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Report of the Week

"Fit enough for the unexpected?"

9/6/2012

Report Number: 06-0000587

Report Date: 11/29/2006 01:49

Synopsis

Battalion Chief steps through floor during stability inspection.

Event Description

I was working as the second due battalion chief on a structure fire in a middle row townhouse. Normal response for my department is 4 engines, 2 trucks, 1 heavy rescue, 1 EMS unit and 2 battalion chiefs. The fire building backed up to a row of townhouses that faced the parking lot. The configuration created access restrictions. Access to the fire building was via sidewalk off the parking lot. Fire had started in the kitchen of the townhouse, extended to the 2nd and 3rd floors by autoexposure. The weather was clear and sunny, warm for this time of year.

Operations went defensive early due to the bulk of fire and involved electrical house service. Once the fire was knocked down and utilities controlled, we still had hot spots on the 3rd floor that were beyond the reach of external streams. Command officers reported to the command post for a re-evaluation. A decision was made to survey the structure to see if it was sound enough for crews to re-enter and extinguish the remaining fires on the 3rd floor before it extended into the attics on the B and D Sides.

I was part of a 3 member team that entered the structure to assess stability. We noted that the exposed structural floor trusses for the second floor were mostly intact, except for two near the point of origin. I pointed the charred trusses out to my two colleagues, I then sounded the plywood flooring above me and around the weakened trusses with my hook. The floor felt solid in all areas except one just above the burned trusses.

We climbed the stairs to the 2nd floor, noting the faces of several stairs were burned through. I checked two rooms on the second floor and was making my way to the 3rd floor stairs when my right foot went through the floor, causing me to fall forward. I went through all the way up to my groin. My two colleagues helped me pull my leg back through the hole quickly. I was not injured, but embarrassed. We sectioned off the area around the hole and decided all access to the 2nd and 3rd floors would be via ground ladders. I was not paying attention during my walk-thru on the 2nd floor. Due to limited visibility, I missed the fact that I was walking toward a weakened section of the floor that I had missed when I was sounding from below.

Lessons Learned

I let my guard down when I got on the 2nd floor. I tunneled in on the amount of fire damage on the 1st and 2nd floors and did not pay attention to my footing. When I was checking the floor from below, I was not thorough in checking all of the bay space between the trusses.

"Fit enough for the unexpected?"

1 of 4

I needed to pay closer attention to my footing and location in the building. I assumed the floor was weakened due to the fire damage below, but was not thorough enough in checking for stability.

Lessons Learned: Remain alert for hazards. Watch for weakened floors. Consider using ground ladders to gain exterior access points to the floors above. Wear all of your PPE. We were breathing air and wearing full PPE. I'm certain the properly worn, full PPE prevented me from getting injured. My fitness level also contributed to avoiding injury. When my right foot went through the floor, I threw my arms out in case both legs went through. The position was awkward; one leg through the hole, the other bent in uncomfortable position. I was able to mostly push myself out of the hole. Good flexibility and upper body strength were a big help in getting out of the hole.

Demographics

Department type: Combination, Mostly paid
Job or rank: Battalion Chief / District Chief
Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off
Age: 43 - 51
Years of fire service experience: 30+
Region: FEMA Region III
Service Area: Suburban

Event Information

Event type: Fire emergency event: structure fire, vehicle fire, wildland fire, etc.
Event date and time: 10/29/2006 15:00
Hours into the shift: 5 - 8
Event participation: Involved in the event
Weather at time of event:
Do you think this will happen again? Yes
What were the contributing factors?

- Situational Awareness
- Individual Action
- Human Error

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Lost time injury
- Minor injury

Report of the Week

Good day.

A fit firefighter is a fireground necessity. The tasks a firefighter performs are labor intensive, can have long duration, and often have a ballistic quality. The time and place a fitness level may be challenged is an unknown. Maximum effort may be required with no notice. In concert with this month's Near-Miss Safety Calendar topic, Firefighter/EMT Fitness, the following example affirms the benefits of adequate fitness.

"Fit enough for the unexpected?"

2 of 4

"I was working as the second due battalion chief on a structure fire in a middle row townhouse... Operations went defensive early due to the bulk of fire and involved electrical house service. Once the fire was knocked down and utilities controlled, we still had hot spots on the 3rd floor that were beyond the reach of external streams.

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We were breathing air and wearing full PPE. I'm certain the properly worn, full PPE prevented me from getting injured. My fitness level also contributed to avoiding injury. When my right foot went through the floor, I threw my arms out in case both legs went through. The position was awkward; one leg through the hole, the other bent in an uncomfortable position. I was able to mostly push myself out of the hole. Good flexibility and upper body strength were a big help in getting out of the hole."

One of the strategies for avoiding/reducing injury is having redundant systems in place to offset the links of the error chain. From the account of this week's ROTW, [06-587](#), the fitness level of the reporter is cited as a contributing factor in preventing an injury. While discussion can branch off with the topic of the wisdom of being in the structure, the secondary message here is the value of being fit for duty. Once you have read the entire account of [06-587](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. How would you rate your current fitness level?
2. Would you have adequate flexibility and upper body strength to extract yourself from a similar situation as the one described in [06-587](#)?
3. What is your total weight when dressed in your full PPE and SCBA? What is the difference between your body weight and your PPE/SCBA weight?
4. How much time do you spend on flexibility training, strength training and aerobic training each week?
5. When was your last fitness assessment?

Career or volunteer, firefighter or EMS provider, a comprehensive fitness program is an essential element to emergency worker longevity. If you haven't paid the appropriate amount of attention to your fitness level, you may not be as operationally ready as needed when the time comes. Make the time to keep yourself in shape for the rigors of the job. The life you save may be your own.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Fitness

[05-329](#)
[09-296](#)

[06-243](#)
[10-030](#)

[07-1016](#)
[11-322](#)

[08-058](#)

Did your fitness level get you out of a jam? 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.

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