



SPECIALIZED RESCUE TRAINING BY RAY DOWNEY

If you were asked to make an analogy between the main supporting construction features of your home and the fire service profession, you could probably answer easily. Many homes wouldn't stand very long if there wasn't a good foundation. This principle can certainly apply to the fire service. But what is the foundation of the fire service? Is it the apparatus or equipment? Is it management with its new buzzword "reengineering" of departments? Is it staffing levels...or contractual agreements? The list of possibilities could fill the remainder of this page.

What about that eight-letter word TRAINING? Take a few minutes to sit down with paper and pen and list the titles of all the training sessions you have attended. Make another list of all the drills. If you are a vet-

eran, make sure you have enough paper.

Recently, I attended a one-week command course for newly promoted chief officers at our training academy. Having trouble finding a parking space, I decided that during our lunch break I would tour the academy to get an idea of how many members were involved in daily training.

Using a turn-of-the-century adding machine, I figured that we had about 450 firefighters involved in some degree of training (for that day). Even for a department of our size (11,500 members) this seemed a big number.

In taking a closer look at the training, however, it really didn't involve that many different types of training. Our recruit class had 150 members, we had 125 members in first-responder training, 20 new chiefs, 60 new lieutenants in first-line supervisor training, and 40 fire marshals. Other training included extrication, chauffeur driving, bunker gear, rope, and company evaluation.

In addition, some of the other mandated training programs (i.e., haz-mat and blood-borne pathogens) were being held at satellite classrooms throughout the city. In-house training and a new pilot project involving cable TV training programs have become part of the daily activities in every fire station as well.

One of the most common complaints about the training sessions is that they are never long enough. There is usually so much material to cover, but time is a precious commodity—and an expensive one accord-

ing to the budget people. I have always found it extremely difficult to understand how the powers to be are always looking to cut the fire department budget and, more often than not, going after the monies designated for training.

All training programs have formulated lesson plans to cover the material needed for the vast number of subjects. This provides a structure whereby different instructors can use the same lesson plan.

What about **specialized rescue training**? How many departments have separate training programs with the plans, resources, and expertise to accomplish this specialized training? If not in-house, is this training available on a municipal, city, county, or state level? There are a number of options departments can use to provide the often difficult but necessary specialized training. They can use one of the municipal, city, county, or state programs to develop their own program. Often times, these programs have long waiting lists, which can create problems for any department. Being able to get one member of a department into a program will be a starting point toward developing a program that mirrors the program offered. It stands to reason that your success in developing a program will be contingent on your resources and the qualifications of the personnel conducting the training.

First, you must define your specialized rescue training needs. Regular training sessions address the everyday needs of a department, depending on its types of inci-

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dents, responses, and assignments. The same principle applies to specialized rescue training. The types of rescue incidents you respond to and how frequently you respond to them will give you a basis from which a specialized program can be developed. If your response district includes numerous expressways, parkways, highways, etc., and you have a significant number of calls for vehicle incidents, you most certainly will continue a maintenance training program in addition to having priority specialized training for these types of incidents for all your

new members. You will also have training sessions for those building collapses, train incidents, high-angle rescues, or any number of other rescue incidents that you could eventually respond to.

Take the phrase "It can't happen here" out of your vocabulary. All you have to do is read the daily newspapers. A recent plane crash came down in a corn field, and a gasoline tanker truck was involved in an accident and fire on a major suburban expressway during rush hour. Both incidents occurred in suburban areas. These

incidents don't always happen in big cities with large departments.

Although my department has responded to rescue incidents for the past 129 years, it has only been in the past few years that a specialized rescue training program was developed. Previously, most of the training was "OJT" (on-the-job training). A number of factors were responsible for the program development. For example, we have seen a dramatic increase in special rescue responses, especially building collapses. Disasters also seem to have become much more common during the last two decades of the 20th century (although this could be due to our heightened awareness of them from media coverage).

Departments must preplan, train, and gear themselves up for a variety of possible specialized rescue incidents. Our department, responding to the need, addressed this issue by first appointing a committee of rescue specialists to review our procedures and make the necessary recommendations to improve our operations. The committee not only made recommendations for procedural changes but also included a recommendation for specialized rescue training. The objective of training would be to develop an SOP for the various types of incidents and the operational procedures to be standardized.

The program began with building construction and its relationship to building collapse. The follow-up training modules included collapse operation planning, operational procedures used in building collapse incidents, void access and exploration, interior and exterior shoring of buildings, confined space, trench rescue, concrete breaking and breaching, victim removal procedures, crush syndrome injury, and specialized tool use training. The program is dynamic and will continue to grow and incorporate the many challenging rescue incidents that are becoming more common.

There are many other similar programs around the country. The Commonwealth of Virginia offers a unique technical rescue program. (There are a number of terms associated with specialized rescue—technical rescue, heavy rescue, and heavy technical rescue, to name a few.) Technically referred to in Virginia as "Heavy and Tactical Rescue," the program is designed to provide training across Virginia to career, volunteer, and industrial departments. The program modules include trench rescue, confined space awareness, confined space entry and rescue, rope rescue, industrial rescue, and vehicle extrication.

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This FEMA training drill, conducted in November 1994, stressed the importance of tool knowledge, understanding of materials' properties, versatility, and operational realism. Creativity and commitment are essential elements of a successful specialized rescue training program, whether your budget is big or small. (Photos by author.)

