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Report of the Week

Vent and ye shall live

6/6/08

Report Number: 08-162

Report Date: 03/31/2008 2134

Demographics

Department type: Volunteer

Job or rank: Lieutenant

Department shift: Respond from home

Age: 16 - 24

Years of fire service experience: 4 - 6

Region: FEMA Region I

Service Area: Rural

Event Information

Event type: Fire emergency event: structure fire, vehicle fire, wildland fire, etc.

Event date and time: 03/31/2008 1230

Hours into the shift: Volunteer

Event participation: Told of event, but neither involved nor witnessed event

Do you think this will happen again? Yes

What do you believe caused the event?

- Situational Awareness
- Task Allocation

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury
- Lost time injury

Event Description

The Fire Department was dispatched to a structure fire in a standard style wood frame cape house under renovation. Upon arrival, heavy smoke was found from the soffits, ridge vent and gable vents. The first due engine laid a supply line from the hydrant and took a position in front of the house. The first due ladder truck took a position in the driveway and set up for roof ventilation. The initial attack team, consisting of one firefighter and one lieutenant, stretched a 1 3/4 preconnect hose line to the front door. No smoke was found on the first floor, with light smoke found on the second floor. The attack team stretched the line up the stairs to the second floor. As the attack team arrived at the stair landing, a door in the knee wall blew open from an apparent smoke explosion in the void space. The force of the event blew the Lieutenant down the stairs, injuring his back as he landed on his SCBA. The Deputy Chief assigned to the Operations Sector was located at the base of the stairs, transmitted a Mayday on his radio due to the potential lost firefighter on the second floor. The firefighter was located quickly and exited the structure uninjured. The firefighter on the attack line nozzle was around a corner from the knee wall door, and thus was not as affected from the event. The injured Lieutenant was packaged and transported. In the mean time, the roof was ventilated using the ladder truck. Heavy fire was

showing in the vent hole. A second attack team then made entry to the second floor, pulled ceilings, and extinguished the fire.

Lessons Learned

The smoke condition on arrival was found to be heavy white smoke, indicating a possible fire in a void space. Timing the roof ventilation before entry into the structure may have prevented the smoke explosion and would have been safer for the initial attack team. It is noted the attack team felt entry was not a concern since there was initially, no smoke on the first floor, with only light smoke on the second floor.

Discussion Questions

Ventilation is second only to SCBA use in actions taken that significantly enhance firefighter safety at the scene of a structure fire. The expression "vent and ye shall live," pointedly makes that statement. Roof ventilation has to be timed properly, proficiently executed, and performed with firefighter safety as the top priority in the risk versus reward equation. Once you have read the complete account of [#08-162](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. Who coordinated roof operations on your last incident?
2. What role should the safety officer play in roof operations?
3. When is roof ventilation called for in your department?
4. Where and how many ladders should be placed to facilitate roof operations?
5. Have your roof operation procedures changed in the wake of lightweight construction?

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.