

Authority at fires and other emergencies

The scope of the IFC includes conditions affecting the safety of fire fighters and emergency responders during emergency operations. The IFC grants the fire code official, the fire chief or the incident commander at the scene of a fire or other emergency to control and direct the incident scene for the protection of life and property or take any other actions that are necessary in the reasonable performance of duty (see Figure 2-6). This can include disconnecting building utilities or limiting or prohibiting the movement of people and vehicles that are not authorized at the incident scene. These requirements allow those in charge to deploy fire-fighting resources based on the size and magnitude of the incident. Consider a large commercial building fire. It may be necessary to lay water supply lines from hydrants located one to two blocks from the fire scene. The IFC requirements authorize fire department officials the ability to block roads and streets and to limit the areas in which the public or media have access. [Ref. 104.11]

A fire or medical emergency can emotionally impact family members and friends. In some cases, people can become extremely agitated, especially if it's a close family member, friend or family pet. People can lose focus that the emergency responders are trained professionals and that the methods for controlling fires or patient treatment may not be understood by those observing the emergency. To ensure the care of patients is not compromised and to protect the safety of emergency responders treating the individual or managing the emergency, the IFC allows the incident commander, fire chief or fire code official to barricade the scene. The IFC also grants emergency personnel the authority to have individuals detained who may be obstructing operations if they disobey a lawful command from fire or police department personnel (see Figure 2-7). [Ref. 104.11.1, 104.11.2]

Code Basics

Fire code official duties:

- Enforce the IFC
- Review construction documents and permit applications
- Issue permits, notices and orders
- Conduct inspections
- Maintain records
- Investigate the cause and origin of unwanted fires
- Control the scene of emergencies

Fire code official authority:

- Make interpretations
- Adopt policies, procedures and regulations
- Approve alternative methods, materials and modifications ●



FIGURE 2-6 The IFC grants the officer in charge of controlling this structure fire complete control of the scene, including limiting access to vehicles and the public.



FIGURE 2-7 The fire chief, fire code official or officer in charge of the incident has the authority in the IFC to secure the emergency scene and order the removal of individuals who obstruct operations.