

# MAYDAY OPERATIONS

## Introduction

Firefighters routinely operate in difficult and hazardous environments. The rescue of a lost or trapped firefighter in a toxic environment is critically time sensitive because of the limited air supply in the firefighter's SCBA. Survival of the lost or trapped firefighter depends on a combination of the following:

- Early notification that a firefighter is missing or in trouble.
- Predictable self survival actions by the lost or trapped firefighter.
- Action by the IC and RIT that is standardized, prioritized, and aggressive.

## Preventing the Situation

The first rule of firefighter survival is ***“Don't get lost, trapped, or run out of air!”***

- All firefighters entering a *Hazard Zone* must be part of an organized crew.
- Minimum crew size is two, and the crew must remain intact while operating in the *Hazard Zone*.
- Each crew must have an assignment and be supervised by a designated supervisor or company officer.
- Each supervisor or company officer must have a portable radio while in the *Hazard Zone*.
- Crews operating in the *Hazard Zone* will follow Accountability and Air Management guidelines.

## Firefighter Self-Survival Actions

Firefighters who find themselves lost or trapped in the *Hazard Zone* should implement the following actions immediately. These actions should be implemented as soon as the firefighter thinks that he or she is in trouble. The longer the delay in implementing these actions, the smaller the chance of survival and the greater the risk to rescuers.

- Manually activate *PASS Device*.
- If equipped with a radio follow mayday procedures
- If equipped with a hoseline, follow it out.
  - Male couplings have long lugs on a fixed shank
  - Female couplings have a smooth shank and a swivel with short lugs
  - To follow the hose towards the pumper, you should have the smooth shank towards your feet, the short lugs in the middle, and the long lugs toward your head if not equipped with a hoseline, find an exterior wall
- Rescuers will first search around walls and hallways before sweeping large interior spaces. Finding an exterior wall increases the likelihood that you will be found quickly.
- If lost in a large interior space, travel a straight line until a wall is encountered.
- Search the wall for windows or doors that may provide egress to the outside. If egress is not possible, windows or doors may be breached for fresh air supply.
- If uncertain of the way out, conserve air and make yourself as “findable” by rescuers as possible.

- Find a location along an exterior wall that is not immediately threatened by fire.
- Assume a horizontal position.
- Make a conscious effort to stay calm and conserve air.
- Avoid all talking or physical activity that doesn't directly contribute to your being found.
- Take slow breaths, breathing in through your mouth and out through your nose.
- Maximize the effects of the *PASS Device*, both visible and audible.
- Aim your flashlight at the ceiling.
- Use a tool to make tapping noises on a hard surface to aid rescuers in locating you.

### **Company Officer Actions**

Company Officers who find that a member of their assigned crew is missing or trapped should take the following actions:

- Immediately transmit a "***May-Day***" message over their radio.
- The "***May-Day***" message will be used only for lost or trapped firefighter notification.
- The message should include if possible:
  - The Company involved
  - How many firefighters are missing.
  - Who is missing.
  - Last known location and activity engaged in.
  - Actions being taken by the crew.
- The Company Officer must keep the remaining crew intact and control free lancing by the crew.
- Assess remaining air capacity. The crew must not run out of air. To do so will only complicate the rescue.
- Firefighting positions should not be abandoned without good cause. To do so may compromise the survival of the missing crew member.
- If crew needs to retreat due to low air or fire conditions, leave hoseline in place as a possible lifeline for the missing firefighter.
- Try to check the last location where the crew was known to be intact, if possible .
- Maintain communications to keep the IC informed of crew status, location and actions being taken.

- If an entire crew becomes lost or trapped, the Company Officer should take the following actions :
- Immediately transmit a “*May-Day*” message over their radio. Include the following information:
  - What company is in trouble.
  - How many firefighters are involved.
  - Where you *think* you are, as accurately as possible. Including the sound of nearby activities (such as a ventilation saw operating) may be very helpful.
  - How much air the crew has remaining.
- Keep crew intact.
- Have all crew members manually activate their *PASS Devices*.
- Attempt to find an exit.
- If an exit cannot be found, or if all routes are blocked, move the crew to an area that is as safe as possible from fire and that maximizes the ability of rescuers to locate the crew.
- Have each crew member implement self-survival and air conservation measures.
- Maintain communications with the IC and rescuers in order to keep them updated on crew status and assist in locating your crew.

### **Command Team Actions**

The Incident Commander must always assume that a missing firefighter is lost or trapped inside the building until the firefighter has been accounted for. The actions listed below should be taken rapidly in order to increase survivability. These actions do not necessarily need to be accomplished in the order listed.

- A “*May-Day*” message will be transmitted to alert all personnel working on the fireground of the situation. (example: “All personnel on the Rte 104 fire, we have a May-Day in the Interior Division.”)
- The IC must reconfigure the plan to include firefighter rescue as the highest priority. The balance of the plan should not be abandoned. Its continued implementation may be critical to the survival of the trapped firefighters. However, a well organized and supervised rescue plan must be rapidly developed and implemented as the highest priority on the fireground. The plan should be communicated to the rest of the Command Team, and implemented by Operations and RIT

- Elements of the rescue plan should include:
  - Deployment of the RIT to initiate search and rescue efforts.
  - The initial efforts of the RIC should include:
    - A rapid search of the following priority areas:
    - Hoselines stretched into the interior
    - Exterior walls
    - The last known location of the firefighter(s) in trouble
    - Attempts to detect and locate activated *PASS Devices*, signal lights and tapping sounds.
- The RIT must stay in communication with the Command Team.
- The rescue plan should also incorporate opening, unlocking or forcing open all doors and other points of egress in the immediate area by exterior resources.
- Where practical, doors should be left open if doing so will not have a negative effect on the fire.
- The rescue plan should maintain and reinforce effective ventilation and interior lighting in order to maintain tenability and visibility in the interior.
- Dispatch or another firefighter should be assigned to monitor all radio frequencies that might be used by the lost or trapped firefighter(s).
- The IC should assign a chief officer to supervise the Rescue Division as soon as possible.
- The IC should immediately request at least one additional alarm that includes a medical component. It should be anticipated that the rescue effort will rapidly consume resources.
- The IC should not hesitate to request multiple alarms based on the potential.
- Consideration should be given to specialized rescue needs.
- A “*PAR*” (Personnel Accountability Report) should be immediately requested from all companies operating on the fireground. Withdrawal of companies from their assigned activity may be ordered at the discretion of the Command Team in order to achieve an accurate accountability report.
- *PAR* will be completed every 15 minutes until all members are accounted for.
- The IC will need to control the media early and throughout the incident. Information on the identities and condition of lost firefighters must be restricted until next of kin are notified.
- The IC and Command Team will need to enforce strong supervision of all resources. Emotions will be high, and firefighters will tend to free-lance and take risks. Survival of the firefighters in trouble will be best served by well managed operations.