

**PHOENIX REGIONAL  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

**MAYDAY RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION**

M.P. 201.01F

08/26-N

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**PURPOSE**

To establish a clear and standardized procedure for declaring, responding to, and resolving a Mayday situation. This ensures firefighter safety through early identification, clear communication, and an organized response that mobilizes all levels of the Incident Command System.

**SCOPE**

This procedure applies to:

- All Fire Department personnel operating in hazard zones, including fireground, technical rescue, and other emergency environments.
- All incidents where members are exposed to conditions that could compromise their ability to exit or survive.
- All levels of the Incident Command System, including:
  - Task level (individual firefighters and crews)
  - Tactical level (Sector Officers)
  - Strategic level (Incident Command Team)
  - Dispatch center personnel

**DEFINITIONS**

**MAYDAY:**

A Mayday is defined as anytime a firefighter is in a life-threatening situation and requires assistance because they cannot safely exit the hazard zone or resolve the problem immediately.

Mayday examples include but are not limited to:

- Lost or disoriented
- Trapped or entangled
- Fall through floor or roof
- SCBA emergency
- Injured and unable to self-extricate
- Separated from crew
- Rapidly deteriorating conditions preventing safe egress

**BOA (Breathe, Organize, Act):**

A mental checklist for firefighters in distress and those responding:

- **Breathe:** Control panic, slow breathing.
- **Organize:** Assess situation, resources, and options.
- **Act:** Take deliberate steps toward self-rescue or resolution.

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**Help Order (Inside-Out Response):**

The prioritized sequence for Mayday resolution:

1. Self-rescue by the Mayday initiator
2. Mayday firefighter's crew
3. Crews assigned in the same sector
4. Crews from other sectors

**GRAB LIVES (Self-Rescue Priorities):**

- **G** = Check Air **G**auge
- **R** = **R**adio for Assistance
- **A** = **A**ctivate PASS Device
- **B** = Control **B**reathing, Conserve Air
- **L** = Stay **L**ow
- **I** = **I**lluminate, Turn Flashlight On
- **V** = Make Loud Noises (**V**olume)
- **E** = Find an **E**xit
- **S** = **S**hield Your Airway (last-ditch effort)

**PROCEDURES**

The procedures that follow a Mayday declaration are designed to mobilize every level of the Incident Command System. Strategic, tactical, and task-level operators must respond efficiently and effectively to ensure firefighter survival.

Following the Bret Tarver line-of-duty death at the Southwest Supermarket fire, post-incident analysis demonstrated that the most effective Mayday resolution occurs when the response is coordinated **from the inside out**. This approach prioritizes crews closest to the firefighter in distress and emphasizes strict fireground discipline.

The response must follow the previously defined "**Help Order**" and maintain accountability. Freelancing is **never** acceptable during a Mayday event.

**Declaring a Mayday:**

A Mayday declaration can come from any position in the incident organization when the need arises.

- A Mayday is declared by transmitting, "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday" over the radio followed by the necessary information:
  - **Who:** Identify who you are and/or the firefighter in trouble (FF Smith, E1)

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- **What:** State the nature of the problem ("Trapped under debris," "Low air," "Lost")
- **Where:** Give your last known location or best estimate ("Entry through North door, I am still on my hose line, second floor")
- **Needs/Actions:** Specify what Actions you are taking or Needs that will help resolve the situation ("Following handline out," "Need manpower to help clear fallen debris," "Need Air supply")

