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Report of the Week

Just following orders can be harmful to your health
6/25/09

Report Number: 09-523

Report Date: 05/23/2009 0949

Synopsis

Inexperienced, ill-equipped crew caught in smoke.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Fire Fighter

Department shift: Respond from home

Age: 16 - 24

Years of fire service experience: 0 - 3

Region: FEMA Region V

Service Area: Suburban

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 11/01/1980 2030

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Not reported

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Command
- Task Allocation
- Decision Making
- Situational Awareness

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury

Event Description

A firefighter was assigned to apply salvage covers to furniture on the first floor. The fire was located in the basement and was not under control. This assignment was given without knowledge of conditions in the basement and given to an inexperienced crew not equipped with SCBA. When the door opened to the basement, it caused visibility to change and disoriented the crew. The crew separated trying to find a window or door. I used my helmet to attempt breaking a window and this alerted an exterior firefighter that we were in trouble. As a result, a firefighter entered and escorted two members to safety.

Lessons Learned

1. Task allocation.
2. Properly train and equip.
3. Use of SCBA.

4. Remain oriented to location and exits.
5. Better risk management.

Discussion Questions

Fireground command and management involve monitoring a number of moving parts to bring incidents under control. In order for the fireground commander to make the best decisions about the when/where resources they need to be committed and have accurate condition reports. The capability of resources on scene is also a factor to consider. Inexperienced firefighters require strong supervision during firefighting to ensure they do not get put in harm's way. They rarely refuse orders due to a desire to be engaged and not knowing any better. The best informed incident commander knows the qualifications of those on the scene and strives to ensure that only the most competent members engage in threatening situations. Once you have reviewed the entire account of 09-523 and the related reports, consider the following:

1. What mechanism does your department have in place to identify personnel qualifications on the incident scene? (e.g., helmet colors, rules of engagement, etc.)
2. Does your department train inexperienced members in how to refuse an order that requires them to perform a task that exceeds their qualifications?
3. When does your department begin salvage operations in relation to fire attack?
4. Does your department conduct air monitoring before permitting members to operate in a structure without SCBA?
5. List five hazards that exist when operating above a fire.

Related Reports

05-658

06-177

07-773

08-246

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.