

	ROFR Section: 3600		TFCA Best Practices:	
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Fires in Vacant, Unoccupied or Abandoned Structures

Purpose

Fire fighters are often killed or injured when fighting fires in abandoned, vacant, and unoccupied structures. These structures pose additional and sometimes unique risks due to the potential for fire fighters to encounter unexpected and unsafe building conditions such as dilapidation, decay, damage from previous fires and vandals, and other factors such as uncertain occupancy status. Risk management principles must be applied at all structure fires to ensure the appropriate strategy and tactics are used based on the fireground conditions encountered.

Definitions

Abandoned refers to a structure that is not being used for any purpose and is not being maintained or preserved for some future use or occupancy. In many cases the building could be classified as a public nuisance awaiting demolition. A building in this condition typically has no value or negligible value.

Vacant refers to a building that is not currently in use, but which could be used in the future. The term “vacant” could apply to a property that is for sale or rent, undergoing renovations, or empty of contents in the period between the departure of one tenant and the arrival of another tenant. A vacant structure has inherent property value, even though it may not contain valuable contents or human occupants.

Unoccupied generally refers to a structure that is not occupied by any persons at the time an incident occurs. An unoccupied building could be used by a business that is temporarily closed (i.e., overnight or for a weekend). The term unoccupied could also apply to a building that is routinely or periodically occupied, but the occupants are not present at the time an incident occurs. A residential structure could be temporarily unoccupied because the residents are at work or on vacation. A building that is temporarily unoccupied has inherent property value as well as valuable contents.

General Guidelines

- A thorough size-up and risk analysis should be performed before conducting operations in any burning structure.
- Fire-fighting operations should be limited to defensive strategy if the structure is judged to be unsafe and in any situation where the risk to firefighter safety is excessive.
- Offensive operations should only be considered when sufficient resources are on scene to conduct offensive operations with a reasonable degree of safety, including the ability to

perform essential support functions (i.e., water supply, ventilation, lighting, utility control, accountability, rapid intervention).

- Additional size-ups and risk analyses should be performed before changing strategies, including any decision to conduct interior overhaul operations following a defensive attack.
- Have adequate resources available on scene to perform rapid intervention duties any time personnel are operating at any structure fire.
- A primary and secondary search shall be performed as soon as the Safety officer and/or Incident Command deem the structure safe to enter.

Risk Management Profile: Pre-determined acceptable levels of risk based on conditions:

- Red Oak Fire Rescue will take large calculated risk to save known victims.
- Red Oak Fire Rescue will take NO RISK for lives or property that is already lost.
- Red Oak Fire Rescue will take minimal risk to protect savable property.

