

# LOST OR TRAPPED FIRE FIGHTERS

This guideline identifies individual, company and Command level activities for the search and rescue of a lost or trapped fire fighter(s).

The rescue of trapped or lost fire fighters in a burning building is especially time sensitive. There is a very narrow "window of survivability" for a fire fighter who is out of S.C.B.A. air supply or trapped by approaching fire. Individual fire fighters must not delay reporting to Command if they become lost, trapped or in need of assistance. Company officers must also not delay the reporting of lost fire fighters or inability to complete accountability reports. Command and sector officers must always assume that the missing fire fighter is lost in the building until the fire fighter can be accounted for. Command must also restructure the strategy and action plan to include a high priority rescue effort.

## "MAY-DAY" RADIO MESSAGE

The radio message "May-Day" will be used by lost or trapped fire fighters to report their status as being in trouble and needing rescue. Any member may use "May-Day" to report a lost fire fighter. Any report of "May-Day" will receive priority radio traffic followed by the emergency traffic tone. The term "May-Day" will be reserved ONLY to report lost or trapped fire fighters. The term "emergency traffic" will be used to report other emergencies. The term "May-Day" typically will be used in the following situations:

- By the member who is lost, trapped, or in trouble.
- By the company officer, sector officer, or other member who cannot account for an assigned fire fighter who is operating in the hazard zone. This "May-Day" would generally occur following a PAR report that fails to locate/account for the suspected lost member.
- By a member who witnesses or has confirmed that a fire fighter is lost or in trouble.

## COMMAND RESPONSE TO A MISSING FIRE FIGHTER

The incident Commander MUST ALWAYS assume that a missing fire fighter is lost or trapped in the building until the fire fighter is accounted for. Rapid, concise, decisions and actions must be taken to increase survivability. The following is a list of actions to be taken by Command for a reported missing or trapped fire fighter. These are guidelines and do not necessarily need to be accomplished in the order listed. The first five (5) must be accomplished very rapidly.

- **EMERGENCY TRAFFIC**  
Immediately upon a report of a missing or trapped fire fighter "Emergency Traffic" will be sounded to alert all personnel working on the fireground of the situation. Following the emergency traffic tone, "May Day" will be announced to alert all operating units of a lost or trapped firefighter (example: "We have a 'May-Day' in West Sector.").
- **CHANGE THE PLAN TO A HIGH PRIORITY RESCUE EFFORT**  
The incident Commander must restructure the plan to include a high priority fire

fighter rescue effort. A rapid, well thought out, rescue plan must be developed and the Command organization expanded. The plan and objectives must be communicated to other Command staff and sector officers for implementation.

- **IMMEDIATELY REQUEST ADDITIONAL ALARMS**

At least one additional alarm should be immediately requested including a medical component. Additional multiple alarms may be requested based on circumstances and potential. Level two staging should be implemented. Early consideration should be given to heavy equipment resources and TRT assistance in structural collapses.

- **FIREGROUND ACCOUNTABILITY**

A Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) must be immediately requested from all companies operating on the fireground. This is especially important in situations of structural collapse. Command cannot develop an effective rescue plan until accurate information is available on the number of missing fire fighters, their identify, their last reported work area, and which companies are affected.

- **COMMIT THE RESCUE SECTOR/BRANCH**

Deploy the Rescue Sector to initiate search and rescue efforts (typically the last reported work area). Rescue Sector/Branch will coordinate activities at that location. Additional available resources in staging may also be committed to rescue efforts. The rescue sector will be made of a sector officer, R.I.T. and other teams the sector officer deems necessary.

- **WITHDRAWAL OF COMPANIES FROM AFFECTED AREA**

In some situations, such as collapse, crewmembers can get separated. The only practical method to obtain an accurate roll call for a PAR may be to withdraw crews to the exterior. Withdrawal is a judgment call based on circumstances at the time, information available, and resources. It may not be practical or possible to do. However, the absolute need for an accurate roll call (PAR) and information on missing fire fighters remains a critical priority.

- **DO NOT ABANDON FIRE FIGHTING POSITIONS, PROVIDE REINFORCEMENT**

Abandoning fire fighting positions during the rescue effort should be avoided. Command and crews should take aggressive measures to protect trapped or missing fire fighters from the effects of the fire. Efforts should be concentrated on reinforcing existing positions and keeping the fire out of the rescue area and providing appropriate ventilation and lighting. In some situations it may be appropriate to write off some areas of the building in order to relocate companies and crews to better protect the rescue effort.

- **ASSIGN A SAFETY SECTOR TO THE RESCUE EFFORTS**

Rescue operations are high risk. The rescue operation may be taking place in post-collapse conditions or a flashover environment. Emotions may be high and fire fighters will tend to want to free-lance and take chances. A Safety Sector must be assigned to monitor activity and evaluate the safety of the operation. An available chief officer should assume this sector as soon as possible. Other Safety Sector

responsibilities will be to conduct an assessment of the hazards, thus, allowing time for the rescue sector officer to concentrate on the critical rescue effort. These sector officers must work hand in hand to insure that a safe and effective rescue operation is conducted.

- **EXPAND THE COMMAND ORGANIZATION**

With additional resources enroute, along with the critical rescue needs, the Command organization must expand ahead of the demand. The incident may eventually escalate to a Branch level operation. The incident Commander must be proactive and aggressive in developing and expanding the Command organization.

- **EARLY ESTABLISHMENT OF TREATMENT AND TRANSPORTATION SECTORS**

The incident Commander must have treatment personnel in a position to immediately treat any rescued fire fighters. A transportation sector must also be in place and coordinating activities with the treatment sector officer.

- **OPEN/UNLOCK ALL DOORS, IF APPROPRIATE**

All doors in the immediate area should be unlocked or forced open, and at least the immediate interior area quickly searched. Where practical, the doors should be left open to provide an emergency escape route, unless doing so will have negative effects on the fire. In all cases, the doors must remain unlocked.

- **VENTILATE, MAINTAIN TENABILITY/LIGHTING**

Reducing smoke conditions, through effective ventilation, improves the air quality for any victims, and will enhance search and rescue capabilities through increased visibility of the interior. Ventilation should be aggressively employed. Early lighting of the operation (both interior and exterior) needs to be included.

- **COORDINATE AND CONTROL THE SEARCH EFFORTS**

The incident Commander and Rescue Branch officer must insure that a complete, coordinated and controlled search is conducted. Close coordination of all search efforts is a must in order to eliminate duplicate searches that waste time. All areas must be thoroughly searched.

- **TECHNICAL RESCUE TEAMS**

Technical Rescue Teams (TRT) and other specialized equipment should be requested at all structural collapses that have trapped fire fighters.

- **WATCH FOR STRUCTURAL STABILITY OF THE BUILDING**

Command and all personnel must watch the structural stability of the building throughout the rescue effort. Where a structural collapse has occurred, or the fire or other event has compromised the structural integrity of the building, a structural specialist should evaluate the structure. Technical Rescue Teams (TRT) may be called upon to assist with shoring the rescue area, or for the use of other specialized equipment.

- **STRONG SUPERVISION REQUIRED**

Strong supervision and control of activities will be required by all officers. Emotions will be very high. Fire fighters in this situation will tend to want to free lance or take higher risk. Treatment personnel will need to be restricted to only those needed. Crowd control of our own non-essential personnel may be required.

- **MEDIA CONTROL**

Command will need to control the media early and throughout the incident. Information on the identities and conditions of lost fire fighters must be restricted until after next of kin are notified. Media film crews should be restricted to areas that are safe and at a distance that will prevent visual/facial identification of any victims.