



www.firefighternearmiss.com

Report of the Week

"Essential Tools 101: Wire Cutters"
06/30/2011

Report Number: 10-0001286

Report Date: 12/27/2010 09:00

Synopsis

FFs become entangled in HVAC wiring.

Demographics

Department type: Volunteer

Job or rank: Fire Chief

Department shift: Respond from home

Age: 34 - 42

Years of fire service experience: 24 - 26

Region: FEMA Region III

Service Area: Rural

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 12/13/2010 14:12

Hours into the shift:

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

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Unknown
- Other
- Task Allocation
- Situational Awareness

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury

Event Description

Brackets [] denote reviewer de-identification.

While at a working structure fire, engine [number deleted] was working in the basement extinguishing all remaining fire and hot spots. The engine company officer and nozzle man became entangled in HVAC duct wiring. The nozzle man and the company officer worked on cutting themselves out with a cutting tool that all firefighters are required to carry in their gear. The company officer notified command that they were in the basement, were not in distress, and were tangled up in wiring. Command sent half of the RIT team to assist.

The engine company that was working on the first floor to ensure the stairwell was protected at all times. The engine company officer attempted to contact command, but was unreadable. Command requested for the message to be

repeated a second time and no answer was received. Because of this, command declared a mayday and a full RIT was sent after the engine company. As soon as county communications transferred all additional companies to an additional channel, the safety officer notified command that the firefighters were disentangled and were exiting the basement with PAR. The mayday was canceled and normal operations were continued.

The mayday was declared due to not being able to communicate. The engine company has had multiple trainings in self extrication and this training proved to be beneficial. They worked as a team and kept calm and were able to cut themselves out. The engine company self extricated before the RIT company reached them. In addition, it was very positive that the engine company officer did not hesitate to notify command what was happening instead of waiting until they were in distress.

Lessons Learned

Never hesitate to report your situation and continue to keep command aware of what is taking place. Command should never hesitate to call a mayday and activate RIT companies. The sooner a problem is recognized and egos are kept out of the picture, the better the chance of survival. While this turned out to be a minor event, it was still positive in the fact that the engine company officer and command did not hesitate to elevate and activate RIT to ensure everyone went home.

Report of the Week

We leave the 2011 Fire/EMS Safety Health and Survival Week with a ROTW that emphasizes best practices. What you carry in your pocket says a lot about your preparedness to protect yourself. [10-1286](#) describes what can happen to any firefighter and the value of keeping one particular tool in your pocket; wire cutters.

"While at a working structure fire, engine [number deleted] was working in the basement extinguishing all remaining fire and hot spots. The engine company officer and nozzle man became entangled in HVAC duct wiring. The nozzle man and the company officer worked on cutting themselves out with a cutting tool that all firefighters are required to carry in their gear. The company officer notified command that they were in the basement, were not in distress, and were tangled up in wiring. Command sent half of the RIT team to assist...The mayday was declared due to not being able to communicate. The engine company has had multiple trainings in self-extrication and this training proved to be beneficial..."

Maintaining a healthy, clear presence of mind (aka good situational awareness) is often cited as the key to surviving hardship and trauma. [10-1286](#) takes us into one of firefighting's worst nightmares, the basement fire with dangling, overhead traps. What comes through in the report is the crew's reaction to becoming entangled. Would you have the same presence of mind? Once you have read the entire account of [10-1286](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. Is there a pair of wire cutters in your pocket? Which pocket?
2. How proficient would you rate yourself in trying to get out of an entanglement hazard? To what do you credit the proficiency?

3. Would this incident have qualified as a mayday based on your department's SOPs?
4. If the firefighter and captain had not been successful in disentangling themselves, what would have been their next option?
5. Command split the rapid intervention team and sent them in to assist. Would you have split the RIT or sent them in as a team? If you split the RIT, would you have filled the gap with another company? Why or why not?

Practicing like you play pays huge dividends when you are caught up in the real situation. Constant realistic practice ensures that you too will remain calm, cool and collected if you become ensnared in an entanglement hazard.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Self-Survival Skills

[05-276](#)

[06-186](#)

[07-946](#)

[08-287](#)

[09-745](#)

Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today so everyone goes home tomorrow.

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.