**Task-level responsibilities during a Mayday situation:**

**After declaring a Mayday, the task-level responsibilities for a Mayday situation include:**

- Controlling the emotional response to the situation with **B.O.A.**
  - **Breath** – Slow breathing, reduces panic
  - **Organize** – Assess situation and options
  - **Act** – Begin self-rescue steps
- **Utilize IAFF Fireground Survival training**
  - SCBA familiarization
  - High/low profile wall breach
  - Disentanglement
  - Ladder bail
  - Window hang
- **Apply GRAB LIVES**
  - **G** = Check Air **G**auge
  - **R** = **R**adio for Assistance
  - **A** = **A**ctivate PASS Device
  - **B** = Control **B**reathing, Conserve Air
  - **L** = Stay **L**ow
  - **I** = **I**lluminate, Turn Flashlight On
  - **V** = Make Loud Noises (**V**olume)
  - **E** = Find an **E**xit
  - **S** = **S**hield Your Airway (last ditch effort)
- **Firefighters responding to the Mayday Situation:**
  - Controlling the emotional response to the situation
  - **B.O.A. = Breath, Organize and Act**
  - Maintain fireground discipline- **Never Freelance**
  - Coordinate and communicate response actions with Sector Officer or Command

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- Follow the **“Help Order”** model
- Follow the **“Rule of Air Management”** (M.P 202.05C)
- Engineers should ensure members are entering on tagged hose lines and have tools available.

**Tactical Level Mayday Response and Resolution**

Company and Command Officers operating at the tactical level are responsible for actively managing and coordinating the response to and resolution of the Mayday situation. Effective communication, coordination, and fireground discipline are critical actions for the Tactical Level Supervisors. Every effort should be made by Incident Command to prioritize and assign Command Officers to the most critical sectors.

**Tactical-level responsibilities for Mayday response and resolution:**

- Management of ongoing tactical objectives.
- Management of current position and function of resources. Recognize and support your ability to mitigate the Mayday within the **“Help Order”** (from the inside out)
- Participation in Mayday mitigation efforts are clearly communicated
- Continually reassess the incident through the strategic decision-making model
  - Size up the hazard zone.
    - Identify Critical fireground factors
    - Consider elapsed time into the incident
  - Evaluating the Risk Management position
  - Operating in the correct Strategy
  - Working within the Incident Action Plan
- Provide effective communications, including C.A.N. Reports
- Monitor and manage Air levels for the entire crew
- Control the pace and emotions of the crew
- Utilize RIC bag, Rescue Tool Bag and Cyanokit
- Complete the objectives assigned by Command
- **Never Freelance.** Do not change your assignment without confirmation from your Sector Officer or Command. If you believe you can assist in mitigating the Mayday situation, communicate your intentions clearly and obtain approval before acting.

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**Strategic Level Mayday Response and Resolution**

A Mayday can occur at any time during an incident. Establishing a strong Incident Command System (ICS) from the very beginning—starting with IC #1—creates the foundation for success. A well-organized incident structure ensures that if a Mayday occurs, the response is efficient, coordinated, and focused on firefighter survival. Company Officers, Sector Officers and the Incident Command Team must all maintain a strategic level of awareness throughout the incident.

The Incident Command Team (Incident Commander, Support Officer, Senior Advisor) is responsible for actively and continually managing the Mayday response while maintaining overall incident organization. Additional positions (staging, logistics, safety) provide support from the Command Van.

- Company Officers operating as IC #1 and as Sector Officers are operating at both the strategic and tactical levels.

**Strategic-level responsibilities of a Mayday situation for Response and Resolution include:**

- Communicate with the Mayday initiator after the Tactical Radio Operator (TRO) completes initial Mayday traffic:
  - Assure the member: **“Help is on the way.”**
  - Remind them to apply **BOA** and **GRAB LIVES**.
  - Gather any additional pertinent information not yet communicated (location updates, condition changes, needs).
- Identify the Sector Officer to manage the Mayday
  - Allow Sector Officer to maintain future contact with Mayday initiator
- Continually reassess the incident through the strategic decision-making model
  - Size up Critical fireground factors
    - Effective and thorough size-ups include a 360-degree report
    - Consider elapsed time into the incident
  - Evaluate the Risk Management position
  - Confirm the correct Strategy
  - Evaluate the Incident Action Plan (communicate any changes)
- Work through the Functions of Command (M.P. 201.01)
  - Strategic level communications
    - Control incident communications
      - Once a Mayday is initiated, all sectors should manage their communications to critical messages only over the radio

