



## Media Update

IMMEDIATE RELEASE – ALL MEDIA –

# Commonly Used Phrases at Fire Scenes

The San Francisco Fire Department employs a specific set of terms and phrases to communicate critical points at the scene of a structural fire. These terms are not just tools for reporting but an essential responsibility for media outlets to disseminate accurate information about a fire's progress to the public. By correctly using these phrases, media outlets ensure the public is well-informed about fire incidents.

**Box**—This designation is for a 911 call reporting a fire. When SFFD arrives on the scene, they provide an initial assessment and may then declare a working fire. You will hear a four-digit number that gives SFFD the geographic location. For example, BOX 1234 would send firefighters to the 100 block of California Street.

**'Working Fire'** -- This term is used when units have arrived on the scene and confirmed the presence of an active fire, marking the start of the firefighting operation. It is a crucial indicator for media outlets reporting on the situation, as it signifies the immediate need for public awareness and safety messaging.

**Fire attack**—A defensive attack is an exterior fire suppression activity that protects against exposure. Defensive operations are actions intended to control a fire by limiting its spread to a defined area and avoiding the commitment of personnel and equipment to dangerous areas.

**Water on the Fire** – Firefighters have found the seat or heaviest portion of the fire and can begin fighting it directly.

**Fire Contained**—The spread of the fire has been halted, although it may remain in some areas.

**Under Control**—The fire is determined to be extinguished.

**Primary Search** – A primary search is a rapid and systematic search for survivable victims and locating the seat of fire during the initial stages of firefighting. It is one of the most critical and potentially dangerous tasks performed on the fireground. A traditional primary search relies on teams of two with visual, voice, or physical contact, utilizing the recognized techniques of wall contact and directional turns. The primary search is the best chance to save lives in an incident.

**Secondary Search**—The secondary search is far more systematic after the primary search is completed. Ideally, it is performed by a different crew and must be thorough. The search crew tears apart each room, hallway, closet, etc., to ensure that nothing (nobody) is left unfound. This is done when fire conditions are relatively minimized, making it easier to see and hear than during the primary search.

**Rapid Intervention Team (RIC)**- Rapid intervention crews (RICs) or rapid intervention teams (RITs) are teams of firefighters who act as standby rescuers on a fire scene. They are dedicated crews of firefighters assigned for rapid deployment to rescue lost or trapped members. Their duties involve monitoring the situation and aiding firefighters and civilian rescue if necessary.

**Safety Chief**—The Fire Safety Officer plays an essential role in maintaining the safety of premises and people by assessing fire risks, developing fire behavior, and ensuring the follow-through of fire safety protocols.

**Exposure**- a fire exposure is defined as “A fire resulting from another fire outside a building, structure, or vehicle, or a fire that extends to an outside property from a building, structure, or vehicle.” For example, if a building fire ignites a truck parked outside, the truck fire is an exposure fire.

**Building sides**- Looking at a fire building (A-Alpha), the **exposure** to the left is B-Bravo, to the rear is C-Charlie, and the left side is D-Delta

**Shelter in Place**— Find a place of refuge in one’s present location and stay there until instructed otherwise, typically by a public safety directive during an emergency: *“The SFFD urges those at 1223 Main Street to shelter in place after reports of a fire producing smoke in this area.”*

**Evacuations**--We often evacuate the fire building and surrounding buildings. We do this with on-site staff, including Law enforcement. This does not require a public announcement. In larger fires, we will establish evacuations and announce them with the assistance of the media.

**Overhaul / Search for Extension** – Firefighters will use tools to open void spaces in the walls, ceiling, and floor to confirm the fire has not spread. Any burned material that can be removed will be placed in the street to avoid possible reignition and allow for investigation.

**Salvage** – The preservation of property in and around the fire area. The act of saving goods from damage or destruction.

**Decon**- Fire decontamination is the process of cleaning gear and equipment after a fire to remove contaminants.

**Under Investigation**—On arrival, no active fire was found, and units are investigating the source of the alarm.

**This fire is Under Investigation**- Investigators will determine the Origin and Cause of the fire.

**Point of Origin**—In the context of fire investigation, the point of origin means the precise location where the substance's initial ignition took place; usually, the location of the heat source is indicated. The point of origin is more specific than the area of origin.

**Cause of fire**- As used in fire investigation, identifying and describing a particular fire's ignition agent or heat source. For example, some causes could be “match ignited and thrown into combustibles,” “friction from an electric motor belt from thrown bearings,” and incendiary origin, such as a Molotov cocktail ignited and thrown into a structure and ignited drapes.

We rely on facts, not speculation. The cause of fires is rarely known immediately and can take weeks or months to determine. In addition, the area of origin of the fire may not be immediately evident. For this reason, firefighters do not comment on suspected causes of a fire. Only after investigation and interviewing potential witnesses will a cause and area of origin be determined.

## Medical Terminology at Fires

**Medical group 'MGS' or 'RC'** —Every working fire receives a medical unit and a Rescue Captain (RC). This group provides immediate care for injured community members or firefighters.

**ABCs** — Airway, Breathing, Circulation.

**AED** – Automated External Defibrillator. The device that delivers electric shocks to someone experiencing a cardiac emergency. All department cardiac monitors are equipped with an AED.

**ALS** – Advanced Life Support. An apparatus is described as ALS if at least one member is a paramedic.

**AMS** – Altered Mental Status.

**BLS** – Basic Life Support. An apparatus is described as BLS if no paramedic is on staff and all members are EMTs.

**BP** – Blood pressure.

**BVM** – Bag Valve Mask. Handheld devices provide ventilation and oxygenation to patients who are not breathing or are not breathing adequately on their own. The terms “Bagged,” “Bagging,” or “Being Bagged” may also be used to describe the action.

**Code 2 Transport** – Hospital transport of a stable patient with no lights or sirens.

**Code 3 Transport** – Hospital transport of an unstable or critical patient with lights and sirens.

**C-Spine**—Cervical Spine. This term is usually used as “holding C-spine” or “taking C-spine precautions” and describes the action of holding the head, neck, and spine in the natural linear position.

**CPR** – Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation. An emergency medical procedure consisting of chest compressions and artificial ventilation of a patient whose heart has stopped and is not breathing spontaneously.

**ED** – Emergency Department.

**EMS** – Emergency Medical Services.

**GCS** – Glasgow Coma Scale. A clinical scale is used to measure a person’s level of consciousness.

**MCI** – Mass Casualty Incident. An incident where management services and the healthcare system are overwhelmed.

**Triage** – A process to determine the order of treatment priority to patients. It is commonly used when the number of patients outnumbers providers or resources.

**Protocols**- [Protocols and policies for emergency medical services](#)

**\*\*If you know a term or phrase we use and are curious about it, please let us know so we can add it.**