RAY DOWNEY'S

THE RESCUE COMPANY

TRAINING

In the introductory article of "The Rescue Company" series (*Fire Engineering*, June 1988), I described a rescue company as a specialized firefighting unit, equipped with a large variety of special tools and equipment, whose personnel are specially trained to handle any fire or emergency. In the articles that followed, apparatus, tools, equipment, manning, recruitment, and site management were discussed. But what of specialized training for rescue companies? The complexity and diversity of rescue unit operations (and the considerable quantity of tools and equipment that must be available for them) require that a training program be developed to provide members with the knowledge and skills to perform their specialized duties proficiently. Training must be on a continuous basis. Initial training provides the foundation; the continuing training reinforces the principles of rescue operations and procedures.

If you were asked about specialized training in your department, how would you answer the following questions:

What type of special training does your department provide?

Who does the training?

Where is the training conducted?

How are the department's training goals accomplished?

What type of subjects are covered?

I'm sure the answers would be varied, depending on the factors that influence individual department policies with regard to specialized training.

Firefighting is a unique profession: it takes a special kind of person to enter a burning structure when everyone else is exiting. It's training that gets the recruit to harness that energy and perform his tasks *safely*. Training, therefore, is given a top priority in most departments, and training for a rescue company should carry even more importance.

This article will cover rescue training in general, and offer some suggestions and ideas for specialized training.

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What type of special training is available? Many departments have training schools that cover a wide spectrum of rescue training development—the list is limited by a department's budget, imagination, dedication, commitment, and resources. Money, however, is usually the main obstacle, especially for departments looking to expand. When city management starts cutting the budget, the fire department is usually the first to feel the impact, and training is one area that cost-cutters always go after.

What if your department doesn't have the specialized training? How about organizations on the national, state, city, and local levels?

"OUTSIDE" TRAINING

Since 1980, the National Fire Academy has provided programs that can be extremely helpful to any department. The NFA courses are offered not only at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland, but in a number of other states as well. (Consult the *Fire Service Directory of Training and Information Sources.*) The Fire Service Technical Specialist program, which provides training in haz mats, is one such state-sponsored NFA program. There's even a fire instructor's course that teaches training personnel to design, develop, and implement training courses/programs for their departments. Financial assistance from the federal government makes the NFA programs more accessible.

Furthermore, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, parent of the NFA, provides partial funding for a state-run rescue training program that's available in some areas. This program provides varied course instruction on victim rescue from entrapment in building collapse, operations in confined space, search and removal from mountainous areas, hoisting and lowering victims and personnel from above or below grade, rigging, gin-pole construction, tunneling, and trenching. A certificate is issued to those who successfully finish the course.

Many states sponsor programs that are directed to all departments within their borders. Maryland, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia are just a few of the states that offer courses directly related to rescue; for a more complete listing, see the *Fire Service Directory*. Towns, municipalities, counties, and other local jurisdictions also have programs designed for specialized training. A rural area with

■ **RAY DOWNEY** has been a member of the Fire Department of New York City for 26 years and has commanded the operations of Rescue Co. 2 for the past 8. 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.

farms in its response area will be interested in a course or program offering training to handle farm incidents. One such course offered by a county training academy covers farm machinery, farm chemicals, and farm structure incidents. A unique extrication of manikins from simulated accidents is part of the curriculum.

If your department's budget doesn't allow for a one- or two-week course, or if this type of program is not available, consider the other options. Seminars, conferences, and workshops are numerous, frequent, much shorter, and less costly. If budget allocations are still a problem, send only one or two members of your department to receive the education and then, in turn, pass the information along to the rest of their unit. Some of these smaller workshops, seminars, and conferences are offered on weekends in consideration of those whose schedule does not allow them to attend during the work week. Many states also offer weekend programs. Listings can be obtained from your state office, and many fire service publications dedicate space to list upcoming events.

There are a number of private organizations that offer rescue courses. Courses are offered from the basic to the advanced levels of rescue work. Some of the more advanced courses require prior experience or prerequisites based on the course program. Before registering for a course offered by a private organization, check to see that it is accredited by federal, state, or local government agencies.

"INSIDE" TRAINING

Company-level programs are the heart of a unit's training. They are generally inexpensive, providing hands-on education that's geared directly toward the unit's needs and objectives. Scheduling of training sessions should be assigned to the training officer. Schedules must be flexible enough so that each and every unit member receives the benefit of training, and records should be maintained for future reference.

