

# St. Louis Fire Department



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## **St. Louis Fire Department Responds to Misinformation About the Stadium Drill**

ST. LOUIS, MO (February 21, 2007) — The St. Louis Fire Department has recently come under attack by various members of the media for failing at a disaster drill held at Busch Stadium this past summer. The information that is being used comes from a confidential draft after action report that was written by the L-3 Communications Titan Group. Specifically, the department is cited as: refusing to participate in unified command, being isolated from other agencies, delays in setting up a decontamination area, and having a radio playing in the Fire Department Command Post.

Fire Chief Sherman George has consistently refused to comment on the draft report because he felt it was inappropriate due to the fact that it was confidential and it was a draft. Chief George did make the St. Louis Fire Department's responses to the draft report available on the fire department web-site. Now the Chief feels compelled to respond to the accusations because so much misinformation and many misconceptions are being reported. The following is a brief synopsis of the Chief's views on the subject.

On the issue of unified command, the St. Louis Fire Department (STLFD), as well as other fire service organizations, has been responding to incidents using the Incident Command System (ICS) dating back to the 1970's. The Incident Command System was used as the framework for the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which emergency organizations are required to adopt. Unified Command which comes from ICS is an effort that allows agencies with jurisdictional responsibility for an incident to participate in the management of the incident

According to NIMS, one of the Incident Commander's responsibilities is to consider the need for Unified Command. During the incident, there was never any clear indication that Unified Command was necessary. Had intelligence information been shared, it may have suggested the need for Unified Command. In addition, command was established by STLFD members operating inside Busch Stadium at the onset of the incident, this placed the STLFD in command of the incident.

The intelligence that was gathered by other agencies the day before the full scale exercise was not disseminated to all emergency response agencies, specifically Fire and EMS agencies. The fire and EMS agencies that would deal with the outcomes of a terrorist incident were not notified of the threat or other suspicious activities. The St. Louis Fire Department would coordinate triage, treatment, transport, decontamination, haz-mat operations, fire extinguishment, extractions, and evacuation. The fire and EMS organizations do not necessarily have to participate in the relay of information; however, they should be notified in order to consider raising the awareness of their personnel to ensure their safety, and to make more informed decisions on the scene of the incident. Further, since mutual aid agreements are practiced locally, notifying one fire organization could have easily allowed for other fire and EMS

agencies to be notified. The lack of intelligence information that was available to other agencies complicated the operations of the St. Louis Fire Department.

On the issue of being isolated from other agencies, the Chief believe this was being confused with the World Series Event. During the disaster drill, the Command Posts for the St. Louis Fire Department as well as other agencies were located in the same location. This was part of the exercise's design.

During certain portions of the drill, a Liaison Officer was used to relay information to other agencies. Since none of the participating agencies had a command post that would support outside agency's operations, this was a necessity. This situation brought to light the need to have a command post large enough for multiple agencies to operate from.

While on the subject of the command post, there was an issue that stated that a radio was playing music in the fire department command post. It should be noted that the STLFD Command Post has a stereo and a television that are used to monitor news reports. Since this was a drill, that was unnecessary. I did question the members that were operating inside the command post at the drill, and it was found that no one heard the radio, or knew that it was operating.

On the issue of decontamination, the decontamination setup was part of the exercise design and was to be pre-staged. Decontamination setup was delayed by Titan exercise staff and by objects that were placed in the designated area. The staff requested that all personnel remain at Soldier's Memorial to take part in a briefing. After the briefing the companies left Soldier's Memorial to set up their decon sites, but were never allotted sufficient time to set up. These companies had to set up and take down gross decon on three occasions and technical decon on two occasions. This had to be done because the decon personnel were told that their set up interfered with other agencies' operations. In addition, these companies were charged with setting up three different types of decon: gross, technical, and responder. Also, while they were in route to their pre-staged sites to set up, the exercise began. The gross decontamination companies were met by occupants trying to evacuate the stadium as they were driving to their locations, so they stopped where they were instead of driving through the crowd. They then set up in different locations from where they were assigned, to ensure that the evacuees went through gross decon. Several of the evacuees had already passed the containment area, and had to be re-routed to gross decon.

It should be noted that in a real world incident, several evacuees will leave the scene prior to emergency responder's arrival. This is an expected outcome, so the hospitals would be notified to prepare for self referring patients and the signs and symptoms they may be presenting.

The technical decontamination site was set up by members of the Haz Mat Team. Since the team had to set up and break down technical decon twice, after the exercise started there was a delay in it going operational.

After the drill, the STLFD received a list of recommendations and agreed with a number of them. More information on the St. Louis Fire Department's responses to the draft report are available on the St. Louis Fire Department's web-site. <http://stlouis.missouri.org/citygov/fire>

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