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- Use Command presence to manage communications pace and tone
  - The Incident and the Mayday always remain on the same tactical channel
  - Plan and prepare for communications challenges
    - A Mayday was initiated on the wrong radio channel
    - Multiple, simultaneous Maydays
  - Request C.A.N. and P.A.R. reports from Sectors as needed
  - Initiate Safety channel when appropriate to track accountability and reduce fire channel traffic
- Maintain the overall incident organization through sectorization
  - Ensure Battalion Chiefs are assigned to all critical tactical level positions
    - Firefighting sectors (geographical and functional)
    - Extrication sector
    - Treatment sector
    - Transportation sector
- Maintain an adequate flow of resources
  - Manage resource deployment
  - Provide resources to provide for tactical-level considerations
    - Improve access to building
    - Support with ventilation, considering fire dynamics and fire behavior
- Strategic level considerations
  - Continue to manage hazard mitigation
    - Ensure the overall incident actions match the overall incident conditions
    - Control access to the hazard zone through the Sector Officers
  - Track and manage accountability
  - Record and confirm Tactical benchmarks
  - Consider on-scene firefighters' welfare
  - Address organizational and external considerations
    - Communicate progress and critical updates to Executive Staff and other key stakeholders
    - Coordinate with PIO to manage media communication appropriately
    - Ensure timely notification and support for the family of the affected firefighter

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- Monitor overall organizational impacts and anticipate additional support needs

**In a Mayday situation, the Sector Officer will take responsibility for resolving it.**

When a Mayday occurs, the Sector Officer takes charge of resolving the situation. The Incident Commander must ensure the Mayday Sector Officer has the necessary resources and simultaneously strengthen other sectors to sustain overall incident control. **Anticipating maximum resource demands ensures rapid intervention and reduces the likelihood of secondary Maydays caused by uncontrolled response, unresolved hazards or insufficient support.**

**Sector Officer responsibilities (M.P. 201.01 Command Procedures)**

- Responding to the Mayday from the inside out
- Maintain awareness of sector Conditions, Actions, and Needs (CAN) and communicate to Incident Command
- Manage communications with the down firefighter
- Manage the search and rescue efforts for the down firefighter if necessary
- Increase and maintain resources assigned to the sector
  - This includes active oversight of the sector's access points into the hazard zone.
  - Managing accountability location utilizing tactical worksheets, passports and hosetags
  - Manage the logistical support
- Manage the improvement of survivability and tenability
  - Increase exterior access to the sector
  - Utilize RIC bag
    - Request additional, if necessary
  - Addressing ventilation and visibility
  - Address the fire if threatening the resolution of the Mayday
  - Consider Fire Dynamics/Fire Behavior
- Recognize and support the **"Help Order"** of a Mayday
  - Self-rescue by the Mayday initiator
  - Mayday firefighter's crew
  - Crews working in the same sector
    - Crews with firefighting assignments
    - Crews from an "on-deck" position or staged outside of the sector as a tactical reserve
    - Additional resources requested from the Incident Commander
  - Crews from other sectors
  - Requesting additional staged resources
  - Communications with surrounding geographical or functional sectors

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- Surrounding sectors not involved in the Mayday
  - Continue the firefight in support of the Mayday; do not abandon current assignments
  - Never Freelance
  - Actively account for all members assigned to a sector
- Report P.A.R.s to the Incident Commander as required Accountability Responsibilities
  - Respond to the designated accountability location and verify/confirm that rosters, passports, and hosetags accurately reflect all personnel operating in the sector.
  - Report P.A.R.s to the Incident Commander as required
  - Maintain accountability of crews working to resolve the Mayday
    - Utilizing the Safety Channel may be the best route of communication to the Command Van regarding accountability
- Maintain awareness of fire and smoke conditions, as well as building conditions, as rescue efforts are initiated
  - There is no more significant time for a clear and concise utilization of the Risk Management System than during a Mayday event
  - It is not acceptable to create further Mayday situations when resolving an existing Mayday

These conditions must be communicated to the Incident Commander as they deteriorate, as they have an immediate impact on the rescue efforts.

