



www.firefighternearmiss.com

Report of the Week

Where *is* the fire?

9/12/08

Report Number: 05-214

Report Date: 05/27/2005 1410

Synopsis

My engine company was the third or fourth to arrive. I actually do not recall the exact date. It was about five or six

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Fire Fighter

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 34 - 42

Years of fire service experience: 14 - 16

Region: FEMA Region IV

Service Area: Urban

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 01/01/2001 1600

Hours into the shift: 9 - 12

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event:

Do you think this will happen again? Yes

What do you believe caused the event?

- Accountability
- Human Error
- Command
- Situational Awareness
- Staffing

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury
- Property damage
- Lost time injury

Event Description

My engine company was the third or fourth to arrive. I actually do not recall the exact date. It was about five or six years ago and was not cold out. We had heavy smoke showing while enroute and the first units on scene initiated a fire attack. On our arrival, the crew I was with reported to command and was assigned a fire attack designation. When we started to enter, a crew was coming out stating it was too hot. We advised command and were ordered to make an attack. We entered and were met with moderately high heat and medium smoke conditions. Flames could be seen straight ahead down a hallway. We started to advance and opened the line. It appeared to make headway. Continued to advance and more flames. Opened line and knocked down flame again. After the

Where *is* the fire?

1 of 2

third or fourth time we could no longer advance due to high temperatures. I was in the front and advised it was too hot and to back out. The crew backed out and immediately exited the doorway. As I took my second step out the doorway, while still standing on stoop, the entire interior of the house collapsed to the basement. We later found the first on scene crew was fighting a basement fire that was fully involved while we were making the interior attack. The flames were coming up the stairway and blowing hard into what we later found was the kitchen. This was the fire we were encountering down the short hallway.

Lessons Learned

Never attack a fire that has a fully involved basement fire underway. This should have been relayed to command and the interior order would have never been given. 2. Everyone needs to be aware of the size-up findings. Hopefully today with safety officers in place these situations will be avoided. Fight the tunnel vision that occurs.

Discussion Questions

Fires that “fight back” can draw crews into a decision making chain that fails to see the bigger picture. This draw, known as “fixation,” blocks out other factors that are apparent, but do not register. There is a projection that we are going to make the situation better if we keep applying water because that has worked in our past experience. Ultimately, and fortunately, the crew of [05-214](#) is driven out of the structure by high heat. Had the floor they were operating on been made of more substantial layers, they may have continued to attack the fire that repeatedly darkened and re-appeared until it was too late. Once you have reviewed the entire account of [05-214](#), consider the following:

1. When do you give your on scene report (i.e., at arrival, after a 360, etc.)?
2. Using this week’s narrative as a reference, which mode of attack (offensive or defensive) would you expect the company in the basement to be operating under?
3. What are your “benchmarks” for progress when attacking a fire?
4. Given the description that fire was darkening then re-appearing and heat conditions were not improving, how long would you continue your attack?
5. Why wouldn’t command have known there was a fire attack going on in the basement?

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.