



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

In the Matter of Robert Urso III, Fire
Lieutenant (PM2020F), Carteret

**FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION
OF THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION**

CSC Docket No. 2025-2129

Examination Appeal

ISSUED: July 2, 2025 (ABR)

Robert Urso III appeals the scoring of the oral portion of the promotional examination for Fire Lieutenant (PM2020F), Carteret. It is noted that the appellant failed the subject examination.

This two-part examination consisted of a written multiple-choice portion and an oral portion. Candidates were required to pass the written portion of the examination, and then were ranked on their performance on both portions of the examination. The test was worth 80 percent of the final score and seniority was worth the remaining 20 percent. Of the test weights, 35.90% of the score was the written multiple-choice portion, 22.04% was the technical score for the evolving exercise, 7.45% was the supervision score for the evolving exercise, 5.71% was the oral communication score for the evolving exercise, 23.20% was the technical score for the arriving exercise, 5.71% was the oral communication score for the arriving exercise.

The oral portion of the Fire Lieutenant examination consisted of two scenarios: a fire scene simulation with questions designed to measure the knowledge of safe rescue tactics and procedures to safeguard citizens, supervision of fire fighters and the ability to assess fire conditions and hazards in an evolving incident on the fireground (Evolving scenario); and a fire scene simulation designed to measure the knowledge of safe rescue tactics and procedures to safeguard citizens, supervision of firefighters and the ability to plan strategies and tactics based upon a building's structure and condition (Arriving scenario). Knowledge of supervision was measured

by a question in the Evolving scenario, and was scored for that scenario. For the Evolving scenario, candidates were provided with a 15-minute preparation period, and candidates had 10 minutes to respond. For the Arriving scenario, a five-minute preparation period was given, and candidates had 10 minutes to respond.

The candidates' responses were scored on technical knowledge and oral communication ability. Prior to the administration of the exam, a panel of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) determined the scoring criteria, using generally approved fire command practices, firefighting practices, and reference materials. Scoring decisions were based on SME-approved possible courses of action (PCAs) including those actions that must be taken to resolve the situation as presented. Only those oral responses that depicted relevant behaviors that were observable and could be quantified were assessed in the scoring process. It is noted that candidates were told the following prior to beginning their presentations for each scenario: "In responding to the questions, be as specific as possible. Do not assume or take for granted that general actions will contribute to your score."

Candidates were rated on a five-point scale, with 5 as the optimal response, 4 as a more than acceptable passing response, 3 as a minimally acceptable passing response, 2 as a less than acceptable response, and 1 as a much less than acceptable response. For each of the scenes, and for oral communication, the requirements for each score were defined.

On the Evolving scenario, the appellant scored a 2 on the technical component, a 1 on the Supervision component, and a 5 on the oral communication component. On the Arriving scenario, the appellant scored a 4 on the technical component and a 5 on the oral communication component.

The appellant challenges his score on the technical component of the Evolving scenario. As a result, the appellant's test materials, video, and a listing of PCAs for the scenario were reviewed.

The Evolving scenario involves a response to a reported fire at a single-story, steel-frame structure where the candidate is the first-level fire supervisor of Engine 5 and Battalion 1 is the incident commander. Beyond the parking area is an adjacent property with debris from a demolished wood-frame building that is in the process of being cleared away. Upon arrival, the candidate sees smoke emanating from the corner of the building between sides C and D. Battalion 1 establishes command, and one of the employees informs them that the fire started in the kitchen. The employee also says that the automatic hood suppression system failed to activate. They are unsure if everyone has evacuated the building. Battalion 1 orders the candidate to establish a primary water supply and begin fireground operations. Question 1 asks the candidate, as the supervisor of Engine 5, to describe in detail what orders they will give their crew to complete their orders from Battalion 1. The prompt for Question 2 indicates that during fireground operations, a message over the radio advises that the debris at the adjacent property has caught fire and is growing

rapidly. It further advises that Battalion 1 has ordered the candidate and the candidate's crew to control the debris fire. It then asks what immediate actions the candidate should take or ensure are taken.

The SME awarded the appellant a score of 2 on the technical component of the Evolving scenario, based upon a finding that the appellant failed to identify a number of mandatory and additional responses, including, in relevant part, ensuring the fire was contained/extinguished in response to Question 2. On appeal, the appellant argues that he covered this PCA by mentioning the engine company's "objective [was] to extinguish" and reporting that the "fire [was] out" during the interior attack of the restaurant in Question 1, and having his crew fight defensively and reporting that the debris fire in Question 2 was under control. In support, the appellant cites passages from John Norman, *Fire Officer's Handbook of Tactics* (4th ed. 2012) and New Jersey Division of Fire Safety, *Model Fire Incident Management Standard Operating Guides – Booklet 9* (Apr. 13, 2011).

In reply, at the outset, as noted above, candidates were told the following prior to beginning their presentations for each scenario: "In responding to the questions, be as specific as possible. Do not assume or take for granted that general actions will contribute to your score." The appellant's appeal essentially amounts to a request to ignore these clear instructions and award him credit for general actions. Nevertheless, in the interest of completeness, a review of the appellant's presentation confirms the SME's determination that the appellant failed to ensure the debris fire referenced in Question 2 was contained and extinguished. Initially, because the Question 2 PCA of ensuring the debris fire was controlled/extinguished was a mandatory response, the appellant had to specifically address it during the portion of his response covering Question 2. As such, the actions he points to from the Question 1 portion of his presentation could not be used to gain credit for the Question 2 PCA at issue. Further, while the appellant does correctly note that he indicated during his Question 2 response that he would utilize defensive techniques and that "[a]fter controlling the debris fire, [he would] report to the incident commander the fire has been under control," these statements fell short of the required specificity. Specifically, instructing the crew to operate defensively was a distinct Question 2 PCA which spoke to the mode of operation and was a PCA for which the appellant received credit. Finally, both containment and extinguishment needed to be directly addressed for purposes of this PCA but the statement that "[a]fter controlling the debris fire, [he would] report to the incident commander the fire has been under control," only made a passing reference to containing the spread of the fire and did not speak to extinguishing the debris fire. Consequently, it was insufficient to award him credit for the PCA at issue. Accordingly, the appellant has failed to sustain his burden of proof and his rating of 2 on the technical component of the Evolving scenario is affirmed.

CONCLUSION


A thorough review of the appellant's submissions and the test materials indicates that the decision below is amply supported by the record and the appellant has failed to meet his burden of proof in this matter.

ORDER

Therefore, it is ordered that this appeal be denied.

This is the final administrative determination in this matter. Any further review should be pursued in a judicial forum.

DECISION RENDERED BY THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION ON
THE 2ND DAY OF JULY, 2025



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