Critical tasking plays an important role in determining and assigning the appropriate resources to specific tactical assignments based on risk. If the department is not trained or equipped to mitigate certain types of incidents, mutual aid is then included in figuring the critical tasks assignments to achieve the effective response force (ERF).

Determining Response Capabilities

The first undertaking a department must complete is to establish the capabilities to respond to and mitigate all incidents based on risk. One method to accomplish this is to initiate a resource inventory. Every departments understands its own capabilities and what type of incidents they can mitigate on their own. A resource inventory includes the assets available to a department, including mutual aid that is capable of responding to and assisting at an incident. This is easily accomplished and is not based on the size of the department but based on the resources available, either internally or with the use of automatic and mutual aid.

A resource inventory can be completed whether your department is a fully paid, combination, or volunteer department. It incorporates:
- Staffing
- Availability and reliability to respond
- Travel distances and terrain
- Training
- Communications
- Pre-fire plans

Other factors that must be considered include:
- Population density; urban, suburban, and rural coverage areas
- Community demographics including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and historic areas
- Critical infrastructure; electrical distribution, natural gas, water delivery, and transportation

All of these combined can then help develop the blueprint for determining and assigning the appropriate resources to complete the critical tasks.

The Critical Task to Resource, Response, and Capability Connection

Let's dissect the connection among critical task, available resources, response, and capability a little further. Again, this can be determined regardless of the size or complexity of the department.

Considerations include:

- *Staffing:* Paid, combination, volunteer, number of personnel on a piece of apparatus.
- *Availability/Reliability:* What percentage of the time is the apparatus and crew available to respond promptly from their assigned station?
- *Travel Distance/Terrain:* How long will it take the resource to get to the incident?
- *Training:* Are response personnel trained to the level of the assigned task?
- *Communications:* Is it seamless or are there inherent delays due to multiple communications centers involved in dispatching resources?

Critical Tasking

Using the criteria above, let's assemble the critical tasks that need to be accomplished based on two common incidents along with deployment models consistent with accredited departments. It should be noted that department specific deployment should be based on minimum staffing as that is the most consistent approach to reach an Effective Response Force (ERF).

Scenario: Moderate risk structure fire in a 1500 square foot single family residence
> *Assumption:* All resources are in quarters and available
> *ERF:* 17 personnel assigned to the initial critical tasks
> *Initial Task Assignments:*

Incident Command/Safety	1
Fire Attack, 1st Line	2
Back Up, 2nd Line	2
Water Supply/Operators	2
Ventilation/Utilities	4
Search	3
RIC	3
Total	*17*

Scenario: Moderate risk technical rescue, auto accident with entrapment, one patient

Assumption: All resources are in quarters and available

ERF: 12 personnel assigned to the initial critical tasks

Initial Task Assignments:

Incident Command/Safety	1
Extrication/Rescue Group	4
Suppression/Safety Line	2
Patient Care/Transport	2
Water Supply/Operator	1
Support Functions	2
Total	*12*

Let's circle back to the resource, response, and capability connection to see how a department will determine how it will assemble the resources, the appropriate number of personnel to achieve the ERF, and make sure that all critical tasks are accomplished.

Staffing: What is the minimum number of personnel that typically respond to an incident on a resource (engine, truck, squad, ambulance, other), 2, 3, 4?

Impact: May have to send additional resources if staffing is too low to meet ERF.

Availability/Reliability: What is the percentage of time the resource(s) will be in the station and available?

Impact: If you rely on a resource from a very busy station, that resource may be unavailable on a regular basis to respond, delaying the ability to establish the ERF.

Travel Distance/Terrain: In rural areas the travel distance and terrain must be considered. In urban areas, heavy traffic and gridlock is prevalent.

Impact: Can cause delays in response. Do additional resources get added to the initial dispatch due to the potential travel time delay?

Training: Are your own personnel and your mutual aid partners appropriately trained?

Impact: It's imperative personnel are trained to the task assigned. If your department isn't trained in certain specialties (auto extrication, hazardous materials, below-grade rescue, water tender operations), where does the department get those resources and how long will it take to respond to an incident?

Communications: Are there any delays in call processing and alerting stations of the incident? If a second dispatch center is involved for mutual aid, what is the lag time with that communications function?

Impact: Considerable delays can and will occur based on information transfer.

Conclusion
Critical tasking, the ability to assign resources to a specific task in order to mitigate an incident, is not a complicated undertaking. Critical tasking will change based on the level of risk and the complexity and specifics of the emergency. By taking time in advance of an incident, every department, large/medium/small, urban/rural, has the ability to assemble the resources necessary to accomplish the critical tasks, fulfill the Effective Response Force, and safely mitigate the incident.