, and local emergency responders to manage incidents involving nuclear, biological, and chemical (N.B.C.) terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (W.M.D.). (Rigg 29)

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When dealing with life threatening situations it is important in establishing safety priorities. These priorities are as follows:

- Lives of persons held hostage
- Lives of innocent civilians
- Lives of police officers
- Lives of suspects

The basis for this tactical triage is found in law and ethics. It recognizes law enforcement's obligation and commitment to act on behalf of innocent persons prior to – and potentially at the expense of – those creating their jeopardy. Some may disagree with this system or prioritization because it does not place officers safety above all other considerations. The reality is however that officer safety has never been – and will never be – more important than the safety of those we serve. If this were true, police officers could not do their jobs. Those who serve their communities through law enforcement literally place their lives on the line every day on behalf of the citizens they are sworn to protect. (James 2)

Preparation for managing a critical incident first requires an appreciation of the magnitude of the potential consequences. When all involved have that awesome outcome in full focus, they will understand the truly essential elements of planning, training, cooperation, liaison, resource definition, and coherent public policy implementation. Therefore crisis managers cannot wait for such an incident to occur to perfect a process for handling the next one. They must manage the first event intelligently and with meaningful application of resources and leadership at all levels of government. (Carlson 22)

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Review of Literature or Practice

At one time public safety agencies handled critical incidents on a case by case basis. At times these incidents were overwhelming and drained the resources of the agency. The agency had to call on its neighbors for help. In the 1970's the fire services of southern California recognized the need to pool all the resources together in an effort to combat the raging wildfires of that area. The fire services entered into mutual aid agreements and thus the genesis of the incident command system was developed. For many years that followed the incident command system was primarily the forte of the fire service (Conner 14). Recently law enforcement had recognized the need for a coordinated response during critical incidents and other disasters. Numerous federal, state and local agencies have adopted the incident command system as their operational plan for disasters and critical incidents. These agencies include the Federal Emergency Management Agency (F.E.M.A.), the Red Cross, and the Department of Public Safety (D.P.S.). Critical incidents have common problem areas, which affect each of the disciplines, particularly during the initial response. These problems are:

- Planning and Preparation
- Resource allocation and utilization.
- Incident Command structure/Communication
- Operational Philosophy
- Safety Prioritization
- Problem Recognition
- Critical incident stress

An agency may employ the incident command system for a wide range of incidents. These incidents can be as small as a vehicular collisions, hurricanes, floods or other man made disaster which would require the response of more than one division or agency.

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The incident command system promotes common language between the various responding personnel. Thus improving response time to the incident and providing a manageable span of control for the incident commander. Prior to the incident the responding agencies will already have written agreements in place and each person will know what their responsibility will be. Personnel assigned to the various elements of the command structure will ensure resources are utilized, accurate documentation is completed, and that all personnel are accounted for. The incident commander is then able to concentrate on the overall management of the scene. In the case of large-scale disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and large explosions involving mass destruction or lives and property the agency responsible for the initial response would implement the incident command system immediately. Thus all other agencies that will have to respond can arrive and begin supplementing the overall functioning and management of the incident. This is true especially when dealing with multiple agencies that are already familiar with the incident command system structure. An example of this would be after a hurricane has struck the coast. The local agency would establish the incident command system. When the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Guard arrived the transition would be much smoother since they work on the same system.

The incident command system simplifies the management of critical incidents by organizing the response into modules: levels 1, 2, and 3.

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The incident is then divided into sectors or districts. The personnel in each district have their own command structure with the supervisor of that district communicating with the respective person at the incident command post. The supervisor of a district is responsible for the people assigned to the district and communicating all needs and current status reports to the command post. The person at the command post is then responsible for obtaining and distribution information and resources for the district. The number of districts and personnel can be adjusted as indicated by the situation and as it may change from primarily a fire responsibility to law enforcement or vice versa. After the incident is over then personnel go into recovery mode.

Discussion of Relevant Issues

In today's society law enforcement is required to investigate, control, and resolve a vast number of issues that 20 years ago were unheard of. The key issues of this research are to protect lives, and property. Secondary to lives and property are to ensure the city of Webster can assist the citizens and employees involved in the traumatic event to recover and still provide protection and service without interruption.

The implementation of a critical incident management policy would provide for a unified command structure, common terminology, modular organization, integrated communications, consolidated action plans, a manageable span of control, and comprehensive resource management.

Many of the injuries and deaths attributed to critical incidents are incurred by the "first in" responding emergency personnel. (Mehl) The organization must accept the fact, there is a great potential for a critical incident to develop and they cannot wait for it to happen to manage it properly.

The implementation of a critical incident policy would be cost effective and could be measured in the number of lives saved, property protected, loss of public confidence and a drop in morale among personnel in the organization and loss of professional reputation. (Moore 92). As with each critical incident there comes extensive media coverage. The proper planning and management of an incident in the eyes of the media will be far reaching. An example: in 1989 a football stadium collapsed killing 95 people.

During a television interview one witness stated "I am still mystified as to how they (the police), with their veritable battery of monitors, could not see what was going on in front of their eyes. If they didn't believe the monitors, their own naked eye could tell them there was something wrong in those pens. I find it difficult to come to terms that professional people could be so blind". (Moore 92)

The cost of implementation would be minimal. Expenditures associated with the implementation:

- Printing of the documents themselves
- Time spent on training
- Time spent locating and identifying threats
- Compiling resource data
- Executing memorandum of agreements with other organizations
- Budget items not already in inventory

A critical incident management policy would provide a means of communicating and interacting with the community and other organizations in their area. By identifying potential threats, hazard analysis and risk assessment and planning employees can work with the community to reduce or significantly decrease the potential for an incident to occur. The organizations would develop a working relationship and learn what resources are available and any

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contingency plans already in place. During critical incidents there is a great increase of communication up, down and sideways. This type of communication is usually outside the normal flow of communication and can be awkward for personnel not trained or accustomed to it. During extremely stressful situations each person reacts differently and law enforcement is no exception. Generally people will resort to what they were trained to do without thinking. Which is why it is important to train and familiarize all people involved.

A properly constructed plan will enable an organization to expand and adapt to the situation at hand without loss of command and communication. As with any good plan the agency must also take into consideration and provide for the employees involved in the incident. The agency must recognize the effect the incident has on the employees involved. This would include peer counseling, health care, psychiatric care, employee assistance programs for the employee and their families as well as the citizens of the community.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The Webster Police department does not have a policy or procedure for responding or managing a critical incident or disaster. The research obtained from this paper will enable the police department to formulate and implement a policy and procedure to responding, managing, and recovering from any incident. The City of Webster is located in an area with a very high potential for disaster and events resulting in multiple agency response caused by either natural or man made circumstances.

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A critical incident policy will provide coordinated and timely response to any situation in where personnel and resources from various agencies must be coordinated and utilized. The policy will provide for a simple systematic approach to managing all aspects of a situation including problem identification, planning, resource allocation, command structure, safety, operational philosophy, and recovery.

A critical incident policy will enable to provide the community with a professional response to management of any situation. The policy will provide guidance to ensure the safety of the community and personnel involved along with reducing loss of life, and property. The proper response and implementation of the Incident Command System will save the city money in efficiently utilizing its personnel, resources and reducing liability to the city. The policy will ensure the employees of the Webster Police Department will know how to respond and coordinate with each other along with members of other organizations at the state and federal levels to successfully conclude a situation as safely as possible. The policy will assist the employees and the community in recovering from a critical incident by providing counseling and support the involved.

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