

NEW JERSEY PERSONNEL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM (NJPAS)

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STATE OF NEW JERSEY
Chris Christie
Governor



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
Lori Grifa, *Commissioner*

DIVISION OF FIRE SAFETY
Lawrence Petrillo, *Director*



NJ PERSONNEL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM (NJPAS)

HISTORY

In 2001, the NJ Fire Safety Commission directed the Division of Fire Safety in conjunction with the Firefighter Safety and Health Advisory Council to develop a statewide standard for fire department personnel accountability systems. It was felt that in order to provide uniform accounting of firefighters at emergency incidents throughout the state, especially where two or more departments worked together, one system utilizing the same operational components was necessary.

Such a system had to be easy to use yet effective; as inexpensive as possible; and be as compatible with existing systems in use by fire departments as possible.

After weighing many options, the parties involved with the system's development agreed on a two-tag system that would allow incident commanders to know where firefighters were operating at any given time.

The proposal was presented to the Fire Safety Commission who, with their endorsement, presented it to Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Levin for adoption into regulation. The Commissioner adopted the regulations on May 3, 2002 and the regulations became operative on January 3, 2003.

WHY ACCOUNTABILITY?

Personnel accountability is one of the most critical elements on an incident scene with regard to firefighter safety. Essentially, personnel accountability is an effort to improve the safety of emergency responders by keeping track of their locations and assignments when operating at the scene of an incident.

A properly implemented PAS will help to ensure that the incident command staff knows the exact number and identity of personnel working at an incident, their approximate locations, and whether they are in distress. In some form or another, regardless of size or nature, personnel accountability is a part of every incident to which fire and rescue personnel may respond. Failure to maintain personnel accountability can, and does, have tragic results. In the event that an emergency responder is injured or otherwise incapacitated on the scene of an emergency, a properly functioning PAS should assist rescuers to locate the personnel in trouble and get them to safety quickly.

It is important to note that NFPA 1561, adopted as an integral part of the regulations of New Jersey's Incident Management System requires that the accountability system "shall include a means to specifically identify and keep track of members entering and leaving hazardous areas."

THE NJ PERSONNEL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

The New Jersey Personnel Accountability System (NJPAS) is basically a system that tracks three key elements on the incident scene: location, function and time. The regulations set forth the minimum requirements of the system including the hardware required to operate the system.

Very basically, each firefighter is to be issued two accountability tags. These tags may be simply laminated ID cards produced in-house, or some other type of tag constructed of plastic, metal or other durable material. Each tag is to have at minimum the firefighter's name and fire department affiliation. Tags are to be equipped with a fastening latch that can be affixed to the firefighter's turnout gear and can be clipped and un-clipped with a gloved hand.

Once on the incident scene, the firefighter should place one tag at a central collection point as determined by SOP or the incident commander (IC). Such a point might be the incident command post or the apparatus that the firefighter responded with. Career firefighters might place this tag on their apparatus at the beginning of each shift if that is the department's policy. A central collection point is necessary so that the IC and command staff have a reliable way to know who is operating on the incident scene as a whole.

The second tag is to be given to the Personnel Accountability Officer (PAO) upon entering any hazardous area. Usually, this will be when the firefighter enters a structure or space where they will be performing firefighting or rescue operations in an Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH) atmosphere. However, this requirement also applies where firefighters may be involved in wildland operations or confined space operations where there is a risk of becoming lost or disoriented either in wide expanses or maze-like areas. Upon leaving the hazardous area, the tag is to be retrieved by the firefighter.

The secondary tag should also be used when a firefighter checks into a rehabilitation station or a decontamination station or other specialized operational area at an incident scene. In this way, there is always someone other than the firefighters themselves that knows where they are and what they are doing.