Effective scheduling hinges on accurate record keeping. A log of what tools and equipment are used at each rescue operation, who used them, and an evaluation of the competence level of the user will be helpful to the training officer. (This kind of record keeping also can be beneficial when purchase of new equipment is being considered by the department—justification for purchase can be supported by complete tool-use records.) The training officer may see the need for "refresher" training with equipment that's used on a limited basis, in which case up-to-date records will again be useful. The value of refresher training can't be overestimated—if you use the tool or piece of equipment only once and it saves a life, it's well worth the cost, especially the cost of the time spent on training.

As previously noted, a number of departments use these training schools for specialized training of rescue personnel. These programs, some lasting for weeks at a time, are developed to cover the special tools, equipment, and operations of rescue units. The limit and scope of the programs will depend on the type of equipment carried by the units, the response of the units (rescue, EMS, haz mat, SCUBA), the facilities and availability of qualified instructors, and/or special certification requirements imposed by governmental bodies. Some regulatory agencies require certification to handle extrication, haz mats, and SCUBA operations. Many departments are capable of operating these schools on a small scale but with high proficiency. In some cases, when a budget doesn't provide for members to attend on a weekly basis, a program is implemented that's geared to bring a unit to the training site for half-day or full-day training.

When new special equipment is received by a department, the training school is an excellent place for its introduction. Some one-day sessions can be used for special training in such areas as extrication (new techniques

stretchers can be done from the building's roof or setbacks. Many units have collected various objects that were part of a rescue operation, brought them back to the quarters and, by training with various tools and equipment, developed standard operational procedures for future use.

A picture in my den reminds me so clearly (even though it was 20 years ago) of one of my first in-house training sessions. It was one of my first night tours in the rescue company and my officer, a salty old lieutenant, decided that I would be "victim" and my fellow firefighters would secure me in an "army" litter. Laying on the litter, I tried to listen to every word and direction the lieutenant gave for the proper lashing of the "victim" to the stretcher. My "brothers"—with straight faces—neatly and with great proficiency secured me so I could be lifted in either a horizontal or vertical method. The pole hole was to be used for the vertical lift on a short ladder. Ropes were lowered down for the lift and guidelines placed, and I was slowly lifted halfway up the pole hole. The lieutenant gave the signal, and the dinner bell rang; I watched in amazement as the brothers went to partake of the evening meal. The picture that's hanging on my den wall was taken by one of the brothers that night. You can be sure that in later years I really savored my meal while the new guy was pondering *his* victim role. Incidently, we did use that lift in a number of operations, and it always worked well. Its success could be attributed not only to the lieutenant's imagination for training sessions, but to the scheming brothers' participation and interest in ensuring that the knots were properly tied. It worked every time.

Returning to the site of a rescue incident is another form of training. With safety in mind, critiquing at the site has been useful. A better understanding of the operational procedure can be gained from seeing it in person. I've listened to many a scenario of rescue operations and not fully understood them until I personally visited the sites.

Rescue units are often called on by the department to partake in and evaluate either a proposed piece of equipment or a special operational procedure that has been recommended. The well-rounded experience and expertise of the rescue members is a valuable asset in fine-tuning a proposed operational procedure or in changing specifications of experimental equipment. These are training sessions in "disguise" that can add to what your unit takes to an operation.

Tools and equipment require a regularly scheduled checklist and maintenance operational check—another step in the specialized training regimen. Operation of this equipment, too, should be utilized as a training lesson. Operational performance checks on the air bag system would include those for bag placement, hoses, manifolds, regulators, adaptors, air supply replenishment; these checks combine to form a training session. By involving all on-duty members in observations, operations, and discussion as to uses, limitations, and capabilities, this equipment check turns into a drill session. This is also an excellent time for the experienced members to be actively involved with the training and pass down many of the tips and hints that have been "grandfathered" down to the new members of a rescue unit.

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Training must include everyone, from the new guy to experienced members, officers included. Officers! Yes, to lead a specialized group of firefighters, the leader must know at least the capabilities and limitations of the tools and equipment and be able to direct their proper placement.

That sounds good for the regularly assigned officer who is involved in the day-to-day activities and training sessions, but what about the fill-in, or officer assigned on a temporary basis? They will have to be given some familiarization training. The unit's training schedule must take these officers into account, and training sessions should be geared for the officers as well as the firefighters. While the firefighter is in-

and/or equipment), mask operations (confined-space, manifold, extension-line use, etc.), rope usage (rescue, rappeling, stokes- or litter-lifting). Individual topics can be planned lessons drawn up and scheduled for small groups.

