

Flawed Situational Awareness: The stealth killer of first responders

The background of the slide is a dark, atmospheric collage. It features several emergency response scenes: a large fire with bright orange flames, a helicopter in flight, a boat with people on board, and a person in a dark suit standing in the foreground. A large, semi-transparent skull is superimposed over the center of the image, with the text 'The stealth killer' positioned within its upper jaw area.

Dr. Richard B. Gasaway
Fire Chief (ret.)

Situational Awareness Matters!

SAMatters.com

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Richard B. Gasaway, Ph.D.

Gasaway Consulting Group, LLC
1769 Lexington Avenue North
St. Paul, MN 55113-6522
Phone: 612-548-4424

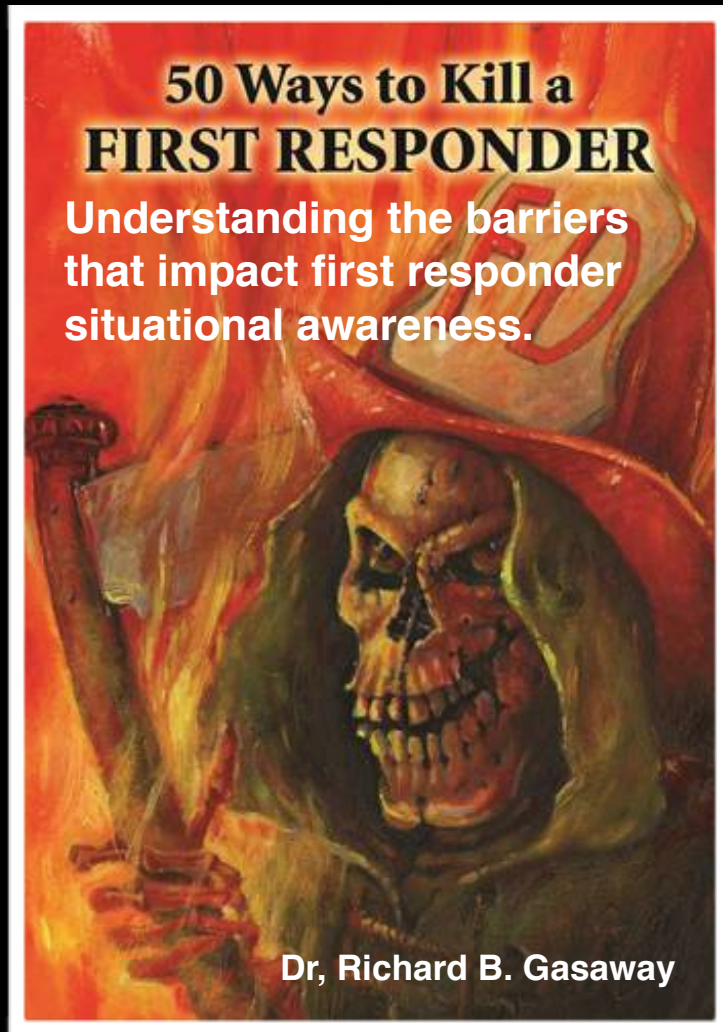


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please contact
Dr. Gasaway at

www.SAMatters.com

Phone: 612-548-4424

rich@RichGasaway.com



This program is available
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Situational awareness

It is your 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

The Situational Awareness Development Process

Perception

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

- **Pay attention...**
- **Keep your head on a swivel...**
- **Look up, down, and all around...**
- **Actively listening...**
- **Size-up**
- **“What’s happening right now?”**

The Situational Awareness Development Process

Understanding

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

- **Comprehension**
- **Moment of clarity**
 - **“What does all this mean?”**
 - **“Is this what I expected?”**

Intuition



Pattern Matching

Tacit Knowledge



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There are 5 problems with intuition:

It is hard to understand the origin of intuition.

It is easy to dismiss or distrust intuition.

It is easy to overlook the value & misunderstand the context of the warning.

It is hard to justify decisions without facts & data.

Intuition can be wrong.



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Prediction

Anticipating future events before they happen.

- Run options in your head
 - Forecasting
 - Projections
- 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.
- Setting Expectations
 - Can we change the outcome?

Sensory Processing
+
Visual imagery
+
Intuition
+
Imagination

Situational Awareness Barriers

Anything that blocks:

- Perception
- Understanding
- Prediction

A 9-1-1 caller uses words to paint
a picture of what is happening on the
mind of the dispatcher.

The first “awareness”
a responder develops about
the call comes from the
dispatcher’s words.

Pre-Arrival Lens

CONSIDER THIS

Conduct an original size-up to to improve the accuracy of your situational awareness.

Avoid making premature decisions based on assumed information.



Confirmation Bias

Task Fixation

CONSIDER
THIS

The bad news is:
It is extremely common.

The good news is:
You can control it.

Meta-awareness.

Mindfulness.



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Stress-Induced Narrowing of Sensory Input (Tunnel Vision)

CONSIDER
THIS

The good news is:
It's a rare phenomenon.

The bad news is:
Once it happens, you cannot control it.

Breathing technique.

Stress inoculation.



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Multitasking

CONSIDER THIS

As you alternate attention,
understand information can be lost.

Write things down.

Sensory domination dulls other senses.



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Mission Myopia

CONSIDER
THIS

The bad news is:
This is taught and reinforced in
our training and our culture.

The good news is:
Behavior can be changed through teaching,
coaching, practice and mentoring.

Teach the process of decision making.



What are the two primary ways firefighters die at residential dwelling fires?

Change Blindness

Urgency

CONSIDER THIS

Avoid taking shortcuts, especially those related to SA and decision making.

Avoid getting caught in the mindset:
“There’s no time to waste!”

Time Distortion

CONSIDER THIS

Keep track of the passage of time.

Elapsed time notifications:

The faster the incident conditions are changing,
the shorter the timeframe for ETNs.



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Over Confidence

Complacency

CONSIDER
THIS

Avoid “created” risk.

Don’t celebrate your near-miss events.

Don’t let your guard down... EVER!



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Automatic Performance (robotic action)

CONSIDER
THIS

In training, ask: Is this realistic?

Teach situational awareness.

Teach decision making.

Teach responders how to:
Think... Then Decide... Then Act.



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Subconscious Programming

Routine tasks

Mind Drift

Fear

Failure

Consequence

Embarrassment

Ridicule

Peer Pressure

Supervisor Pressure

Media Expectations

Political Expectations

Self Expectations

Culture

Short-Term Memory Overload

Confabulation

CONSIDER THIS

Be aware that in the absence of facts,
or if you cannot remember the facts,
your brain can make up its own reality.

Be alert for differing
“Perceptions of reality.”



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Communications Issues

Auditory Exclusion

CONSIDER THIS

Determine what radio traffic is:
Critical, essential, non-essential.

Use standardized terms & phrases.

Use a cadence.



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Motion-Induced Blindness

Hallucinations and Reverse Hallucinations

Flawed Perceptions of Reality

Lack of Shared Mental Models

Flawed Outcome Expectations

Hindsight Bias

Barriers can steal away your
Situational Awareness

**And there are more
than 100 of them!**

Situational Awareness:

The foundation for good decision making.

Situational awareness

It is your 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

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Situational Awareness
Best Practices



Dr. Richard B. Gasaway

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Situational Awareness Matters!

Helping you see the bad things coming...
in time to change the outcome.

If I can help you in any way, please contact me:

Richard B. Gasaway

www.SAMatters.com