It is usually advisable to limit the number of points of entry into a hazardous area. In this way, it is easier to monitor entry and egress of firefighters and can reduce the potential for freelancing. However, where there are different points of entry into a hazardous area, firefighters entering will need to be accounted for. Many times more than one entry point is observable by one PAO such as at a corner of a structure. Other times it may be advantageous to designate more than one PAO if it is necessary to operate multiple points of entry. Some volunteer departments have found it feasible to utilize Fire Police who are not assigned to their normal duties to act as PAOs. In some career departments, an Incident Management Specialist position has been instituted. These individuals may be utilized as PAOs. Departments may need to develop innovative solutions in order to comply with the regulations and provide appropriate accountability for personnel.

Fire departments may, at the very beginning of operations at an incident, find it difficult to provide staffing for the accountability function. While the lack of staffing does not relieve the department from maintaining proper accountability of its members, some innovation may be necessary. One method may involve the placing of a large traffic cone with a metal ring attached near the entry point. In this way, members entering a hazardous area can "tag in" on the cone. It must be remembered that until a PAO is assigned, the incident commander retains the responsibility for the function in accordance with the requirements of the NJ Incident Management System. It is recognized that the incident management system at any incident grows with the incident and as additional staffing arrives.

Another way of providing accountability until a PAO is assigned is for the "two-out" personnel to maintain accountability. These are the two individuals that are required to be outside the hazardous area in a ready state in case it becomes necessary to rescue the initial team of firefighters in the hazardous area.

These previously referred to "interim actions" must only be utilized prior to the assignment of a PAO and should not be relied upon as a means of providing accountability throughout an incident. A PAO should be assigned as soon as it is possible. If departmental staffing is so short that it is often difficult to staff the accountability function, then additional staffing in the form of mutual aid may be an option.

It must be noted that the scope of the PAS does not simply involve the transfer of tags between personnel on the incident scene. The tags are only the tools for the PAO to use to monitor personnel with regard to location, function and time.

Taken individually beginning with location, the PAO by monitoring entry into a hazardous area knows the approximate location of firefighters. By using some type of accountability board divided by location i.e. basement; division 1; roof etc., tags can be grouped into the area where the firefighting team is assigned.

In the same way, function can be monitored in conjunction with location i.e. division 1 search; roof ventilation etc. depending upon assignment.

Time can be monitored by the PAO by utilizing a dry erase marker on a suitable accountability board for example. By marking the time of entry of each crew and knowing the average duration of the department's SCBA, the PAO can gauge as to when to expect the crew to exit or if they might be in trouble if they are overdue.

The key to all of this working effectively is communication between the crews and the PAO regarding where the crew is assigned and what their function is; and between the crews and the IC or designated officer with regard to regular situation/status reports via portable radio. Crews should inform those outside what they are experiencing and accomplishing and those on the outside should be asking for information on a regular basis. All players have an equal responsibility to ensure that every firefighter is accounted for at all times.

Another important part of the PAS is the Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) and roll call. If there is any question regarding the whereabouts or safety of firefighters, or if there is a change in firefighting mode, or if an evacuation is ordered, the IC will call for a PAR. A PAR is actually the result of a roll call conducted by the PAO and company officers to ensure all firefighters are accounted for and in a safe location. The primary reasons for the IC to call for a PAR are the following:

- If there is a report of a firefighter missing.
- When an emergency evacuation is ordered.
- When the incident is declared under control.
- When changing attack modes (i.e. offensive to defensive).
- Anytime the IC feels it necessary to conduct a PAR.

Once the roll call is completed the PAR is then conveyed to the IC and if there are any firefighters unaccounted for, search and/or rescue operations are then undertaken. Usually if the PAO is holding firefighter's tags when a PAR is ordered, the PAO must try to ascertain where the firefighters that he/she is holding tags for are.

It cannot be more strongly stressed that all those operating on the incident scene play an important role in the PAS. It is for this reason that all members be trained in the use of the system. Additionally, the system needs to be instituted on every incident except those that are so minor all firefighters are in plain sight at all times.

