***Restricted Distribution – Fire Department Use Only***

**Purpose:** *The purpose of this procedure is to establish guidelines for Fire/EMS companies operating at incidents where violence has occurred or could potentially occur. The Okolona Fire Protection District will always strive to treat all patients as quickly and as safely as possible. This procedure is meant to provide a foundation for working in any violent incident environment and in any level of complexity. Responsibility and accountability for member safety lies at all levels of an incident organization, including the strategic, tactical and task levels.*

**Scope: All Okolona Fire and EMS personnel**

**Intent:**

It is the desire of the Okolona Fire Protection Districtto maximize member safety through the use of body armor in combination with prescribed safety procedures. While body armor provides a significant level of protection, it is not a substitute for the observance of member safety procedures.

**Overview:**

Violent incidents or incidents that have the potential for becoming violent are no less dangerous to EMS personnel and firefighters than the traditional incident scene. These incidents include calls in private residences or businesses to large‐scale public gatherings. Each incident has its own unique challenges for emergency service delivery as well as managing member’s safety. Once dispatched, it is imperative that the incident command system utilizes the same strategic decision making as those established under normal operations.

The standard decision making model for the Okolona Fire Protection Districtincludes:

1. Size up and Identification of the Critical Factors
2. Risk Management
3. Strategy
4. Incident Action Plan
5. Tactical Objectives
6. Review and Revision

This process is ongoing and continual, which requires a review/revision based on actions and conditions until the tactical objectives are met. In these incidents, the key tactical positions are:

• Triage

• Extrication

• Treatment

• Transportation

Three zones must be understood:

* Hot Zone – The area where there is a known hazard or threat to life that is potentially direct and immediate. This includes any uncontrolled area where the disturbance could directly engage both civilians as well as first responders.
* Warm Zone – The areas where law enforcement has either cleared or isolated the threat, and the risk is minimal or has been mitigated. This area may be considered clear but not secure.
* Cold Zone – The area where there is little or no threat. It may include the outside of the building or an area law enforcement has secured. It is safe to operate in this zone.

It is possible that other tactical positions may be necessary; however, the above are foundational to meeting the life safety tactical objective.

**Procedures:**

A. Issuance of Body Armor:

1. All body armor issued/or used by member must comply with protective and related requirements prescribed under current standards of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ); along with those established by NFPA 1500 .

2. All apparatus’ equipped with body armor shall be NFPA 1500 approved body armor.

3. Body armor that is worn or damaged should be replaced by the Department. Body armor that must be replaced due to misuse or abuse by the member shall be paid for by the member.

B. Use of Body Armor:

1. Members should wear only NFPA approved body armor.
2. Members should wear protective vests during high risk and/or tactical situations. Examples of “high risk” or “tactical” situations include but are not limited to, civil disturbance, standoff or barricade, and active shooter responses.
3. It is highly recommended that all members responding to such “high risk” incidents, wear body armor during their tour of duty. However, members who choose not to wear their body armor must have it immediately available at all times during their shift. Immediately available means easily accessible.

C. Inspection of Body Armor:

1. Supervisors shall be responsible for ensuring that body armor is worn and maintained as required by this policy, through routine observation and periodic documented inspections when conducting daily apparatus’ equipment inspections.
2. Annual inspections of body armor shall be conducted for cleanliness, and signs of damage, abuse and wear.

D. Care, Maintenance and Replacement of Body Armor:

1. Members should routinely inspect body armor for signs of damage and for general cleanliness.
2. As dirt and perspiration may erode ballistic panels, each member shall be responsible for cleaning body armor in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
3. Members are responsible for the proper storage, maintenance and care of body armor in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions.
4. Members are responsible for reporting damage or excessive wear to the ballistic panels or cover to their immediate supervisor.
5. Body armor will be replaced in accordance with guidelines and protocols established by the National Institute of Justice.

E. Training:

1. The Training Division should be responsible for:
2. Monitoring technological advances in the body armor industry that may necessitate a change in body armor.
3. Assessing weapons and ammunition currently in use and the suitability of approved body armor to protect against those threats.
4. Providing training programs that emphasize body armor’s safe and proper use.
5. Evaluating incidents where armor has been placed into operations.

**Unpredicted Situations:**

It is common for EMS personnel and firefighters to, on a random basis, encounter situations that did not appear to be volatile or violent, but have become so. Quite often these situations surprise personnel in the process of delivering services that has been performed multiple times before without incident. Historically, EMS personnel and firefighters escaping without injury are usually due to quickly assessing a situation or calmly conversing their way out of violence because of our good standing within the public. Neither is reliable or predictable enough to ensure any amount of success. The most effective means are true situational awareness and defensive tactics that limits our exposure to these scenarios.

The most effective actions when EMS personnel and firefighters find themselves in an unpredicted, possibly violent situation is:

* Removing themselves to safety
* Communicate directly with dispatch over their operational channel to request assistance
  + Communicating who, what and where
* Utilizing the emergency traffic button on portable radios when it is not safe to speak
* Utilize any area of safe refuge or cover
* Only actively engage the aggressor as an absolute last resort

Active management of our environment and our proximity to patients is important to our overall safety. The key to close quarter interactions with patients is maintaining defensible space. Removing or coaxing patients to open areas or unconfined spaces can improve our defensible space. Due to the nature of our job, working near patients sometimes is necessary. Remain aware of their body language and communications. It may be reasonable to sometimes only treat emergent issues as an effective way to improve overall safety. Simply getting patients to an environment that EMS personnel and firefighters can control (maybe with the assistance of PD) is important to reducing the overall exposure to violence. Furthermore, removing any items that may conceal weapons or eliminating dangerous items from proximity of the patient can significantly limit the overall exposure to violence. It is imperative that company officers and individual firefighters are continuously aware of their surroundings.