Flawed Situational Awareness: The stealth killer of first responders

Dr. Richard B. Gasaway
Fire Chief (ret.)
Situational Awareness Matters!

SAMatters.com
If you are interested in hosting a program please contact Dr. Gasaway at

www.SAMatters.com

Phone: 612-548-4424

rich@RichGasaway.com
This program is available as a 3 part DVD series.

If you are interested in purchasing it:

Click the “store” link on the SAMatters.com website
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
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.
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
Conduct an original size-up to improve the accuracy of your situational awareness.

Avoid making premature decisions based on assumed information.
Confirmation Bias
Task Fixation
The bad news is:
It is extremely common.

The good news is:
You can control it.

Meta-awareness.

Mindfulness.
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.
Multitasking
As you alternate attention, understand information can be lost.

Write things down.

Sensory domination dulls other senses.
Mission Myopia
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
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
Keep track of the passage of time.

elapsed time notifications: The faster the incident conditions are changing, the shorter the timeframe for ETNs.
Over Confidence
Complacency
CONSIDER THIS

Avoid “created” risk.

Don’t celebrate your near-miss events.

Don’t let your guard down... EVER!
Automatic Performance (robotic action)
In training, ask: Is this realistic?

Teach situational awareness.
Teach decision making.

Teach responders how to:
Think… Then Decide… Then Act.
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
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.”
Communications Issues
Auditory Exclusion
Determine what radio traffic is: Critical, essential, non-essential.

Use standardized terms & phrases.

Use a cadence.
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.
If you want to learn more…

Join the SA Matters community.

And receive a special report:

www.SAMatters.com

25 Situational Awareness Best Practices

Dr. Richard B. Gasaway
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