INTEGRATION WITH NJ INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Since the inception of New Jersey's Incident Management regulations, fire departments have been required to operate within the parameters of a uniform incident management system (IMS). Part of the requirements of the IMS have always been that a fire department must utilize a PAS. The NJPAS regulations have expanded upon that requirement by providing a specific uniform method of complying with the original regulations. In this way the new regulations integrate seamlessly with the IMS and should pose little if any additional obligations on a fire department than what was originally required.

ACCOUNTABILITY OPTIONS

As stated earlier in this booklet, the regulations for PAS are the minimum requirements that must be adhered to by fire departments. There are many enhancements that a department may want to implement to make the PAS more effective or easier to use. Tools such as dry erase accountability boards provide an easy way to organize firefighters' tags by location and function in the hazardous area. They can provide the PAO a quick reference to rapidly assess the location all the firefighters he/she is responsible for.

Additionally, some departments find that medical information on a personnel accountability tag (PAT) relating to the firefighter is useful in the event a firefighter is injured and transported to a hospital. Normally the most suitable type of PAT for this would be the laminated type where the inner part of the tag is folded in half with the confidential medical information inside. The tag is then laminated and if it is necessary to access the information, the tag is cut open.

If medical information is to be collected and included on the PAT, it must be remembered that all information is confidential and should not be shared beyond those responsible for the collection of the information without the permission of the information's owner. Information collection should also never be mandatory. Firefighter may not want to share all or any of their personal information and they should be informed that it is their right to provide only what they wish to. Any information provided should not be used for any other purpose.

Another consideration is whether the information collected will be utilized by EMS or a hospital. Some health care providers may not want to rely on what could be outdated or incorrect information. It would probably be best for the fire department to meet with their normal EMS and healthcare providers to find out whether the information provided will be used in an emergency, and if so, what information in particular would be useful to collect.

Some departments may wish to issue additional PATs above the two that are required by the regulations. Departments are free to do this if for instance it is desired for a firefighter to have a PAT on his/her person at all times in the unfortunate circumstance where identification of a severely injured or deceased firefighter must be made. Other reasons for extra PATs may be secondary access to smaller areas inside a larger hazardous area such as high rise buildings or large complexes; or where firefighters may travel on vehicles to remote locations before being assigned to tasks, such as a large wildland fire scenario.

One key element of the new PAS regulations is the ability for newer technology that provides at least the same level of firefighter safety to be utilized. There are some advanced systems that are basically like simple tag systems with features that integrate computerization. An example is a system that utilizes bar coding, where instead of a tag with readable printing, the bar code contains the firefighter's information. This code is scanned into a computer and a task and location are input to show where the firefighter is and what his/her assignment is. With a standard tag system, an accountability board and dry erase marker perform the same function manually.

There are newer systems on the horizon that utilize Global Positioning System (GPS) technology where firefighters have "sending units" attached to their gear or integrated into their SCBA that send signals to satellites and then to a central computer on the incident scene. The location and movements of each firefighter are tracked accurately within a few feet of their position and displayed on the computer screen. Some of these systems provide for telemetry between the computer location and the individual firefighters and are capable of monitoring breathing rate, air supply and interior temperature. Additionally, they can provide for the activation of integrated PASS devices and the transmission of distress signals to the outside.

APPENDIX A
REGULATIONS FOR
THE NJ PERSONNEL
ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

SUBCHAPTER 2 PERSONNEL ACCOUNTABILITY

5:75-1.5 Definitions

“Hazardous Area” means any location(s) that may pose a safety and/or health risk to firefighters due to, but not limited to, the presence of products of combustion, hazardous or otherwise oxygen deficient or oxygen enriched atmosphere or the potential for any IDLH atmosphere, hazardous equipment or operations or the potential for any of these situations to exist. Additionally, any area or location that predisposes a firefighter to become lost, disoriented or trapped, including any confined space and wild land areas shall be considered a hazardous area for the purpose of this section.

“Personnel Accountability Officer” means the person designated by the Incident Commander to monitor entry into and exit out of hazardous areas and/or structures for the purpose of ensuring accountability of all personnel in the hazardous area or structure.

