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Report of the Week

"Not your ordinary vehicle fire."
2/23/2012

Report Number: 07-0001185

Report Date: 12/29/2007 20:58

Synopsis

Vendor cart fire proves a challenge.

Event Description

Responded to a report of a vehicle fire as the engine officer. The response was an engine and truck. Upon arrival was directed down a side street to a street vendor who sold pretzels. The side of the cart had flames issuing from it. A truck firefighter with a water extinguisher approached to extinguish the fire since it appeared this would be more than sufficient. When water from the stream was applied, intense fire issued from the cart narrowly missing members and the vendor. The fire was then quickly extinguished and investigation revealed a gasoline container was in the cart and the fire above it had melted the top of the gas can and the vapors were feeding the fire. When the water stream was applied to the opening in the cart the stream probably drove into the gasoline and caused it to splash violently out of the container and dramatically increase flames. The street vendor spoke little if any English and probably knew he was not to store gas in his cart.

Lessons Learned

Obviously expect the unexpected.
Civilians don't look out for our best interests.
Don't expect people to be following the code.

I have checked vendors occasionally and exchanged this info with other officers. I have also told street vendor depots to stress to their people how hazardous and illegal the practice is.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal
Job or rank: Lieutenant
Department shift: Other
Age: 25 - 33
Years of fire service experience: 7 - 10
Region: FEMA Region II
Service Area: Urban

Event Information

Event type: Fire emergency event: structure fire, vehicle fire, wildland fire, etc.
Event date and time: 01/24/2007 11:00
Hours into the shift: 13 - 16
Event participation: Witnessed event but not directly involved in the event
Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

"Not your ordinary vehicle fire."

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Do you think this will happen again? Yes
What were the contributing factors?
What do you believe is the loss potential?

Report of the Week

Welcome to the February ROTW REWIND, featuring [Report 07-1185](#) from a December 2007 ROTW.

Firefighters and EMS providers are called to assist in a wide variety of emergency situations and must be prepared for the unexpected. We risk our lives on a daily basis to protect our communities. The risks are high and it is impossible to prepare for every situation that we may face. We train for high-risk events, but it is the unknown situations and those situations that we may not be prepared for that present unique challenges. What may seem ordinary can prove to be something very different. [Report 07-1185](#) started out like any other call and changed to something very different. As you read this ROTW REWIND, think about what changes you or your organization have made to prepare for unexpected situations since this report was submitted in 2007. Post your comments on the near-miss [Facebook page](#).

"Responded to a report of a vehicle fire as the engine officer. The response was an engine and truck. Upon arrival was directed down a side street to a street vendor who sold pretzels. The side of the cart had flames issuing from it. A truck firefighter with a water extinguisher approached to extinguish the fire since it appeared this would be more than sufficient. When water from the stream was applied, intense fire issued from the cart narrowly missing members and the vendor. The fire was then quickly extinguished and investigation revealed a gasoline container was in the cart and the fire above it had melted the top of the gas can and the vapors were feeding the fire. When the water stream was applied to the opening in the cart the stream probably drove into the gasoline and caused it to splash violently out of the container and dramatically increase flames. The street vendor spoke little if any English and probably knew he was not to store gas in his cart."

Training for those unexpected situations is sometimes difficult. Developing training scenarios that encompass low frequency/high risk events is challenging. It is up to us to use all resources available to help us prepare for these events. FIRE 20/20 is a non-profit organization that connects Fire/EMS agencies with their multicultural communities. They produced a report as part of their Multicultural Health and Safety Research Project, which identified cultural misunderstandings that may negatively affect and delay response. The report is available by request on the [FIRE 20/20 website](#).

Once you have read the entire account of this report, and the related reports, consider the following:

1. Assess your company level SOPs (e.g., PPE expectations on incidents, tools to carry, actions upon arrival, etc.). Do any of them leave you and your crew vulnerable if the situation changes between dispatch and mitigation?
2. What other hazards might be encountered on a street vendor's cart?

3. How would you and your crew dress out for an incident of this type in your department? Would the level of PPE you use have protected you in this instance?
4. How knowledgeable are you about your community and any potential language or cultural misunderstandings?
5. What additional lessons can you draw from this incident?

Related Reports- Topical Relation: Vehicle Fire, Unusual Incidents, Language Barriers

[06-376](#)

[09-099](#)

[10-1043](#)

[06-493](#)

[08-530](#)

Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today on a similar call you have run. Remember that the ROTW REWIND will appear the last Thursday of every month. Please email ROTW@firefighternearmiss.com with your feedback on this new feature, ROTW REWIND.

Note: The questions posed by the reviewers are designed to generate discussion and thought in the name of promoting firefighter safety. They are not intended to pass judgment on the actions and performance of individuals in the reports.

If you would like to subscribe to the ROTW please e-mail ROTW@firefighternearmiss.com with "Subscribe" in the subject line.

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