Do you see what I hear?
Situational Awareness for Communications Professionals
The Academy is suited for individuals and teams working in high-stress, high-consequence environments.

13 courses covering situational awareness from A-Z and everything in between.

For more information, visit: SAMatters.com
Situational awareness

The ability to perceive AND understand what is happening around you (in context to how time is passing) and then, in turn, be able to accurately predict future events… in time to avoid bad outcomes.
Perception

Using the senses to capture information…
(clues and cues) about the current situation

• “I pay attention.”
• “I keep my head on a swivel.”
• “I look up, down, and all around.”
• “I actively listen.”
• “I conduct a size-up.”

➤ What’s happening right now?

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SITUATIONAL AWARENESS MATTERS!
Understanding

Making sense out of what is:
Seen, heard, felt, tasted & smelled

• Comprehension
• Moment of clarity
  ➢ “What does this mean?”
  ➢ “Is this what I expected?”
Sensory Conflict
Where in your brain do you develop your understanding?
Memory Recall

Can trigger the 6th sense.
Intuition: Knowing...

Without knowing...

How you know.
Prediction

Anticipating future events before they happen.

– Running mental “what if” options
  – Forecasting
  – Projections
– Begin... with the end in mind
Prediction

Anticipating future events before they happen.

– Where is this event headed?
  – How long is it going to take to get there?
  – Every event unfolds at a certain pace (speed)
  – Keeping track of the passage of time.
The ability to perceive AND understand what is happening in your environment (in context to how time is passing) and then, in turn, be able to accurately predict future events... in time to avoid bad outcomes
Prediction

Anticipating future events before they happen.

– Setting Expectations

  – Can we change the outcome?
  – Are the conditions right?
  – Do we have the resources?
  – Can we operate faster than conditions are changing?

– How much time do we have?
Your Mind’s Eye
Sensory inputs
  +
Visual imagery
  +
Memory Search
  +
Forecasting
Situational Awareness Barriers

Anything that blocks:

- Perception
- Understanding
- Prediction
The 9-1-1 caller’s words paint a picture of what is happening on the mind of the communications professional.
The first “awareness” a responder develops about the call comes from the words shared by the communications professional.
Pre-Arrival Lens
Confirmation Bias

A responder may only see what they expect to see... and sometimes nothing more.
The brain can be VERY stubborn.
Multitasking
Confabulation
Short-Term Memory Overload
Time Distortion
Auditory Exclusion & Sensory Domination
Tunneled Hearing
Best Practices to consider for improving:

Communications Professionals and Responder

Situational Awareness
Your agency may not be able or may not want to implement some of these recommendations.

Prioritize based on what will give you the greatest benefit.
Implement slowly, with a plan.

Coordinate implementation with your response agencies.

Some of the recommendations are for you to do, individually.
Shared Situational Awareness

CONSIDER

Talk slowly and calmly.

Don't just throw paint on the canvas.

The words you use and how you say them are important.
CONSIDER

Transferring Understanding:

Information:
Volume
Complexity
Detailed
As a general rule:

In high-stress, time compressed situations... MORE information is NOT better.
Full communications loop
• **Connect**  
  – The sender captures the receiver’s attention.

• **Convey**  
  – Sender states the message.

• **Clarify**  
  – The receiver repeats the message.

• **Confirm**  
  – The sender affirms the receiver understood or corrects the misunderstanding.
Remind responders to complete a size-up.
Respect the limits of your short-term memory.

Document it.

Use memory aids: (checklists and worksheets).
Manage your stress:

• Breathing Technique
• Stress Inoculation
• Stress Transference
In the multitasking environment

Writing it down.

WARNING!
Sensory domination.
In the absence of facts or when there is conflicting information...

Your brain can write its own script.
CONSIDER

Time Distortion

Elapsed Time Notifications

Example:
10 minute ETN
CONSIDER

• Joint Training sessions (realistic).

• Ride-Alongs for communications professionals

• Sit-ins for first responders.
CONSIDER

• Consider providing field support during incidents.

• Consider having responders can provide Communications Center support during incidents.
Align communications center SOPs with response agency SOPs.
Communications Professional
Overload

Team approach

• Working in tandem - good

• Alternating or relieving - DANGER!
Telephone call taker - radio operator disconnect

• The call taker filters information.

• Under stress, critical information can be forgotten (or simply not shared).
Sensory Overload

• The good news is: You don’t have to process the visual incident scene information.

• The bad news is: You have to read a LOT! Reading is a slow form of information processing and knowledge transfer.
Auditory Exclusion & Sensory Domination.

Listen for lack of acknowledgment of critical radio traffic. It should be assumed that if it is not acknowledged, it was not heard.
Accountability Checks

• Tracking:
  • Crew Sizes
  • Crew Locations
  • Crew Tasks
  • Progress Reports
The communications center and the agencies you serve benefit from having a mutually understand of:

- What each agency does.
- What each does not do.
- How each does it.
- How each can support the other.
How to be supportive is **NOT** an intuitive skill set. If not taught, the understanding may come from TV and movies. Or confabulated.
QA and QI Process

• Conduct post-incident debriefings.

• Ask for feedback from the agencies you serve on how you can improve.

• Provide same feedback to agencies you serve
The outcome of high-risk, high consequence incidents depends heavily on communications professionals and responders developing and maintaining shared situational awareness.
Books and videos

Situational Awareness Matters

Volume 1
Fifty lessons to improve situational awareness and high risk decision making.
Dr. Richard B. Gasaway
Situational Awareness Matters!

Volume 2
Thirty lessons to improve situational awareness and high risk decision making.
Dr. Richard B. Gasaway
Situational Awareness Matters!

Volume 3
Thirty lessons to improve situational awareness and high risk decision making.
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SAMatters.com
Situational Awareness Matters!
Helping all members of the first responder community see the bad things coming... in time to avoid bad outcomes.

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