

	<b>ROFR Section:</b> 900		<b>TFCA Best Practices:</b>	
	<b>Effective:</b> 9/2011	<b>Revision:</b>	<b>Fire Chief:</b> 	

## **“May-Day” Communications**

### **PURPOSE**

Recent events surrounding multiple firefighter fatalities while operating at fires in various communities should cause the fire service to re-think the approach to managing a rescue effort for a reported trapped or missing firefighter. Actions by the incident commander must be quick, decisive, and correct. The situation allows only a very narrow window of survivability for any missing firefighter(s). On an annual basis, all companies, and dispatch shall train on this procedure as well as emergency evacuations. This shall be conducted in the form of a company performance standard.

### **“MAY-DAY RADIO MESSAGE**

The radio message “May-Day” will be used by firefighters to report their status as being in trouble and needing rescue. Any member may use “May-Day” to report a lost firefighter. Any report of “May-Day” will receive priority radio traffic. The term “May-Day” will be reserved **ONLY** to report missing or trapped firefighters. The term “emergency traffic” will be used to report all other emergencies.

### **COMMAND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Command will maintain an awareness of the location of firefighters on the fire ground primarily through assignments and the accountability system. In the event that a firefighter cannot be located through a PAR, or any other time a firefighter is missing, the officer or any member may announce a “May-Day”. The term “May-Day” will indicate a lost or down firefighter. Command shall respond to a “May-Day” by implementing a rescue plan for the firefighter(s).

### **MISSING FIREFIGHTER?**

Company officers and individual firefighters that suspect a firefighter is missing must notify the incident commander immediately. The incident commander **MUST ALWAYS** assume that the missing firefighter is lost in the building until the member is accounted for. The system must include the ability to identify when a firefighter is going to be delayed beyond his/her SCBA airtime.

The plan should include:

- Fire operations during rescue operations

- Expanding organization
- Establishing the rescue sector
- Assign an officer to the rescue team
- Medical operations
- Family support branch officer
- Member support—debriefing, ect.
- Logistics—specialized equipment (RM)
- Safety
- Support activities
- Media control—information management

### **CHANGE THE STRATEGY AND PLAN TO A HIGH PRIORITY RESCUE EFFORT**

The Incident Commander must restructure his/her strategy and action plan to include a firefighter rescue effort. This may seem obvious to most. However, incident commanders can become overwhelmed by the emotion related to the crisis at hand and may become hooked on reacting to tasks rather than looking at the global picture. This can lead to disorganization and delays that can be fatal to the missing firefighter.

A conscious commitment must be made to quickly develop a rescue plan (see above). Accurate information must be quickly obtained and acted upon. A rapid, well thought out plan must be established. Additional resources must be immediately obtained. Rapid commitment of resources must occur. These resources must be organized and controlled. The Command organization must expand. The plan, strategy, and objectives must be quickly communicated to Command staff and sector officers. The plan and rescue activities must be continually monitored and revised as necessary. Conditions and updated information causes changes in the plan and objectives. The Incident Commander must communicate any changes to the Command staff and sector officers.

### **IMMEDIATELY REQUEST ADDITIONAL ALARM**

In many situations, all resources on-scene may already be committed to firefighting positions. Some firefighters may already be approaching physical exhaustion, or the SCBA's

may be nearly empty. Relocation committed forces is difficult and slow. One additional alarm should be immediately requested upon a report of a missing or trapped firefighter. This is to try and get any additional personnel that did not respond on the initial alarm. There should be no hesitation in requesting any additional resources.

### **INCLUDE A MEDICAL COMPONENT WHEN REQUESTING ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Medical personnel will be needed to treat rescued firefighters. The incident commander must ensure that an adequate number of paramedics are responding as well as an adequate number of Ambulances to transport injured firefighters. The incident commander should understand that the situation is critical, and firefighters sometimes tend to extend their risk taking when searching for a missing firefighter and additional firefighters may become injured in the process. Adequate medical resources must be readily available and on site.

### **UTILIZE A CENTRALIZED STAGING AREA**

All additional resources will be sent to a centralized staging area. The incident commander should commit resources from staging based on needs at the site. Staging controls resources and ensures that there is a route in and out of the scene, free of congestion, for ambulances to transport recovered firefighters.

### **COMMIT THE RAPID INTERVENTION TEAM**

All significant firefighting operations will have a “standby” rapid intervention team (RIT) near the scene. This team should be fully outfitted with protective clothing, SCBA, ect., and monitoring all tactical radio traffic. Upon report of a missing firefighter, the incident commander has a completely fresh crew (or more than one crew for especially high hazard situations), fully outfitted, available for commitment to an immediate search and rescue of the last known area of the missing firefighter(s). The RIT team, or any fresh crew(s) in staging, must be immediately sent to the rescue sector. The commitment of additional crews, however, must be controlled and organized.

