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Report of the Week
"Where's the fire."
10/20/2011

Report Number: 11-0000216
Report Date: 05/30/2011 17:31

Synopsis

Quick action by crew helps FF during bailout.

Demographics

Department type: Combination, Mostly volunteer
Job or rank: Lieutenant
Department shift: 24 hours on - 24 hours off (4s & 6s)
Age: 34 - 42
Years of fire service experience: 14 - 16
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: 05/12/2011 23:56
Hours into the shift:
Event participation: Involved in the event
Weather at time of event: Cloudy and Rain
Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Staffing
- Decision Making

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Property damage
- Life threatening injury

Event Description

We were dispatched to an attic fire in a single-family home. Initial arrival was an on duty engine and ladder truck with two firefighters and one officer, who gave an on scene report of a two-story wood frame residential structure with heavy smoke showing from the rear. The officer announced command and told all traffic to go to fireground. After seeing three sides of the building, the officer (myself) ran around to back side and found heavy flames venting from the second floor gable end off the rear of the structure. At the time it was not known if this area was an attic over a first floor addition or a room on the second floor. The officer decided a quick interior search and fire attack, pushing the fire

out the already vented hole, would be the initial strategy. The ladder truck was parked and the firefighter, officer, and an arriving part-paid firefighter donned full gear while the engine operator pulled and charged the initial attack line, set up PPV to the first floor, and gathered hand tools. As the initial entry to the first floor was made, the next arriving on duty rescue and engine arrived on scene with two firefighters and one officer. Other part-paid firefighters were beginning to arrive on scene. The second arriving officer took command. After searching the first floor and finding no stairs, the initial team exited the first floor and went to the rear of the structure where an exterior stairwell was found to the second floor. On initial size-up, the stairwell and two mailboxes on the house were missed, causing approximately a one minute delay to fire attack. Upon entry to the second floor, conditions were a light haze with complete visibility of the occupied area. Entry was made into a bedroom, which was adjacent to the first floor attic area on fire. Upon entry I noticed a mattress on the floor and a small window just above floor level. A small pike pole was used to breach the wall while the nozzleman stood ready and the third firefighter moved hose. After an area between the studs and about two feet tall was opened, the attack line was discharged. Conditions went from almost clear to black and steamy instantly. After spraying the nozzle for less than 30 seconds (maybe even sooner) the room became too hot to occupy. All three of us announced we had to get out, almost at the same time. The nozzleman and firefighter supplying hose went out the door to the bedroom. As I tried to go out the door, heat and flames prevented my departure. I felt the mattress at my knee and went for the window I knew was adjacent. I opened the window, thinking I did not want to break it because I knew others would be working under/near it. I hung out the narrow window from my waist up. I radioed immediately asking if the other firefighters who were with me made it out, and announced I was at the window and OK. I thought to myself, "I'm OK, I just need a ladder to get down." When I opened the window, other arriving part-paid firefighters recognized the situation was not right and immediately began bringing a ladder outside of Incident Command's direction. He was directing others in pulling secondary lines, etc. Firefighters recognized immediate action was required and took it. While bent over the window sill, flames began coming out the top of the window. When the ladder was placed at the base of the sill I slid out head first holding the rails. The window was too narrow to attempt to turn around and the heat was building behind me. Another firefighter came up the ladder from the ground to help brace me on the descent. Once my feet cleared the window, I did an arm hook, swung my feet below me, and climbed down the ladder. Almost the same time I reached the ground, the room and windows became fully engulfed in flames.

Lessons Learned

The greatest safety lesson that came from this was to be aware of your surroundings and maintain situational awareness. Train so that when you have to react you just do it, and do it calmly. We have done save your own/save yourself training which included quick ladder bailouts. Take that extra time to read a building (even your average house fire where that quick initial attack will do the job). As an officer in a department with limited full-time staff, the first arriving officer has to wear many hats. Take the extra time to read the roof lines. In

this case, when we opened the wall and then the nozzle, we were hitting a knee wall and not the main body of fire.

Report of the Week

Sizing up a structure for a fire attack is a skill that takes time, practice and experience to fully develop. When the first arriving (and any other arriving) officer surveys the structure, the process needs to be rapid and thorough. In some cases, if the size up is too rapid, critical points can be overlooked. This oversight can result in unintended consequences for the initial attack team. As seen in [11-216](#), it is worthwhile to take an extra minute to process the situation prior to attack.

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Reading the structure is as important as reading the smoke and fire conditions prior to mounting an interior attack. Aesthetics can play a large role in the building design, and what appears to be structural may truly not be safe to load. As [11-216](#) illustrates, the fire blowing from an upper floor window may not be as visible on the inside as it is on the outside. Once you have read the entire account of [11-216](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. The report notes that, "...exterior stairwell and two mailboxes on the house were missed". What situational loss factor would best describe why that occurred? Go to our Facebook page and record your answer and the reason why you selected the factor.
 - a. Distraction
 - b. Fixation
 - c. Overload

2. What fire behavior phenomenon occurred when the crew opened the interior wall and experienced conditions that went from “clear to black”?
3. If you were dispatched for fire in the attic and arrive to find heavy smoke and fire showing, what attack line would you select and why?
4. Based solely on the information provided in [11-216](#), would a two out be necessary before the interior attack could commence?
5. The reporter states “heavy smoke” was observed. Jot down a few factors that mean “heavy smoke” to you. Discuss what you wrote down with your colleagues.

The time pressure to go into action when we arrive at a working fire will often cause the size up to be hurried. Remembering the lessons learned from [11-216](#) will make your next size up more complete. Thank you to the lieutenant from Region V for sharing what was learned.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Size- Up

[05-398](#)

[06-111](#)

[07-1180](#)

[08-399](#)

[09-366](#)

[10-689](#)

Have you avoided a disaster because of a good size-up? Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today to pass on your experience.

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.