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Report of the Week

"Risk nothing for what is already lost."
08/04/2011

Report Number: 11-0000217

Report Date: 05/30/2011 21:34

Synopsis

Several hazards present at scene of DOA.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Captain

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 34 - 42

Years of fire service experience: 14 - 16

Region: FEMA Region X

Service Area: Urban

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 05/27/2011 00:00

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Decision Making

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Environmental

Event Description

My crew was dispatched to assist police on an odor investigation. Upon arrival I noted that the stench of a dead body lingered in the air. I met with the on-scene police officer in charge and asked what we could do. He informed me that they needed to force a garage door open and look for a dead body in the garage. We agreed and did the task. As we opened the door we were toppled by trash. The garage was a single car stall that was filled top to bottom with trash. The dead body was on top of the pile and needed to be removed.

After the medical examiner performed the duties required of that office we were called back to assist in the removal and bagging of the soul. By this time the battalion chief was on scene and he informed me that he wanted my guys to crawl up and bag the victim. I said, "No way!" The amount of trash and possible exposures outweighed the benefit of preserving the body. We agreed and used pike poles to wrangle the body into the bag.

"Risk nothing for what is already lost."

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Lessons Learned

In a recovery effort all angles need to be thoroughly looked at and talked about prior to action.

Report of the Week

Among the many stressful situations firefighters face are incidents involving the deceased. The ways in which people die ranges from peaceful to horrific. The fire department's role ranges from first responder, to assisting with the removal of the deceased from the scene. This week's ROTW, [11-217](#), takes us to an especially unusual situation. The company is asked to assist the police and the coroner with gaining access to locate a deceased individual. The complications come when the crew gain access and find themselves faced with an especially unusual situation.

"My crew was dispatched to assist police on an odor investigation. Upon arrival I noted that the stench of a dead body lingered in the air. I met with the on-scene police officer in charge and asked what we could do. He informed me that they needed to force a garage door open and look for a dead body in the garage. We agreed and did the task. As we opened the door we were toppled by trash. The garage was a single car stall that was filled top to bottom with trash. The dead body was on top of the pile and needed to be removed..."

Handling the deceased varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The fire service's role as the "all -hazard" agency has opened the door for calls for service in every category. The catch all mindset, "we don't know who else to call so call the fire department..." has created an environment where fire departments have come to be relied on for any and all possibilities. Once you have read the entire account of [11-217](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. What is the protocol for handling the deceased in your jurisdiction?
2. In emotionally charged situations involving death, how quickly are law enforcement assets on the scene?
3. Is your apparatus equipped with the appropriate BSI (body substance isolation) PPE for all riding members?
4. Have you participated in a briefing from your jurisdiction's coroner and or crime scene investigator so you are familiar with their role at the scene of a deceased person?
5. If an incident involving a deceased victim turns violent, does your department have an SOP/SOG for extricating you and your crew from the scene?

Death is rarely an occurrence that is devoid of emotion. Whether the incident is highly emotionally charged, or influenced by a failure to perform a full risk assessment, the outcome for the victim doesn't change. What hangs in the balance, and has to be remembered as the paramount concern, is the safety and survival of those called to the scene.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Dealing with the deceased.

[06-264](#)

[06-463](#)

[07-766](#)

[08-281](#)

[10-386](#)

Have you experienced a near miss involving a response to a strange odor or deceased person? 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.