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Report of the Week

**A Homeowner's Ladder Can't Be Trusted.
03/17/2011**

Report Number: 11-0000096

Report Date: 02/25/2011 15:26

Synopsis

Ladder folds causing FF to fall.

Demographics

Department type: Combination, Mostly volunteer

Job or rank: Driver / Engineer

Department shift: 48 hours on - 96 hours off

Age: 16 - 24

Years of fire service experience: 4 - 6

Region: FEMA Region IX

Service Area: Rural

Event Information

Event type: Non-fire emergency event: auto extrication, technical rescue, emergency medical call, service calls, etc

Event date and time: 02/18/2011 16:41

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Witnessed event but not directly involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Cloudy and Snow

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Fatigue
- Decision Making
- SOP/SOG
- Weather
- Human Error

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Lost time injury
- Life threatening injury

Event Description

It was a cold, snowy day and we had been running calls almost nonstop. This was day two of the cold snowy weather. Everything was slippery, including the roads, walkways, porches, driveways, etc. We had taken precautions by using boot chains to prevent us from falling. We got dispatched for a public assist on our way back from another call. The address listed happened to be just down the road from our station. We arrived on scene along with our battalion chief (referred hereafter as BC) and two other units to assist the homeowner. The call was for a tree through the roof of the house. Once we talked to the homeowner and found that all that needed to be done was to cut the branch that was through the roof from the trunk. We did just that.

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One firefighter was up on the roof assisting the homeowner and our BC was standing on the homeowner's 6 foot A-Frame ladder. He was standing one step below the step that said "do not stand on this step." He was standing sideways holding onto the roof, supervising the firefighter. Once the tree was cut, he turned to face the ladder to climb down when the ladder gave out. It slipped and toppled at the same time and our BC fell off the ladder. On the way down he struck his arm on the railing that lined the porch. The two of us waiting immediately ran up the steps to the porch to see if he was okay. He got up and stated that he was okay, but just sore from the fall.

Talking with our BC later, he said that once he woke up the next morning he thought that his arm was broken and knew that his leg was bruised. He ended up with just sore muscles and bruises and nothing was broken thankfully. He did not have to take time off work or file workers comp.

Lessons Learned

1. Even though we were using the homeowner's ladder, it should have been footed, especially with the conditions that we were in at the time of the incident.
2. We have to get in the proper mindset. Even though this was a standard homeowner's ladder, we still have to follow our SOG's and foot ladders regardless of the type.
3. Sleep deprivation and fatigue may have played a factor since our BC had stated that he had gotten little or no rest that night because we were so busy. Sleep is very important because of factors involving fatigue. If you have to take a nap during the day, it is okay for the safety of operations.
4. Our BC should not have been on the ladder, but instead on the ground commanding the incident where he could take everything in instead of having tunnel vision on just one thing.

Report of the Week

The ladder is a well-known symbol of the fire service. It is a valuable tool with uses that range from access to egress to bridge. It takes hours of training to master raising, lowering and climbing and frequent repetition to keep skills sharp. Also, due to severe duty, fire department ladders are constructed of heavier duty materials and subject to a more regimented and rigorous inspection and maintenance schedule. When firefighters opt to use a homeowner grade ladder instead of a fire department ladder, the same confidence in the equipment cannot be a guarantee.

"We got dispatched for a public assist on our way back from another call...The call was for a tree through the roof of the house. Once we talked to the homeowner and found that all that needed to be done was to cut the branch that was through the roof from the trunk. We did just that...One firefighter was up on the roof assisting the homeowner and our BC was standing on the homeowner's 6 foot A-Frame ladder. He was standing one step below the step that said 'Do Not Stand on This Step.' He was standing sideways holding onto the roof, supervising the firefighter. Once the tree was cut, he turned to face the ladder to climb down when the ladder gave out. It slipped and toppled at the same time and our BC fell off the ladder. On the way down he struck..."

Observing safe ladder practices at any incident isn't just a matter of checking the box. The homeowner grade ladder is neither tested nor maintained to the NFPA

1931 or NFPA 1932 Standards. When we fail to use NFPA 1001 techniques to use or climb ladders, we leave ourselves open to increased chance of injury. And while the homeowner's ladder may appear to be sturdy, we have no way of knowing what the ladder has been subjected to at the hands of its owner. Therefore, it is better to combine the equipment we know best with the techniques we are taught to ensure a non-emergency service call doesn't turn into an actual emergency. Once you have read the entire account of [11-096](#) and the related reports, consider the following:

1. Think of three factors you believe contributed to this near miss. Discuss them with your colleagues to see how many are common among all of you.
2. Make a visit to your local hardware/building supply store. Visit the ladder section and compare the ladders available to homeowners/contractors. Compare them to the ladder(s) on your apparatus. What similarities do you note that may lead a firefighter to us a homeowner grade ladder. What differences do you note between the homeowner grade and fire department approved ladders?
3. Are the ladders on your apparatus maintained according to NFPA 1932: Standard on Use, Testing and Maintenance of In-Service Fire Department Ground Ladders? (Visit www.nfpa.org and type in the keyword "NFPA 1932" to view the standard)

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Ladder Safety

[05-499](#)

[06-147](#)

[07-743](#)

[08-081](#)

[09-792](#)

[10-882](#)

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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.