

THE RESCUE COMPANY

UTILIZING THE RESCUE COMPANY

It is 3:30 a.m. on a cold winter night and the voice on the department radio in the cab of the rescue truck is firing out a preliminary report, giving instructions and other information from the communications dispatcher in rapid-fire order. The tone of voice indicates a serious fire is in progress.

The building involved is a four-story occupied dwelling with heavy fire in the cellar and a smoke condition that has obscured the entire building from view. The first-arriving unit reports that people on the upper floors are screaming for help and unable to exit the building. In addition, a heavy odor of illuminating gas is evident on arrival of the units. Additional reports indicate that fire is extending out the rear of the building, cutting off the fire escape as a means of egress and severely exposing an old church located directly to the rear of the fire building.

The incident commander immediately requests additional help after being notified of all existing conditions and his initial response assignment—including a task force of three pumpers, two ladder companies, an additional chief officer, and a rescue company. Standard operating procedures have guided the first-arriving units to their initial assignments. The

RAY DOWNEY has been a member of the City of New York Fire Department for 27 years and has commanded the operations of Rescue Co. 2 for the past nine. Captain Downey holds an associate's degree in fire science. He's a New York state certified instructor and has conducted seminars and lectures throughout the United States on rescue-related tactics.

incident commander places his initial attack lines in position, and the ladder company members have laddered the building and are removing people from the upper floors. All units with the exception of the rescue company are on the scene and heavily engaged in their duties.

The incident commander has prioritized his immediate concerns and orders the rescue company on its arrival to assist in the search and rescue of victims from the upper floors of the fire building. His decision to use the rescue company this way is based on experience. His primary responsibility in this incident is the safe removal or rescue of the people trapped in the fire building. Because of the magnitude of the fire, such problems as victims trapped above the fire, and reflex time of the additional units, he decides to use the rescue company.

What if the building involved was a boarded-up vacant building with the same fire condition but no life hazard? Would the incident commander

A. order the rescue company to find out the cause of the strong gas odor and shut it down from the street with its special gas shutoff keys?

B. have it place into operation special saws used for cutting the boarded plywood windows and doors?

C. have it check the possible fire extension to the church directly in the rear of the fire building?

D. assign all of the above to the rescue company?

In this case the incident commander's knowledge of the rescue company's manning, expertise, and response assignment combined with fire condi-

tions would afford him the luxury of multiple assignments for one unit while awaiting additional help. The rescue company's manning level of an officer and five firefighters would allow for three two-man teams capable of covering all three assignments: The officer and one member would check the exposure in the rear for extension, another team would operate the special saws on the boarded-up windows and doors, and a third team would work on shutting down the gas in the street.

A VERSATILE UNIT

How should an incident commander use a rescue company? His decisions are based on a number of factors: the type and nature of the incident, the type of response assignment (initial or special-called), the special equipment unique to the unit, and the expertise of the unit's members. Incident commanders, because of their experience, are the key to effectively utilizing the rescue company.

Not every fire will have the same problems or be of the same magnitude. Incidents do not have to be complex, unique, or the odd job for an incident commander to put the rescue company to work. Fire can present a multitude of problems.

At a recent fire an incident commander was about to declare the fire under control when he was notified that a heavy smoke condition reappeared above the original fire floor. Attempts to locate the source of the smoke condition were hindered due to the renovations that had taken place in the old building over the years. The incident commander had

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not used the rescue company initially because of the first attack line's quick knockdown of the fire. However, he ordered rescue company members to search for the source of the smoke condition with their special heat-detecting camera. Within minutes the special camera located a hidden pocket of fire in a recessed area of the ceiling that was causing the smoke condition but couldn't be seen by firefighters using conventional search methods. The incident commander's familiarity with the rescue company's specialized equipment enabled him to successfully utilize it.

In the case of a serious fire in the cellar of a fireproof building with limited access that needs immediate ventilation, the incident commander could decide to put the rescue company's pavement breakers to work. Or the rescue company could check for visible signs of cracks or collapse.

Whether the task is ventilation, entry, search, or rescue during initial operations or the use of special tools and equipment at a large-scale operation, the incident commander's decision to employ the rescue company can have a major impact on the outcome of an operation. The rescue company is an additional resource to draw on regardless of the conditions.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Emergency responses are a large part of every department's activities. In one of the largest fire departments in the world, emergency responses comprise 30 percent of the total annual responses. How does the incident commander effectively utilize the rescue company at emergencies?

Recently units responded to a gas odor in a building. Such incidents usually are caused by a gas jet left on, defective stoves, or pilot lights going out. Units at such responses usually find the leak's source fairly quickly by going from apartment to apartment to locate and rectify the problem. In this

incident, however, the source of the leak remained elusive. Members checked and rechecked every apartment, stove, and gas appliance. A rescue company using a combustible detecting meter was able to trace the source of the leak to a supply pipe in a wall and seal off the pipe using a leak and plug kit. Again the incident commander prevented a minor incident from becoming a major one by using the rescue company.

One incident commander's solution to a major water leak was to call a rescue company to the scene. The expertise of scuba-equipped rescue members quickly resolved what could have been a serious situation.

A training session at which a rescue company displayed its newest equipment provided an incident commander with important knowledge that he used at a serious incident the following week: a partial building collapse that trapped a worker under a large slab of concrete. The sections of broken concrete were too heavy for rescue workers to lift. A crane appeared to be the only way to move the concrete. Time was of the essence—the trapped worker had been seriously injured, and waiting for a crane could prove fatal. The IC ordered apparatus cleared from the immediate area and had the rescue company back its rig as close to the scene as possible. Having seen the "A" frame and hoist attachment during the training session, he used this equipment to lift the concrete slabs and rescue the trapped worker.

Rescue company responses range from building collapse to vehicle extrications, machinery entrapments, impalements, train and railcar incidents, trench cave-ins, and scuba and haz-mat incidents. Success in such operations can be greatly enhanced by effectively utilizing the rescue company. Familiarity and knowledge of the rescue company's equipment and tools, training, and expertise will prove a vital resource that the IC can draw on in both major and minor incidents. ■

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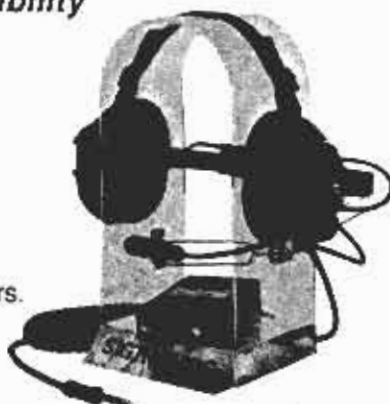
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