**The Tactical Benchmark for the endpoint resolution of a Mayday is “Mayday resolved.”** The critical points that must be confirmed before giving the benchmark of “Mayday resolved” are:

- The individual(s) that are experiencing the Mayday situation are removed from the hazard zone
- All members involved in the rescue are accounted for and are out of the hazard zone
- All members working in all other sectors are accounted for
- The Incident Commander can give a PAR for the entire hazard zone

The Officer of the individual sector in which the Mayday occurred is responsible for notifying command of the completion of the rescue and that all members involved are out of the hazard zone. The Incident Commander must complete the accountability process for the entire incident to complete the benchmark “Mayday resolved.”

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**Dispatch Center Role and Responsibilities**

It is critical to acknowledge the role the dispatch center and, most specifically, the tactical radio operators will have in the resolution of a Mayday. A significant component of the hazard zone management systems and firefighter safety involve communication between the incident command team and the dispatch center, regardless of the incident's size. The tactical radio operator's responsibilities for a Mayday response are as follows:

- A Mayday is initiated by a member in the field communicating “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday” on the radio
- A Mayday can be initiated by anyone, at any time, who is working in the field and has access to a portable radio
- Mayday is not just a fireground term. It can be used in any hazard zone
- Upon initiation of a Mayday, the tactical radio operator shall:
  - Transmit the emergency traffic tone
  - Voice on the tactical channel: “We have a Mayday on the scene. All units hold your traffic.”
  - Request the Mayday FF to go ahead with their Mayday traffic if not completed
  - Repeats the Mayday message using the standard radio order model
  - Allows for the Incident Commander to speak to the Mayday initiator
- If a Command Officer has not yet arrived on scene the TRO shall communicate the following:
  - Assures the member that “help is on the way”
  - Maintains communications with the Mayday initiator until other units arrive
    - Ensure the communications are necessary and not to fill dead radio time
  - Reminds the member to initiate their “**GRAB LIVES**” procedures
  - Ensures all responding units are aware of the Mayday
  - Upgrades the assignment to a Mayday nature code

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- The entire dispatch center provides redundant monitoring of the Mayday radio traffic
- The dispatch center upgrades the assignment to assist with a Mayday incident.
  - Upon the initiation of a Mayday, the incident is upgraded using the Mayday nature code
    - If 3 – 1 incident, then balance to 1<sup>st</sup> Alarm Mayday
    - If 1<sup>st</sup> Alarm incident, then to 2<sup>nd</sup> Alarm Mayday (up to 9 Alarms)
    - Provide additional medical or transport resources as appropriate
    - Monitoring of all *possible* hazard zone channels

**Key Takeaways**

- It is every firefighter's responsibility to maintain their preparedness for a Mayday situation
- The only way to guarantee a successful outcome of a Mayday situation is to **PREVENT IT!**
- Mayday response and resolution requires action at all levels of an incident command system
- The Ultimate goal for any Mayday response is to resolve the Mayday successfully and, at the same time, not create any further Mayday situations
- Any Mayday situation elevates emotional levels and tests a command system.
- **B.O.A. - Breathe, Organize and Act!**
- **Utilize The IAFF Fireground Survival training**
  - SCBA familiarization
  - High/low profile wall breach
  - Disentanglement
  - Ladder bail
  - Window hang
  - **GRAB LIVES**

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- **G** = Check Air Gauge
- **R** = Radio for Assistance
- **A** = Activate PASS Device
- **B** = Control Breathing, Conserve Air
- **L** = Stay Low
- **I** = Illuminate, Turn Flashlight On
- **V** = Make Loud Noises (**V**olume)
- **E** = Find An Exit
- **S** = Shield Your Airway (last ditch effort)