The significance of the routine use of RIT teams to firefighter survivability on the fireground is substantial. At multiple alarms, one or more companies will be assigned this standby function and given the designation “Rescue Sector”.

### **WITHDRAW COMPANIES FROM THE AFFECTED AREA, IF APPROPRIATE, TO OBTAIN A ROLL CALL AND RECONNAISSANCE INFORMATION**

In some situations, such as collapse or explosion, crewmembers can get separated. The only practical method, to obtain an accurate PAR of effected crews, may be to withdraw them to the exterior. In addition, withdrawal may be the only way to quickly obtain accurate information and reconnaissance on exactly where trapped members may be, routing to

victims, debris locations, and the type of rescue equipment needed. Once the roll call and reconnaissance information is quickly obtained, crews can be re-assembled into a more organized rescue effort.

Withdrawal is a judgment call based on circumstances at the time, information available, and resources. It may not be practical or possible to do. However, the absolute need for an accurate roll call and information on missing firefighters remains a critical priority. If it's determined not to withdraw, a detailed roll call must be obtained from each sector for crews operating under his direction.

### **DO NOT ABANDON FIREFIGHTING POSITIONS—HOLD POSITIONS AND PREVENT FIRE SPREAD**

The reasons for a standby rapid intervention rescue team(s), and the immediate request for additional resources, becomes very clear with this critical fireground need. If a missing firefighter(s) is to survive, the incident commander must keep the fire out of the rescue area. Without standby rescue teams, the incident commander is in a fatal catch 22 dilemma. Does he/she relocate companies committed to fire combat to the rescue effort and allow the fire to spread? Or does he hold the fire positions and wait for additional resources for the rescue effort? With a RIT team in place, the incident commander can initiate an immediate rescue effort without withdrawing or relocating fire combat companies. Teams located on the exterior on standby will have full air cylinders in their SCBA's, where as crews working on the interior or the Hot Zone will have limited supply.

In most situations the incident commander cannot allow the fire to spread. If anything, these fire combat positions need to be reinforced. Additional companies from the multiple alarms or mutual aid should be sent to priority positions to keep the fire out of the rescue area.

### **ASSIGN AN OFFICER TO THE RESCUE SECTOR**

The incident commander is faced with a time critical crisis. Correct decisions and strong management of rescue operations is essential. An officer must be assigned to the direct the rescue sector and rescue operations. Depending on the size of the rescue area and the complexity of operations, more than one officer may be needed to fill additional support positions or sectors.

### **ASSIGN A SAFETY OFFICER TO THE RESCUE OPERATION**

Rescue operations are high risk. The operation may be taking place in a post-collapse environment. Flashover may have occurred. Firefighters will tend to want to freelance and take chances that they would not normally take if it were not for fellow firefighters that are missing. The incident commander must avoid additional injuries. Each additional injury requires a resource commitment that will draw away from the priority rescue effort. A safety officer in the affected will help control the risk taking. The officer will be able to conduct an

assessment of the hazards allowing time for the rescue sector officer to concentrate on the critical rescue effort. These sector officers must work hand in hand to insure that a safe and effective rescue operation is conducted.

### **INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

- to follow directions from officers
- to continue with assignment unless otherwise directed
- to keep your cool

Every officer on the scene should listen specifically for a “May-Day” as fireground noise could cover a call for the “May-Day”

### **DISPATCH CENTER RESPONSIBILITIES**

When a firefighter is declared lost or missing the Dispatch Center will be notified emergency traffic only and to document the time of the May-Day.

The Dispatch Center must have the capability to monitor these channels; it is essential that someone monitor the channels that are in our radios in case the personnel is not able to get out on our channel or during the circumstances the channel may have been changed.

The Dispatch Center will contact ALL other agencies on our radios and advise of the situation and to monitor for our personnel. These agencies must be advised to keep the firefighter on whatever channel he/she is currently on and to notify Red Oak Dispatch immediately. Instructions and information will be relayed between agencies, or get the personnel on the proper channel.

ALL non-emergency activity in the Dispatch Center will be suspended and ALL channels will be monitored very closely for any transmissions from the missing firefighter.

## **Lost/Trapped Fire Fighter -- Self-Survival**

### **PURPOSE**

The nature of fire fighting places the fire fighter at risk of becoming lost or trapped. The toxic environment provides only a narrow window of survivability. Survival depends on a mix of predictable self-survival actions by the lost fire fighter and the incident commander.

### **BASIC SELF-SURVIVAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Number 1 Basic Self-Survival responsibility is ***DON'T GET TRAPPED/LOST, OR RUN OUT OF AIR.***

The rescue of trapped or lost fire fighters in a IDLH atmosphere is especially time sensitive because we work with a limited air supply.