“Personnel Accountability Report/Roll Call” means the results of an accounting of all personnel on the emergency incident scene to the Incident Commander.

“IDLH” means immediately dangerous to life and health

5:75-2.4 Personnel Accountability

As an integral part of the incident management system used by the fire service, personnel accountability shall be maintained through the use of a personnel accountability system meeting the requirements of this section as a means to track and locate all fire department personnel operating at all emergency incidents.

(a) Every member of a fire department shall be issued a minimum of two (2) Personnel Accountability Tags.

1. Such tags shall be constructed of but not limited to metal, plastic, plastic laminated paper or plastic laminated cardboard or similar durable material.

2. Each tag shall be equipped with a clip or latch hook that will allow attachment of the tag to the firefighter’s protective clothing. The clip or latch hook shall be designed to be attached and removed by a firefighter with a gloved hand.

3. The tag shall be engraved, imprinted or otherwise marked or electronically coded with the firefighter’s name and fire department affiliation at minimum.

(b) The incident commander shall designate at each incident a Personnel Accountability Officer. The personnel accountability officer shall be responsible for ensuring that all personnel are accounted for. The personnel accountability officer may serve other functions at an incident scene permitting he/she is able to safely perform in the accountability function. At minor incidents, the incident commander may retain this function as he/she sees fit.

(c) Each firefighter, upon arrival at an incident scene, shall surrender the primary personnel accountability tag to a central collection point as designated by the Incident Commander or departmental policy. Such point may be a command post; or the apparatus to which the firefighter is assigned. Upon leaving the incident scene, the member shall immediately retrieve his/her personnel accountability tag from the designated collection point and re-attach it to the designated area of his/her protective gear as determined by the fire department. Firefighters assigned to a specific piece of apparatus for the duration of a tour of duty shall leave their primary personnel accountability tag on that apparatus for the duration of their tour.

(d) Each firefighter, upon entry in an IDLH atmosphere, hazardous area, structure, wild land area or other remote area shall surrender the secondary personnel accountability tag to the

Personnel Accountability Officer who shall be in close proximity to the entry point into the hazardous area. Upon leaving the hazardous area or structure, the member shall immediately retrieve his/her personnel accountability tag from the personnel accountability officer and re-attach it to the designated area of his/her protective clothing.

(e) If the need arises to evacuate a hazardous area or structure and an evacuation is ordered, the personnel accountability officer shall order an immediate roll call of all members operating at the incident to be conducted as soon as they exit the hazardous area. The personnel accountability officer shall assure that every member who has surrendered his/her accountability tag retrieves it and re-attaches it to their protective gear. If after a reasonable time crews have not retrieved their personnel accountability tags or conditions indicate that the area is immediately unsafe for crews and/or the personnel accountability officer to operate in safely, the personnel accountability officer shall immediately report to the Incident Commander and inform him/her that members are unaccounted for and that the need for search and rescue might exist. If the personnel accountability officer is not holding any personnel accountability tags after an evacuation is ordered, he/she shall report to the Incident Commander that all members are accounted for.

(f) The Incident Commander shall call for a Personnel Accountability Report:

1. If there is a report of a firefighter missing.
 1. When an emergency evacuation is ordered.
 2. When the incident is declared under control.
 3. When changing attack modes (i.e. offensive to defensive).
 4. Anytime the Incident Commander feels it necessary to conduct a PAR.

(g) When it is announced that a PAR is to be conducted all companies will:

1. Conduct a role call of the members in that company to ensure all members are accounted for.
2. Cease all but emergency radio communications.
3. Report all members accounted for or report members missing.

(h) Nothing in this section shall restrict the use of more sophisticated accountability systems utilizing bar coding, geographic positioning systems or similar methods providing the intent of this section is met.

