



**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

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

In the Matter of Christopher Steitz,  
Fire Captain (PM0158A),  
Union Township

Examination Appeal

CSC Docket No. 2020-2365

**ISSUED: OCTOBER 2, 2020 (RE)**

Christopher Steitz appeals his score for the oral portion of the promotional examination for second-level Fire Captain (PM0158A), Union Township. It is noted that the appellant passed the subject examination with a final score of 79.720 and his name appears as the third ranked eligible on the subject list.

It is noted for the record that this two-part examination consisted of a written multiple-choice portion and an oral portion. The test was worth 70 percent of the final score and seniority was worth the remaining 30 percent. The various portions of the test were weighted as follows: written multiple choice portion, 35.26%; technical score for the Evolving Scenario, 20.77%; oral communication score for the Evolving Scenario, 2.79%; technical score for the Administration Scenario, 13.56%; oral communication score for the Administration Scenario, 2.79%; technical score for the Arrival Scenario, 22.04%; and oral communication score for the Arrival Scenario, 2.79%.

The oral portion of the second level Fire Captain examination consisted of three scenarios: a fire scenario simulation with questions designed to measure knowledge and abilities in assessING risk (Evolving); a simulation designed to measure technical knowledge and abilities in administrative duties (Administration); and a fire scenario simulation designed to measure technical knowledge and abilities in strategy and attack plan and hazmat (Arrival). For the Evolving and Administration scenarios, candidates were provided with a 25-minute preparation period for both, and candidates had 10 minutes to respond to each. For the Arrival 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. For a performance to be acceptable, other than for oral communication, a candidate needed to present the mandatory courses of action for that scenario. Only those oral responses that depicted relevant behaviors that were observable and could be quantified were assessed in the scoring process. Scores were then converted to standardized scores.

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.

For the Evolving scenario, the appellant scored a 2 for the technical component and a 4 for the oral communication component. For the Administration scenario, the appellant scored a 5 for the technical component and a 3 for the oral communication component. For the Arrival scenario, the appellant scored a 5 for the technical component and a 5 for the oral communication component. The appellant challenges his score for the technical component of the evolving scenario. As a result, the appellant's test material, video, and a listing of PCAs for the scenarios were reviewed.

The evolving scenario involves a report of a fire in a mobile home and in a tree on the property due to a lightning strike. Across the street from the tree on the A/D side is a 50-foot propane tank. Side B faces a similar mobile home. The wind is blowing from east to west at 17 mph. The candidate is the commanding officer of the first arriving engine company and is first on scene. Question 1 asked for initial actions to be taken upon arrival. Question 2 indicated that the wind shifts from an east to west direction to a west to east direction, and the high winds cause the trunk of the tree to collapse towards the east within feet of the propane tank. This question asked for actions that should now be taken based on the current situation. Instructions indicate that, in responding to the questions, the candidate should be as specific as possible in describing actions, and should not assume or take for granted that general actions will contribute to a score.

For the technical component, the assessors indicated that the appellant failed to set up an isolation perimeter, which was a mandatory PCA in question 1. They also

indicated that the appellant missed the opportunity to assign a public information officer, which was an additional response to question 1. On appeal, the appellant provides some information from a reference book, and states that he requested police to the command post, he evacuated exposures and used the police for crowd control, he had personnel use flanking positions and use structures for protection, had an orderly withdrawal from the area and out of the potential BLEVE zone, used the police to expand the evacuation zone, and used the DOT guidebook to determine an evacuation status.

As noted above, credit could not be given for information that was implied or assumed. The actions provided by the appellant on appeal are not the same as setting up an isolation perimeter, and the appellant cannot receive credit for an implied response. In fact, the appellant received credit for protecting exposures, another mandatory response, requesting police for crowd control, ensuring exposures were evacuated, and referencing a guidebook in question 1. In question 2, he received credit for expanding the evacuation area. The appellant cannot receive credit for a “sum total” of these responses which he believes reflects setting up an isolation perimeter. They are separate responses, and the appellant was credited for some of them. In addition, switching from offensive to defensive tactics is not setting an isolation perimeter. The isolation perimeter is the designated crowd control line, and designating and establishing this line is the Incident Commander’s responsibility. A review of the appellant’s video indicates that in responding to question 1, the appellant did not set up an isolation perimeter, which was a mandatory action in question 1 given the exposures. The appellant missed the actions listed by the assessors, including a mandatory response, and his score of 2 for the technical component is correct.

### **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 30<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 2020

*Deirdre' L. Webster Cobb*

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