- All members entering the Hazard Zone must have a portable radio and personal rescue tools.
- Minimum crew size is two and crewmembers must remain intact.
- Crews must have an assignment and must be working under the direct supervision of a Sector Officer or Command.
- Crews will follow Air Management practices.

### **CALL FOR HELP IMMEDIATELY**

Firefighters who find themselves lost or trapped must immediately use "May Day" to announce their situation while they continue to attempt to find their way out. Firefighters should not delay notification of distress. Notifications should occur as soon as the firefighter **THINKS** he or she is in trouble. The longer you wait to tell somebody you are in trouble the more you jeopardize yourself and the rescuers lives.

### **"MAY-DAY" RADIO MESSAGE**

The radio message "May-Day" will be used by a lost or trapped firefighter to report their status as being in trouble and needing rescue. **Any report of "May-Day" will receive priority radio traffic followed by the emergency traffic only.** The term "May-Day" will be reserved **ONLY** to report lost or trapped fire fighters. The term "emergency traffic" will be used to report other emergencies.

Lost firefighters should give Command information as to who they are, how many firefighters, what Sector they were operating in, where they **THINK** they are (as accurately as possible), description of building structures surrounding them, sounds of nearby activities, (i.e., ventilation saw noise), or any other information that might direct rescue crews (RIC) to their location.

### **OTHER RADIO CHANNEL**

If a lost fire fighter can not contact Command, dispatch, or any other units on the assigned radio channel, the fire fighter should go to another channel to attempt contact and declare an emergency. Channel 1 (dispatch) is preferred. It's important to find any channel that works. Once communication is established remain on that channel and advise them who you are and your situation. Advise them to contact command immediately.

### **ACTIVATE PASS DEVICE**

As soon as a fire fighter recognizes he/she is lost or trapped, the PASS device must be manually activated to sound the audible tone. The device must remain on until rescued. If the device interferes with the lost fire fighters communicating critical radio messages to incident commander or rescuers, the device may be turned off temporarily. Once messages are completed, the device must again be manually activated.

## **CREWS STAY TOGETHER**

Members that separate from each other make it difficult for rescuers to find all firefighters. Crewmembers that stay intact as a crew enhance their chances for ALL being rescued and allow easier, more efficient operation.

## **FOLLOW THE HOSE OR LIFELINE OUT**

Crewmembers should stay with the hoseline (or lifeline) and follow it out whenever possible. All fire fighters must remember that the male couplings lead toward the nozzle (the fire), female side of the couplings toward the pump (outside). The hoseline should always be treated as a safety line to the outside. Where lifeline ropes are in use, follow the lifeline to the exterior.

## **SEARCHING FOR AN EXIT**

A lost fire fighter should always attempt to get out of the building by whatever means possible. Where doors, windows, or other egress is not available, fire fighters should next attempt to reach an exterior wall.

Once at the wall he/she will be able to search for doorways, windows, and hallways which generally lead to the outside. Rescuers will first search hallways, around walls, and around windows and doors, before sweeping large interior areas. For this reason, fire fighters must avoid staying in the middle of open spaces. Getting to hallways, doors, or windows will increase the chances of being rescued early. Breaching walls for escape or fresh air can aide in survivability. These actions also provide predictable activities that will aid rescuers.

## **RETREAT TO A SAFE REFUGE**

Where the fire fighter cannot find a way out, but there is a safe refuge (protective room or floor) away from the fire that the fire fighter can retreat to, he/she should take advantage of this location. Command and the rescuers should then be advised of the location by whatever means possible.

## **STAY CALM AND CONSERVE AIR**

A conscious effort must be made by the lost firefighter to control breathing. Unnecessary talking or physical activity must be ceased, unless absolutely needed. Firefighters must control and pace their physical exertion activities in order to extend their SCBA air supply. Stay calm!!!!

## **HORIZONTAL POSITION**

If a firefighter cannot get out, he should assume a horizontal position on the floor that maximizes the audible affects of the PASS device. The firefighter should attempt to take this position at an exterior wall, doorway or hallway that maximizes quick discovery by rescue crews.

## **FLASHLIGHTS/TAPPING NOISE**

If assuming a position to await rescuers, the fire fighters should attempt to position his flashlight toward the ceiling. This will enhance the rescuer's ability to see the light and locate the downed fire fighter. If able, the fire fighter should attempt tapping noises to assist rescuers in locating him (i.e., hitting a tool against a metal roll-up door).

## **COMPANY OR SECTOR OFFICERS**

Company officers or sector officers who are unable to locate a crew or fire fighters assigned to them, must immediately notify command and conduct a PAR to notify all personnel operating on the fireground. When possible the company or sector officer should include who's missing, last known location, and actions being taken. If the Firefighters are not found a "MAY-DAY" must be called. Fire fighting positions must not be abandoned during the rescue effort; the Company and Sector officers **MUST** control free-lancing. Command will initiate a rescue effort.