APPENDIX B

REGULATIONS FOR THE NJ INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

SUBCHAPTER 2

FIRE SERVICE INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

5:75-2.1 Incident management system adopted

(a) Pursuant to authority of P.L. 1995, c.266 sec. 4, (N.J.S.A. 52:27D-25) the Commissioner hereby adopts the model standard of the National Fire Protection Association, known as "NFPA 1561/ Standard on Fire Department Incident Management System/1995." This standard is hereby adopted by reference as the State Incident Management System, subject to the modifications set forth in N.J.A.C. 5:75-2.2.

(b) Copies of this standard may be obtained from the sponsor at: National Fire Protection Association, Batterymarch Park, Quincy, Massachusetts 02269.

(c) When used alone, the terms "subchapter," "section," and so forth, refer to that portion of these regulations. When used in Section 2.2 below, the terms "section," "subsection" or "chapter," and so forth, refer to the NFPA Standard.

5:75-2.2 Modifications

(a) The following sections of the NFPA 1561, 1995 ed. are modified as follows:

1. Section 1-1.1 is amended to replace the term "fire departments" with "the fire service."
2. Section 1-1.2 is amended to delete the terms "emergency medical care," "military, and private" and "and fire brigades."
3. Section 1-1.2.2 is amended to delete the second sentence in its entirety.
4. Section 1-3 ("Definitions") is amended as follows:
 - i. "Emergency incident."
 - ii. "Fire Department," and
 - iii. "Member."
5. Section 2-5.2 is amended as follows:
 - i. The term "fire department" is deleted and the term "Regulations for Fire Service Incident Management System" is substituted in lieu thereof.
 - ii. The term "and experience" is deleted.
6. Section 2-6 is deleted in its entirety.
7. Chapter 5 "Referenced Publications" is deleted in its entirety.

5:18E-2.3 Geographical identification of the incident scene

(a) To provide for uniform identification of locations and operational forces within an incident scene, the scene shall be divided geographically into smaller parts which shall be designated as divisions. Specific areas of the incident scene shall be designated as follows:

1. Sides of incident scenes designated as divisions shall be further identified by the addition of a letter of the alphabet beginning with the letter "A."
 - i. The side of the incident scene that bears the postal address of the location shall be designated as division "A" by the incident commander. Where the incident scene has no postal address, the incident commander shall select any side to designate division "A."
 - ii. Continuing in a clockwise rotation, the side adjacent to the division "A" side shall be designated as division "B."
 - iii. Continuing in a clockwise rotation, the side adjacent to the division "B" side shall be designated as division "C."
 - iv. Continuing in a clockwise rotation, the side adjacent to the division "C" side shall be designated as division "D."
2. When operating at an incident containing more than one level, each level shall be designated as a division and shall be further identified by the addition of an Arabic numeral beginning with the number "1."
 - i. The ground level of the incident scene shall be designated as division "1."
 - ii. The next level above the ground level shall be designated as division "2."

iii. Subsequent levels above division "2" shall be assigned division numbers in progressing order in this manner.

3. Additional areas of the incident scene shall be designated through the use of terms common to the fire department including but not limited to: basement, roof, interior etc.

APPENDIX C

MODEL SOP FOR THE NJ PERSONNEL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

**NJ DIVISION OF FIRE SAFETY
SAMPLE STANDARD
OPERATING PROCEDURES**

**Safety: Personnel
Accountability System
SOP 101.01-2003**

PURPOSE:

This procedure is designed to establish a means to track and locate all fire department members operating at any incident or activity in which this company becomes involved.

SCOPE:

All department personnel.

RESPONSIBILITY:

All department personnel and officers.

SAFETY:

It is the intention of this department to provide the optimal level of firefighter safety. The application of this procedure will assist all members to meet this goal.

DEFINITIONS:

Hazardous Area - means any location(s) that may pose a safety and/or health risk to firefighters due to, but not limited to, the presence of products of combustion, hazardous or otherwise oxygen deficient or oxygen enriched atmosphere or the potential for any IDLH atmosphere, hazardous equipment or operations or the potential for any of these situations to exist. Additionally, any area or location that predisposes a firefighter to become lost, disoriented or trapped, including any confined space and wild land areas shall be considered a hazardous area for the purpose of this section.

