

Firehouse.com WEEKLY DRILL

DRILL # 48: SECURING UTILITIES

Introduction

There are a thousand and one things happening on the fireground at the same time. As the Incident Commander (IC) it is important that you track these tasks in some manner. I have seen ICs on the fireground with their clipboards documenting the action. Some use a blank piece of paper, some use the ICS 201 form and others use their own generic form. I would say to use whichever one works for you.

I have developed a “tactical worksheet” that I use when assigned to the safety officer role at incidents. My worksheet has a list of things that need immediate attention during any incident. Right next to these items is a little box that can easily be checked off when the tasks are accomplished. One item on the list is that of securing the utilities. There are three main areas to focus on here, the electric, the gas and the water.

Electricity

Generally speaking, the electrical service for most homes comes in from the outside at the meter box, and from there power is directed to a panel box or fuse box. When instructed to locate and secure the electrical utilities there are a few things you should know:

- One quick way of locating the fuse box would be to start at the overhead power lines at the street. By following them back to the house, you will find the meter box. The panel or fuse box is usually located inside the structure around this same area. In many homes it is located in the basement just beneath where the meter box is located.
- Before turning off the power, take the time to look around the area first. If the fuse box has water in it or the ground around the box is flooded with water, *do not* touch the switches. At this point, it is better to notify the utility company and await their arrival.
- If, however, the area is free from any water and your personal protective equipment (PPE) is dry, it should be alright to shut off the main power switch.
- *Never* pull the meter when asked to secure the electric, as this is dangerous and the meter could explode.

Gas

Another utility that is becoming more common in homes is gas, both natural and propane. Each poses the danger of being very flammable. When instructed to locate and



turn off the gas, we must first determine whether it is natural gas or propane.

For natural gas we should follow these steps:

- We will need to locate the meter. It can generally be found on the exterior of the newer homes in our jurisdictions; however, some of the older ones still have the meter located in the basement.
- Locate the piping coming into the meter and look for the cock valve used to close off the gas supply. Usually a spanner wrench will be sufficient for turning the valve off. Generally, a quarter turn of the valve is all it will take or until the flange is perpendicular to the pipe.

For propane gases follow these steps:

- Locate the propane tank, which is usually located next to the house or a few yards away.
- Lift the access lid located on the top of the tank. Find the shutoff valve and turn it clockwise until the gas flow is shutoff.

Water

The last service to secure is the water supply. In most cases it will be easily turned off using the shutoff valve at the water meter, which is usually located on the front wall or a sidewall of the house in the basement. Sometimes, however, this meter will be located in a below-ground vault under a water meter lid in the front yard. In some situations the water may need to be turned off at the curb using a special wrench called a water key or a curb cock key.

—Prepared by Russell Merrick