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## Report of the Week

Could it *just* be we're rusty?

10/23/08

**Report Number: 08-103**

Report Date: 02/21/2008 1808

### Synopsis

Crews witness freelancing, unsafe acts, and lack of proper PPE.

### Demographics

Department type: Paid-on-Call

Job or rank: Captain

Department shift: Respond from home

Age: 25 - 33

Years of fire service experience: 7 - 10

Region: FEMA Region VII

Service Area: Rural

### Event Information

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

Event date and time: 02/20/2008 2345

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear with Frozen Surfaces

Do you think this will happen again?

What do you believe caused the event?

- Individual Action
- Equipment
- Command
- Human Error
- Situational Awareness

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Minor injury

### Event Description

Our fire department was dispatched for a possible structure fire in a 1 story commercial brick building after a passerby reported fire visible inside the structure with light smoke showing. The building was occupied by both a restaurant and a drycleaner. The first fire personnel on scene was a deputy chief who arrived within 2 minutes of the initial alarm, assumed command, performed a size-up, and communicated a working fire from the drycleaner occupied part of the building. As a deputy chief and the department's safety officer, I arrived on scene, advised command I was the incident safety officer for the incident and performed a 360 of the structure to identify any possible hazards. Upon my return to the alpha (A) side of the building, the truck company had forced entry to the structure with the engine company entering with a 1 1/2" line. There was a moderate smoke condition at the time. The fire was located and confined to a

commercial dryer. The building was ventilated with PPV and checked for extension. This was the first fire that the department has had in quite some time. As I was checking, I realized that our accountability procedures were not in place and that I had no reliable information on the number of firefighters in the structure. Not one accountability tag had been placed at the door. We have a two tag system where one tag remains on the rigs and one is left with an accountability officer at the door. Had the incident escalated into a major fire, the IC would have had limited information on the number of personnel inside of the structure. Also, as the building was being ventilated and checked for fire extension there was still a light smoke condition inside of the structure. I observed 50% of the firefighters had removed their SCBA masks and walking around inside of the building. I notified the OIC of the interior to have all firefighters go back on air which they did. The building was then metered and elevated CO was detected. I believe that the excitement of the fire quickly caused the firefighters to ignore or forget the department's mandated SOPs on accountability procedures and our current policy on the use of SCBA during salvage and overhaul procedures need to be evaluated.

### **Lessons Learned**

Lessons learned: Eye protection and SCBA should be worn during overhaul situations. Due to the fact that the overhaul was hot and flames were showing, they should have been wearing SCBA. Suggestions to prevent similar events: Command needs to assign a safety officer and reduce free-lancing through staging officer. Actions to correct the situation: Review of training standards, proper use of PPE, respect for volunteer fire fighters suggestions and other departments in a mutual aid situation.

### **Discussion Questions**

The possibility of "making a fire" is a drive that hovers just under the surface to keep us sharp and anticipating the first stroke of the house bells or warble of the alert tone. For some of us, the further we go between fires, the deeper the drive is buried. For the vast majority of the American fire service "making a fire" is more the exception than the rule. Since there is a recognized infrequency, what are the odds you'll perform with perfection at your next fire? After you have reviewed the entire account of [08-103](#), and at least one other commercial structure report of your choosing, consider the following:

1. When was your last commercial structure fire?
2. What type of occupancy was involved?
3. Were actions taken specific to the occupancy, or did the response crews attack the fire "as we always do?"
4. Discuss the pros and cons of applying your "as we always do" to two structures in your area: a single family residence one commercial structure (not a converted residence).
5. Place yourself at this incident scene as a firefighter, company officer and incident commander. Is there a correlation between how you would act at this "minor fire" and how predictable performance would be on a larger fire?

*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.*