

**DEPARTMENT of PUBLIC SAFETY  
DIVISION of FIRE  
COLUMBUS, OHIO**

September 8, 2011

**SUBJECT:** Administration  
**TITLE:** SOP Issued– Vacant Structure Fire Response  
**PURPOSE:** Implementation  
**ORIGINATING BUREAU:** Office of the Chief  
**EFFECTIVE DATE:** September 10, 2011  
**DISCARD DATE:** December 31, 2011

The following SOP has been revised:

**SOP #:** 02-03-16  
**Name:** Vacant Structure Fire Response  
**Status:** Issued  
**Effective Date:** September 10, 2011

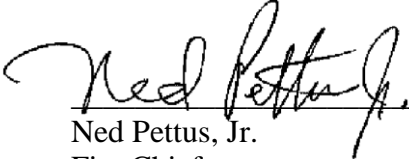
It is the intent of the Division to periodically revise the SOP Manual and to make the revisions available on the Intranet.


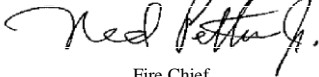
The revisions are available from the [Division Publications](#) link on the Division of Fire Intranet home page.

**NOTE: Please be mindful that due to the two sided printing of the original SOP Manual the page breaks may not line up correctly.**

Any member unable to obtain SOP revisions from the Intranet should contact Lt. Guay at ext. 5257, Research and Development.

  
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Gregory A. Paxton  
Executive Officer

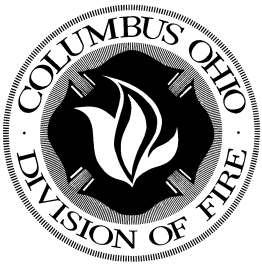
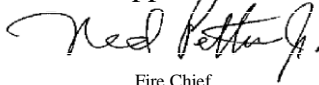
  
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Ned Pettus, Jr.  
Fire Chief

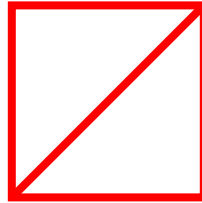
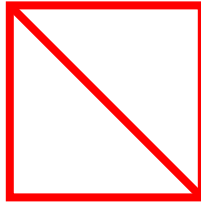
	<b>Standard Operating Procedures</b>	
	Subject: Vacant Structure Fire Response	
	S.O.P. Number 02-03-16 Vol-CH-Cat.Sub	Approved  Fire Chief
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		Revised Date:

- I. **PURPOSE:** To provide operational policy guidance and fire attack action at occupancies that are identified as vacant structures.
- II. **RESPONSIBILITY:** It shall be the responsibility of each member to know, understand, and utilize these procedures as they apply to the situation at hand. It shall further be the responsibility of all Division Officers to train their subordinates in the proper application of these procedures and to implement and enforce the use of these procedures.
- III. **INTENT:** It is the intent of this policy to establish procedures to minimize the possibility of serious injury or death in vacant structures through the application of limited fire attack options. While the intent of this policy is to offer guidance and a standardized response to fires in vacant structures with emphasis on safety, the Incident Commander is granted flexibility in the application of the SOP due to circumstances that may be unique to a given incident.
- IV. **DEFINITION:** A structure shall be considered vacant if:
  - A. The structure is not being used for its designed purpose, is absent of a permanent occupant, and is presently unoccupied.
  - B. It has been identified by the Fire Division and/or the Columbus Building Department and/or Code Enforcement Division as a vacant structure using the above definition or relevant definition from applicable building code provisions.
- V. **MARKING SYSTEM FOR VACANT STRUCTURES** - In the future, some vacant structures may be identified to indicate the level of hazard that exists. The identification marking of vacant structures will be accomplished by using high visibility contrasting marking paint or posted signs. Identification markings will be located on the front and rear of the structure. Additional markings may be placed on larger vacant buildings as necessary. Additional markings may be added, such as an arrow pointing to the safest point of entry into structure. The size of painted markings will be approximately 12"x12" or larger.

For the purpose of this policy, structures meeting the criteria to be defined as a vacant structure shall have one of the following classifications:

- A. **Vacant structure with MINOR structural compromise** – Interior hazards exist to such a degree that interior operations can be conducted **ONLY** after examination and with extreme caution.

