



Table Top Training Drills

Table Top Training Exercise- February 2011

Vacant Structures

The response to a fire or emergency in a vacant structure is a response that requires a well thought out incident action plan with the priority being safety. The hazards that are present are great and the potential for injury is high. The safety of all responders is paramount, especially at vacant structures where the life hazard is ill-defined and vague at best. Using the matrix of “risk a lot to save a lot” and “risk nothing to save nothing” along with a complete and ongoing size-up should be the common goals at the scene of the alarm.

In near- miss report [10-1078](#) located at www.firefighternearmiss.com units encounter a fire in a vacant building and a fire fighter is injured. Place yourself and your crew at the scene and discuss your departments SOP/SOG’s relating to vacant building operations.

Event Description

While working as a firefighter on an engine company, I responded to a reported structure fire in a commercial building. Upon arrival, we found heavy smoke coming from an abandoned commercial building. My crew and I were assigned to make entry on the "C" side of the building. Prior to entry, my crew cut a 4x4 hole through a 4x8 sheet of plywood with the partner saw. Once inside the building with a 2 ½ inch hose line, I observed heavy smoke with visibility less than 10-15 feet. My Captain (using the thermal imager camera behind me) identified the fire to be located in the mezzanine area. After taking approximately five steps towards the fire, I fell into a hole that was approximately 12 feet deep. After landing, I promptly tried to notify the incident commander of my condition and location. There was so much radio traffic after I fell it was difficult to communicate with anyone. My crew, aware of the situation lowered a ladder into the hole for me to climb out of the hole. I was able to remove myself from the building on my own after getting out of the hole.

Use the checklist below to augment the discussion on how each could help affect the outcome of the operation.

- A. **Time**- Time of day and how long the fire has been burning
- B. **Life**- The most serious factor at any fire. Life hazard to firefighters must also be considered.
- C. **Area**- Building or occupancy area. Large areas such as commercial buildings to be searched may require search lines or long hose line deployments. Large areas generate fires of great intensity, heavy volumes of smoke and severe heat.

D. **Height**- Building height will govern the use of the Aerial and/or Tower Ladder and portable ladders.

E. **Construction**- Non-fireproof buildings contain vertical voids that allows for extension. Alterations may have introduced larger voids, both vertical and horizontal. Wooden "I" beams, lightweight truss, energy-efficient windows and membrane-type roofs can affect the safety of operations within the structure.

F. **Occupancy**- This determines the severity of the life hazard and the intensity of the fire. For example, a commercial occupancy may have an increased fire load or a larger type single family dwelling.

G. **Location and Extent of Fire**- will determine access and areas to be searched.

H. **Water Supply**- Hydrant availability, tanker access and the placement and readiness of hose lines

I. **Street Conditions**- Effect apparatus access and the placement of aerial/tower ladders to the fire building.

J. **Auxiliary Appliances**- Standpipe/sprinkler systems, and the location of outlets, O S & Y, FDC's, and/or check valves.

K. **Weather**- Excessive heat, snow and freezing conditions, wind velocity and direction are major factors in safety and fire operations.

L. **Apparatus and Equipment**- Be aware of the units on the scene and/or in the staging area, including the location of the Rapid Intervention Team and the arrival of those units assigned on the alarm, engines and ladders, 1st due, 2nd due, etc.

M. **Exposures**- May be adjoining buildings or areas within the fire building itself (auto exposure) e.g., floor to floor via windows, and/or adjoining occupancies.

N. **Communication**- on the fireground, to command, RIT and to the dispatcher.

Further References

<http://www.interfire.org/features/AbandonedBuildingProjectToolBox.asp>