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Report of the Week

The ride of her life
4/4/08

Report Number: 08-019

Report Date: 01/11/2008 2233

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Captain

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 43 - 51

Years of fire service experience: 17 - 20

Region: FEMA Region IV

Event Information

Event type: Other

Event date and time: 08/15/2007 1400

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Do you think this will happen again?

What do you believe caused the event?

- Human Error

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Minor injury

Event Description

I work at a single engine house with a small entry door cut into the overhead door. Entry is gained by way of a combination lock. The fire company had responded to six alarms in 90 plus degree heat and members were fatigued. We closed the overhead door to about 2 1/2 feet from the floor to allow some air movement while the fire company attempted to catch a quick nap before training. EMS personnel came back to the fire house and unlocked the combination door, stepped one leg through the door and triggered the electronic eye. The overhead door went up, taking a female up with it, straddling the bottom cutout of the door. The entry door luckily opens outward and jammed against the top of the overhead door jamb. The EMT was suspended about eight feet above the concrete floor with motor still running on the overhead door. Members ran out on floor and hit the stop button attempting to get person down. Members kept triggering the electronic eye and starting motor again until power was shut off. EMS person was not injured, but if she had fallen from that height onto concrete it could have been fatal. Also if the door had not jammed, it would have gone all the way up, crushing her and then dropping her from about twelve feet. I try to be aware and think ahead concerning safety but I never thought of this happening and the consequences could have been fatal.

Lessons Learned

Be aware of the unexpected. Do not leave an overhead door with an electronic eye partially open.

Discussion Questions

The surroundings of our work assignment become “background” for us. We follow patterns, develop routines, and take actions day after day without incident. Over time, we lose sight of situations that put us in danger. Even worse, we can take actions that ordinarily wouldn't be hazardous, except the surroundings have one or more factors that differ from our norm. After you have reviewed [08-019](#) in its entirety, consider the following:

1. What “standard” practices do you engage in at your station that are new, or unfamiliar to detail, overtime or new members?
2. Are the overhead doors on a regular inspection/maintenance program?
3. What is your station policy on overhead doors? Is it consistent with the rest of the department?
4. Are all personnel familiar with emergency operations of the overhead doors?
5. How many different styles of overhead door assemblies are there in your department?

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.