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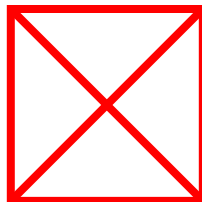
In a structure marked with a square and a single diagonal line extending from one corner to the opposite corner, **offensive firefighting can take place with extreme caution.**

If offensive operations are undertaken in a vacant structure with minor structural compromise, the following actions should be considered:


- i. Ventilation shall be coordinated with the fire attack.
- ii. Two means of egress shall be maintained on every floor of the structure.
- iii. Identified hazards shall be communicated to all personnel on the scene.
- iv. Minimal personnel should be utilized for fire control efforts within the structure.

*\*\* It is important to remember that a structure identified to have only minor compromise can, over time, deteriorate and become a structure with SEVERE compromise. \*\**

- B. **Vacant structure with SEVERE structural compromise** – Every effort must be made to conduct operations from the exterior **ONLY** (with limited exception for civilian life safety).



In a structure marked with a square and two diagonal lines extending from corner to opposite corner, **offensive operations may only be conducted in situations where a viable victim is visually seen or heard and where immediate action could prevent loss of life.** Immediately following any rescue attempt, all remaining firefighting action will be accomplished in a defensive mode only.

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**VI. ATTACK PRECAUTIONS** – Initial arriving companies, who observe and identify a working fire in a vacant structure, will notify the FAO and the incident commander of this information upon arrival. Prior to the initiation of an interior attack in a vacant structure **with no civilian life safety threat(s)**, personnel must psychologically adjust to a “**NO RUSH**” approach, as the greatest life hazard is that of the fire personnel who are entering the structure. In this instance; a slower and more cautious approach to conduct operations is appropriate. More time than usual should be devoted to the size-up of vacant structures.

The structural stability of the vacant building or parts of the building will be the most important aspect determining the initial attack strategy (interior v’s exterior).

Vacant structures promote the rapid spread of fire, both vertically and horizontally. In addition; possible collapse and extension to exposures requires the rapid application of water to achieve timely fire control and extinguishment.


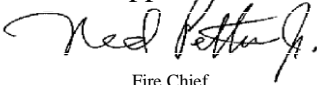
The use of a minimum number of personnel should be used at all times based upon the hazard profile for any given incident.

**VII. HAZARDS TO CONSIDER FOR STRUCTURES WITH STRUCTURAL COMPROMISE**

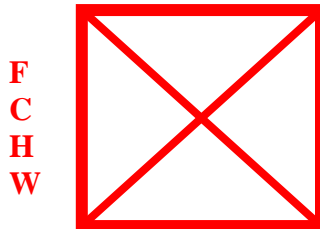
- A. Unusually heavy water load on roof due to poor drainage.
- B. Holes in floors
- C. Holes in roof, open, missing or broken skylights.
- D. Missing stairway treads and or railings.
- E. Weakened parapets.
- F. Breached or missing fire walls.
- G. Unstable front or rear porches, stairs or fire escapes.
- H. Damage from previous fires.

**VIII. HAZARD SYMBOLS USED WITH MARKING SYSTEM** - The following letters may be used to indicate specific hazards identified in marked vacant structures:

<p><b>F</b> - Floor hazard  <b>R</b> - Roof hazard  <b>W</b> - Wall hazard  <b>H</b> - Holes in structure  <b>S</b> - Stairs compromised  <b>C</b> - Chimney</p>
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An example of the hazard symbols used with the marking system are provided below:



#### **IX. HAZARDS TO CONSIDER FOR STRUCTURES WITH SEVERE STRUCTURAL COMPROMISE**

- A. Structure may be in imminent danger of collapse.
- B. Large holes in floors.
- C. Sagging floors, roofs and or roof beams.
- D. Missing girders and or floor beams.
- E. Missing and/or eccentrically loaded columns.
- F. Structurally significant cracks in masonry walls.
- G. Open and/or unprotected vertical and/or horizontal voids.
- H. Damage from previous fires.
- I. Structure may have “CONDEMNED” signs displayed.

- X. SAFETY** - The life safety hazard at vacant structure fires is almost solely that of members of the Division of Fire. At all times, operations are to be conducted in a disciplined and planned manner with emphasis on the safety of operating personnel. Because vacant structures tend to have low victim potential, they should be searched within the limits of safety using a reasonable number of personnel after building conditions and size-up have been evaluated. The intent of this SOP is to minimize the total risk and exposure of fire personnel in response to vacant structure fires. Initial arriving companies, who observe and identify a vacant structure, will notify the FAO and the incident commander upon arrival that the structure is vacant. Structures identified in this manner may require defensive firefighting tactics and the protection of exposures only, with an emphasis on minimizing risk to firefighting personnel. **Unmarked vacant structures shall be approached with the same degree of extreme caution as marked structures. The incident commander has sole responsibility for the operations and safety of all personnel.**