



www.firefighternearmiss.com

Report of the Week

"Back-up line did its job."

08/18/2011

Report Number: 09-0000682

Report Date: 07/15/2009 15:31

Synopsis

Officer's handline order not followed.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Lieutenant

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 34 - 42

Years of fire service experience: 7 - 10

Region: FEMA Region V

Service Area: Urban

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 11/04/2008 13:00

Hours into the shift: 17 - 20

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again? Uncertain

What were the contributing factors?

- Accountability
- Decision Making
- Equipment
- Communication
- Command

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Minor injury
- Lost time injury
- Life threatening injury
- Property damage

Event Description

I was the nozzle firefighter at a fatal fire on the 1st engine to arrive. I masked up at door as another firefighter brought me the line. The officer called for the 2", but the 1 3/4" was stretched. There was too much fire for the 1 3/4" with

"Back-up line did its job."

1 of 3

www.firefighternearmiss.com

[type deleted] nozzle. I sprayed water, but the fire was not going out. We called for more pressure and were able to advance. We put out some fire to allow the ladder company to make it upstairs. While advancing the line, not all fire was extinguished as we moved. All of a sudden, all water was lost in the line. A hole had burnt through the line. The fire behind us lit up and we were cut off. Almost immediately after the fire lit up behind us, the back up line was there to cover our rear.

Lessons Learned

Officer's line selection order should have been followed; then maybe we would have put the fire out quicker. Back up line did its job.

Report of the Week

A basic principle of fire attack includes the deployment of a back-up line. The purpose of the back-up line, as its name describes, is to provide support for the initial attack line. This support can take several forms. The most critical support function is to protect the means of egress of the attack and search teams in case conditions change. A second critical function of the back-up line is augmenting the fire attack if the initial attack company finds that fire conditions are exceeding its capability. Finally, members of a properly placed and positioned back-up line can assist with the initial attack team's advance by feeding and stretching the initial line as the attack team advances. This week's featured ROTW, [09-682](#), provides an account of the back-up line's value.

"I was the nozzle firefighter at a fatal fire on the 1st engine to arrive. I masked up at door as another firefighter brought me the line... I sprayed water, but the fire was not going out. We called for more pressure and were able to advance. We put out some fire to allow the ladder company to make it upstairs... All of a sudden, all water was lost in the line. A hole had burnt through the line. The fire behind us lit up and we were cut off. Almost immediately after the fire lit up behind us, the back-up line was there to cover our rear."

The interior attack has become a controversial tactic as fire departments wrestle with a variety of variables. Everything from staffing to risk assessment and heat release rates to line placement need to be factored into the equation of supporting the decision of going in or not. The selection, position, and placement of the back-up line is paramount when an interior attack is deemed the right thing to do (i.e., after a complete risk assessment). The back-up line, working in concert with, not in opposition to, the primary attack line, ensures an organized fire attack with a successful outcome. Once you have read the entire account of 09-682 and the related reports, consider the following:

1. In report [09-682](#) the back-up line goes into service and supports the initial attack and search teams. The back-up line in [05-408](#) follows a different path. Compare and contrast the actions of the two back-up teams. What defining qualities of the two teams can you identify that led to their actions?
2. Does your department have any criteria for the back-up line (i.e., minimum size/flow, crew size, direction of entry, etc.)? What are the pros and cons of having this much detail in your SOP?
3. If you participate in automatic or mutual aid, do the neighboring departments know what the expectations are for the back-up line?

4. What are the hazards of a back-up line entering a structure from a direction that doesn't follow the path of the initial attack line?
5. Should a back-up line be pulled from the attack engine or another engine?

The back-up line is an essential component, not an optional consideration, of fire attack. Properly staffed, placed, and coordinated, this essential firefighting adjunct can ensure that attack and search teams carry out their roles quickly and safely.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Back-up Line

[05-408](#)

[06-496](#)

[07-983](#)

[08-273](#)

[09-231](#)

[10-1049](#)

Do you have an experience involving a back-up line? Have you ever been part of a back-up line that kept a crew out of harm's way? Have you been caught without a back-up line when you needed one? Submit your report to <http://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.