Pre-Incident Executive Checklist

Maintaining Visibility Before the Organization Is Tested

Excerpted from *Executive Oversight: The City Manager's Guide to the Business of Public Safety* by Jeff Cirminiello — Chapter 7

ORGANIZATION	REVIEWED BY	DATE

PURPOSE

This checklist helps city managers and chief executives maintain visibility into public safety systems before a major incident occurs. It is designed to surface warning signs, test assumptions, and ensure that important areas are reviewed before the organization is forced to explain them publicly.

This checklist is intended for use by the city manager or chief executive and should remain part of regular executive oversight.

Executive Visibility

- ☐ Public safety issues are reviewed through a regular executive briefing process
- ☐ Major operational concerns are elevated before they become public problems
- ☐ The city manager understands which decisions remain within the department and which require executive review
- ☐ Leadership has a clear process for revisiting areas that have not been examined recently
- ☐ Repeated concerns are tracked and brought back for follow-up

Training and Readiness

- ☐ Critical training areas have been reviewed recently
- ☐ Training is evaluated for effectiveness, not just completion
- ☐ Supervisors understand how training is expected to be applied in real conditions
- ☐ Multi-agency or cross-department training needs have been identified
- ☐ Gaps from prior incidents, exercises, or after-action reviews have been addressed

Policy and Practice

- ☐ Key public safety policies have been reviewed within an appropriate timeframe
- ☐ Policy updates reflect current operations, legal requirements, and community expectations
- ☐ Supervisors are applying policies consistently
- ☐ Policy changes with broader city impact are reviewed at the executive level
- ☐ The city can explain why major policies are written the way they are

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Communication and Notification

- [ ] There is a clear process for notifying the city manager of significant incidents
- [ ] Leadership understands who is authorized to brief elected officials
- [ ] Public information roles are defined before an incident occurs
- [ ] Police, fire, city, and partner-agency communication responsibilities are clear
- [ ] The organization has a process for sharing verified information quickly and consistently

Equipment, Technology, and Systems

- [ ] Critical communication systems have been tested under realistic conditions
- [ ] Backup systems are known, available, and understood
- [ ] Technology used during major incidents has clear ownership and support
- [ ] Equipment concerns raised by personnel have been reviewed and documented
- [ ] The city understands any limitations in systems it may have to rely on during a crisis

Early Warning Signs

- [ ] Leadership regularly asks what concerns are not showing up in formal reports
- [ ] Supervisors have a way to elevate concerns without waiting for failure
- [ ] Repeated issues are treated as signals, not background noise
- [ ] Silence is not assumed to mean everything is working
- [ ] Concerns raised in after-action discussions are assigned, tracked, and reviewed

Accountability and Follow-Through

- [ ] Identified issues have clear owners and timelines
- [ ] Corrective actions are tracked to completion
- [ ] Leadership knows which issues remain unresolved
- [ ] Delayed items are reviewed and explained, not allowed to disappear
- [ ] Executive oversight includes follow-up, not just initial discussion

Leadership Alignment

- [ ] The city manager and chief have discussed expectations before a major incident occurs
- [ ] The chief understands what the city manager expects to be elevated
- [ ] The city manager understands the chief’s operational concerns and constraints
- [ ] Roles are clear enough to reduce confusion during high-stress events
- [ ] Trust and candor are strong enough for difficult issues to be raised early

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Executive Framing Statement

Pre-incident governance is about seeing concerns early enough to act on them while leadership still has time, structure, and control.

Executive Test

Before a major incident occurs, can leadership clearly explain:

- What areas have been reviewed recently
- What concerns have been raised more than once
- What training, policy, communication, or equipment issues remain unresolved
- Who is responsible for follow-up
- How the city manager will be notified when something significant happens
- *If those answers are unclear, the organization may already have a visibility gap.*

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