Education System was established to provide a single statewide focus for fire service training in California. The authority for the central coordination of this effort is vested in the training division of the state fire marshal's office. There are two separate special-

ing, penetrating ordinary construction, and a final breaking of concrete to reach the trapped victim located behind the last obstacle. This station was affectionately known as "Chase and Ray's Funhouse."

Each station had a different set of tools so that students would have the opportunity to work with a variety of tools that were capable of performing the required tasks. The scenarios for each station and substation were created by the 20 instructors who came from departments around the country. These instructors brought real-

life experiences from disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, explosions, collapses, etc., to help develop what was unanimously agreed to be one of the most challenging and rewarding training sessions in which the students and instructors had ever participated. Each of the nine substations were designed to be equally challenging.

All of this would not have been possible without the new "Rescue Mall," constructed by the Montgomery County Fire Department and especially designed for rescue

training. The mall provided ideal props for the various scenarios.

A major exercise was a simulated earthquake in the Rockville area that resulted in a number of collapsed buildings and a highway overpass collapse. "Victims" were reported to be trapped in two different buildings and in cars under the collapsed overpass. In less than six hours, seven live "victims" were freed from the entrapment.

Another plus for this training session was the reality built into this exercise and the availability of the "Rescue Mall." This session provided the student and instructor with many lessons. Other major training exercises and conferences have been held around the country during the past few years, but none of them ever had the opportunity to use a similar-type structure built just for rescue training.

What's available for the departments that don't have the training sites, resources, or expertise to conduct this type of specialized training? A number of private training companies can provide programs specially designed for rescue training. Some can be done at your location, and others require you to travel to their location. Budget constraints could create problems when travel is involved. One warning before you go out and hire a private training company: Check it out; make sure it is reputable and has experience in specialized training. Ask for references. Call other departments who have been trained by the company. Most of these companies have highly professional personnel conducting the training but every once in awhile, someone lacking the credentials tries to sneak by. Be sure to get your money's worth; it can be relatively expensive.

Your most important resource is yourself and those around you. Bother your members for a meeting of the minds. Consider a cooperative effort, crossing multijurisdictional lines, to meet the major resource requirements inherent in a heavy rescue response. Work together and learn together. And there is no substitute for creativity—you may find a way to create a training setup that does not break the budget.

There is a definite need for specialized training, especially as we approach the 21st century and have to face the many challenging rescue incidents complicated by the modern technology often incorporated into building design.

The last issue always asks the relevant question. How much time should we dedicate to specialized training? Just look at the cover of this magazine... need I say more? ■

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ized rescue programs—Rescue Systems I (the fundamentals of heavy rescue) and Rescue Systems II (a more advanced course).

The Rescue System I course curriculum includes management of the rescue scene; utilization of rescue rope and related equipment; construction of mechanical advantage systems; lowering/raising of victims; construction of ladder gins, A-frames, ladder slides, gin poles, block and tackle systems; utilization of tools during heavy rescue operation; and the list goes on.

Rescue Systems II has a more advanced course curriculum, including emergency building shoring, structural building types and how they fail, wood shoring and cribbing, confined space, advanced rope rescue, concrete building construction hazards, concrete cutting and breaking, victim locating devices, and specialized equipment resource allocation. Space doesn't allow for a complete listing of the course curriculum; but as you can see, these courses are geared toward the specialized rescue.

In Indianapolis, the introductory module

of the Marion County Fire Chiefs Association Basic Emergency Rescue Technician (BERT) training program states that the content is directed toward introducing the evolution of special rescue teams, with special emphasis on specialized rescue. The program starts with an introduction to physics and its application to rescue and progresses through all of the previously mentioned specialized rescue training programs. What is especially unique about the BERT training is the voluminous training documentation that is incorporated into the entire program.

These certainly are not the only specialized rescue training programs in the country; they are used here as examples of the types of training programs that address specialized rescue training. During November 1994, nine of the 25 Urban Search and Rescue teams from the National Program participated in the first "Rescue Specialist" training program sponsored by FEMA's National Urban Search and Rescue Program. Each team sent one squad comprised of six rescue specialists to the Montgomery County Public Service Training Academy in Rockville, Maryland. (The teams came from New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Florida, to name a few.) This one-week course consisted of classroom lectures on building construction and its hazards, structural engineering systems, rescue operations strategy and tactics, safety, and special tool orientation. Three full days were dedicated to hands-on training in the field. Skill stations were divided into three sections: a) breaking and breaching concrete, b) lifting and rigging, and c) shoring. Each of these stations were then divided into three substations. The students rotated through each station. The days were hard, long, and wet but very rewarding for both the student and the instructor. As co-lead instructor along with Battalion Chief Chase Sargent of the Virginia Beach (VA) Fire Department, I can personally attest to the intense training.

Our breaking and breaching of concrete station started each day with a classroom lecture that discussed concrete from the time of its development up to the present day. On completion of the lecture, the squad would then be assigned to one of three substations. Station 1 involved the horizontal removal of a 24- by 24-inch piece of reinforced concrete in a clean lift-out (in other words, the piece had to come out intact). Station 2 was a similar clean lift-out but of a vertical, triangular, 24- by 24- by 24-inch piece. Station 3 was a confined-space breaching of concrete, cutting of steel plat-

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