One point bears reemphasis: Training must be on a *continuous* basis. Ideally, the longer the time allotted for training, the greater the area of topics that can be covered. Week-long programs are better than shorter sessions for covering a greater number of tools and equipment, but remember—it's not the quantity but the quality that counts more. Having an instructor that can "show" but not "tell" won't be much help for the rescue member who wants the meat and potatoes of the program. When we talk about specialized training, we must also consider the instructor—the kind of instructor with the qualifications and background to give the rescue members the *special* instructions they need.

Keeping a separate file or folder for the instruction books and manuals of each tool and piece of equipment is an important aspect of rescue training. These files can be used for the "introductory phase" of special training (especially for the new members). Manuals that are provided by the manufacturer explain tool operation and maintenance and include the parts list, but, most importantly, they will show various examples of its possible applications in rescue situations. Expanding a tool's capabilities is the result of training and practical application.

In addition to tool manuals and instruction booklets, some training aids to consider are videotapes, slides, 16mm films, articles written about rescue operations, and manuals designed for training of rescue personnel.

The video-cassette tape can be a very effective means of training. Many of the major manufacturers of rescue equipment can provide a tape describing the equipment's capabilities, limitations, maintenance requirements, and design features. There are a number of specialized training video-cassette tapes on the market, providing step-by-step instruction on the basic to the most difficult and unusual. Tapes are being used in many of the programs across the country and have proven to be excellent training tools.

Many individual units are making their own tapes, recording their training sessions and using them for "classroom" instruction at the firehouse. Critiquing the tape can help improve operations and ensure that the safety of all personnel is being considered. Refinements of the operation can then be retaped and kept on file for use by members at any time. If a department does not have a video-cassette recorder or video camera, perhaps some of the members may be willing to loan their own personal equipment to the department for viewing and recording.

Slides and 16mm films are also used for in-house productions of drills, and very effectively. Together with video cassettes, they can make for an extensive training aids section for the unit. Along those lines, fire service publications often supply a listing of tapes, films, instructional booklets, plans, and informational guidelines that can be helpful in the specialized training of your unit.

The use of multiagency, large-scale disaster drills is part of specialized training. Many of these drills require the special equipment and expertise of the rescue firefighters. This is an excellent time not only for active participation, but also for a training session. Many operational procedures used at large-scale incidents have been developed through training at these drills. Other participating agencies may have similar equipment, and it could be the time to exchange ideas and suggestions regarding, for example, a special tool's usage. In addition, seeing the specialized equipment of other units can be helpful when it comes the time to evaluate the equipment needs of your own department.

A firehouse can provide its own training ground. Previous rescue incidents can be critiqued and, if necessary, corrections, additions, and refinements to the operational procedure can be made and practiced at quarters. For example, lowering and lifting "victims" and/or

volved mostly in practical applications, the officer must be concerned with the theory and principle of the equipment's operation.

Training for the new rescue company member has to be spread out over a long period of time, mainly because of the vast amount of equipment carried by specialized units. Again, the unit's needs and objectives will play the deciding role in how, what, where, and when the new member is trained. Ideally, having a specialized training school for rescue members would provide the means by which a basis foundation could be formed. However, realistically, budgets provide few departments this luxury.

STARTING AN IN-HOUSE PROGRAM

In-house programs should be geared toward familiarization, principles of operation, and practical utilization of the rescue company's specialized equipment and tools.

What do you start with when developing in-house programs? Tool usage based on response records can help develop a training format for your unit. If, for example, a breakdown of your records indicates that over a six-month period you used a hydraulic spreading device more often than any other piece of equipment, the training program for the new member might well begin with that device. Each tool and piece of equipment the company uses can be similiarly researched and a complete listing formulated, then sessions scheduled to coincide with the members' work schedules.

Some departments schedule training sessions for a particular time during a tour. This helps standardize the department's policy. In special units such as a rescue company, training can be done at any hour; the availability of an abandoned, burned-out vehicle, for instance, could provide the ingredients for a drill on spreading devices and cutters whether it's morning or night—rescue operations can occur at any hour. Don't be limited by a lack of imagination. Be prepared for any rescue operation that your company may respond to and schedule some training sessions in the same manner. ■