IDLH - means immediately dangerous to life and health

PAS - Personnel accountability system

PAT - Personnel accountability tag

Personnel Accountability Officer - means the person designated by the Incident Commander to monitor entry into and exit out of hazardous areas and/or structures for the purpose of ensuring accountability of all personnel in the hazardous area or structure.

Personnel Accountability Report/Roll Call - means the results of an accounting of all personnel on the emergency incident scene to the Incident Commander.

PROCEDURE:

This procedure applies to all members of this department when:

Operating at the site of any/all emergency responses.

1. Every member of this department will be issued two (2) Personnel Accountability Tags (PAT). The tags will be affixed to the front of their turnout coat.

2. Each member, upon arrival at an incident scene, shall surrender the primary personnel accountability tag to a central collection point as designated by the Incident Commander (this may also be the apparatus the firefighter is assigned to or arrived on).
3. Each member, upon entry to a hazardous area or structure, shall surrender the secondary PAT to the Personnel Accountability Officer as appointed by the Incident Commander. Upon leaving the hazardous area or structure, the member shall immediately retrieve his/her PAT from the Personnel Accountability Officer and re-attach it to the front of his/her turnout coat.
4. A key element of personnel accountability is crew integrity. It will be the responsibility of all members and officers to ensure that crew integrity is maintained. Simply stated, all crews must enter together, stay together and come out together.
5. All crews entering a hazardous area or structure should exit at the same point where entry was made. If hazardous conditions dictate that crews must exit the area or structure by a different route than where entry was made, the crew must immediately report to the Personnel Accountability Officer at the original entry point and retrieve their PATs.
6. When multiple points of entry are used at hazardous area or a structure, a Personnel Accountability Officer shall be appointed for each entry point.
7. It will be the responsibility of the company officer or Personnel Accountability Officer to ensure that:
 - At least two (2) members be assigned to each crew or task.
 - The location and function of each crew be communicated to the Incident Commander or designee.
8. If the need arises to evacuate a hazardous area or structure and an evacuation is ordered, the personnel accountability officer shall order an immediate roll call of all members operating at the incident to be conducted as soon as they exit the hazardous area. The personnel accountability officer shall assure that every member who has surrendered his/her accountability tag retrieves it and re-attaches it to their protective gear.
9. If after a reasonable time crews have not retrieved their personnel accountability tags or conditions indicate that the area is immediately unsafe for crews and/or the personnel accountability officer to operate in safely, the personnel accountability officer shall immediately report to the Incident Commander and inform him/her that members are unaccounted for and that the need for search and rescue might exist. If the personnel accountability officer is not holding any personnel accountability tags after an evacuation is ordered, he/she shall report to the Incident Commander that all members are accounted for.
10. Immediately upon receiving a report of a member or members unaccounted for, the Incident Commander shall reassign all resources necessary to locate unaccounted for members.
11. On large or complex incidents, it becomes critical that all crews and companies operating be tracked. Any time a crew or company's assignment, location, or status changes, the change must be immediately communicated to the Incident Commander. It will be the responsibility of the company officer to report the status of their crew or company at all times.
12. The Incident Commander will call for a Personnel Accountability Report:
 - If there is a report of a firefighter down or missing.

- When an emergency evacuation is ordered.
 - When the incident is declared under control.
 - When changing attack modes (i.e. offensive to defensive).
 - Anytime the Incident Commander feels it necessary to conduct a PAR.
13. When it is announced that a PAR is to be conducted all companies will:
- Conduct a role call of the members in that company to ensure all members are accounted for.
 - Cease all but emergency radio communications.
 - Report all members accounted for or report members missing.
14. If a member should lose their primary PAT, they must immediately report this to a company officer or the Incident Commander.
15. Members without PATs shall not be permitted inside hazardous areas or structures.