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Report of the Week
"Where did everybody go."
09/08/2011

Report Number: 10-0000537
Report Date: 03/24/2010 19:22

Synopsis

Crew becomes separated during fire attack.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal
Job or rank: Captain
Department shift: 10 hour days, 14 hour nights (3-3-3)
Age: 43 - 51
Years of fire service experience: 24 - 26
Region: FEMA Region I
Service Area: Suburban

Event Information

Event type: Fire emergency event: structure fire, vehicle fire, wildland fire, etc.
Event date and time: 04/17/1998 16:11
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?

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Command
- Accountability
- Decision Making

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury

Event Description

Note: Brackets denote reviewer de-identification. We responded to a reported structure fire on [location omitted – bordering two fire districts]. Standard protocol was response by both communities for fires on this street. [Department A] arrived first and had a line stretched to the front porch when [Department B] arrived, where I was an engine company captain. I gave progress report and then assisted my crew in stretching a line to the front porch of Floor #1 of a 3-story multi-family wood frame. [Department A], meanwhile, had stretched a

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second line to the porch, so we now had three 1 3/4 " attack lines all on a small, conjoined front porch. Because my crew was ready before I was to attack the interior fire, I told them to go ahead and I would follow. Without my realization, and due to massive amounts of personnel and firefighters on the porch, all three of us ended up on different floors on different lines. It took me some time (many minutes) to realize the complete fragmentation of my crew and my lack of crew accountability. Ultimately, no injuries and fire suppressed, but this was a very uncomfortable, potentially deadly situation.

Lessons Learned

1) Maintain strict adherence to accountability 2) Constant reinforcement for accountability on all calls 3) Need to stay together as a crew, go in and out together, or at least communicate some way by radio or in person 4) Train personnel on accountability 5) Development of SOP/FOCs on accountability

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The initial entry point into a working structure fire is a congested and potentially confusing place. Maintaining crew continuity can be a challenging function in that dynamic and fluid environment. The jumble at the front door is compounded by several factors ranging from the amount of smoke pouring from the front door to an avalanche of people trying to cram through a standard sized residential doorway. This week's ROTW, [10-537](#), takes us to one of those crowded front porches where the number of people, hoselines, square footage and a decision by the captain, set the stage for a near miss.

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"We responded to a reported structure fire on [location omitted – bordering two fire districts]. Standard protocol was response by both communities for fires on this street. [Department A] arrived first and had a line stretched to the front porch when [Department B] arrived, where I was an engine company captain. I gave progress report and then assisted my crew in stretching a line to the front porch of Floor #1 of a 3-story multi-family wood frame. [Department A], meanwhile, had stretched a second line to the porch, so we now had three 1 3/4 " attack lines all on a small, conjoined front porch. Because my crew was ready before I was to attack the interior fire, I told them to go ahead and I would follow. Without my realization, and due to massive amounts of personnel and firefighters on the porch, all three of us ended up on different floors on different lines. It took me some time (many minutes) to realize the complete fragmentation of my crew and my lack of crew accountability..."

Crew continuity is the essential company level component in the overall scheme of scene accountability. Given all that the company officer has to process, his senses are often operating at peak. Maintaining crew continuity becomes difficult as the officer's senses are stifled by the components of PPE and the IDLH. Once you have read the entire account of [10-537](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

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1. As a company officer, what strategies do you employ to ensure your crew sticks together once you have entered the IDLH?
2. Have you ever "lost" a crew member while part of the interior attack? What action(s) did you take to regain continuity?
3. Have you, as part of an interior operating crew, ever become separated from your crew? What action(s) did you take to be reunited with your crew?
4. Would the realization of "the complete fragmentation of my crew..." qualify as a mayday? If yes, how would the mayday message be transmitted to convey the situation?
5. What recommendations can you bring to the table to address the "...massive amounts of personnel and firefighters on the porch..."?

Remaining together once a crew arrives on the scene requires discipline and good communication. While it is a common occurrence for crews to split into functioning teams to accomplish tasks on the fireground, the "fragmentation" of a crew as described in [10-537](#) warrants immediate attention.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Crew Continuity

[05-423](#) [06-046](#) [07-1105](#) [08-104](#) [09-570](#) [10-591](#)

Have you lost contact with your crew at an incident? Become separated unintentionally while operating in an IDLH? Find a lost crewmember using good teamwork? Take 15 minutes to 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.