

Firehouse.com WEEKLY DRILL

DRILL # 41: RESCUE SIZE-UP

Introduction

The number one item on the list of priorities is that of saving lives. For this reason, the most important job we are ever going to perform at an incident will be that of searching for innocent victims trapped by the fire. This is a very important job and will be conducted until it has been determined that everyone has either safely exited the building on their own, have been removed from the dangers by fire personnel, or until the incident commander has determined that it is no longer possible to rescue anyone due to the severity of the incident.

Remember, saving lives does not just mean civilian lives as firefighters can and often do become victims of an aggressive fire. Sometimes, the firefighters need to stop and think about this; we are not in this business of being sacrificial lambs.

Much like everything else we do at an incident, size-up must embrace the critical factor for search and rescue. Items that are going to need consideration are:

- Risk Benefit analysis
- Occupancy information
- Building size

Risk Benefit

As mentioned above, we are not sacrificial lambs and in some situations we are not going to be successful at conducting a search and rescue operation. If we pull up on location and find the structure pushing smoke and flames from every window and door, it is highly unlikely that there is any victims inside alive. Perhaps we find the structure all buttoned up and all the signs of an imminent backdraft are present. This presents a very dangerous situation for the firefighters. Implementing the Risk Benefit analysis, the risks present are too high for firefighters and any possibility of saving victims inside the structure are too low to justify entry.

Occupancy Information

Gathering information about the occupancy upon arrival, either from someone who may have escaped already or from a neighbor, can provide the fire responders with critical and timesaving information.



The first order of business is to make sure everyone is accounted for. This can be accomplished by asking one important question of these people: “Are you sure all the occupants are out and that there is no one else inside?”

Should you receive a response that someone is still within the structure a follow-up question would be: “Where did you last see the individual, and what is the best way to get to that location?”

Building Size

A large building can intimidate firefighters when there are reports of occupants trapped. Stick to basic operations and conduct a systematic search. Incident Commanders (ICs) need to ensure that all areas are searched and that there are none omitted. Therefore, search teams must report when they have completed their area of responsibility to the IC.

All searches should be conducted following a set of priorities that never change.

1. Search areas immediately around the fire
2. Search areas directly above the fire
3. Search from the highest floor and work down
4. Finally, search areas below the fire or having a low priority

Again, firefighter safety is the number one priority and, in very large buildings, the IC might want to consider assigning more than one team to a floor or area of the structure.

—Prepared by Russell Merrick