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## **Firefighter Rescue - The Ultimate Fireground Challenge**

Firefighter rescue is one of the most challenging situations you'll ever face on the fireground. The only event likely to be more challenging and stressful than performing a firefighter rescue is an individual fireground emergency. When faced with an individual emergency your ability to calmly deal with the situation will be your most difficult obstacle. When faced with rescuing a firefighter- teamwork, communication and focus will be the most difficult factors to control.

Firefighter rescue involves assisting and/or removing a firefighter from a troubled location or situation on the fireground. The rescue may be as simple as guiding the firefighter to the outside (safety) or as complicated as extricating the firefighter from a collapse or entanglement, securing his air supply with a new source, and removing him from the structure. Sometimes the complexity is based on the situation and sometimes it's based on a lack of preparation.

**FIREFIGHTER RESCUE CAN BE BROKEN DOWN INTO THREE POSSIBLE SCENARIOS:**

1. Assisting or rescuing a member of your own crew;
2. Assisting or rescuing a firefighter encountered during interior operations; or
3. Assisting or rescuing a firefighter when performing as part of a rapid intervention team.

Whenever any of the above rescue situations are encountered on the fireground, the firefighter(s) performing the rescue must remain calm, communicate the situation, and use teamwork and previous training to resolve the problem.

### ***ASSISTING A MEMBER OF YOUR OWN CREW***

While operating on the fireground a member of your crew may run into trouble and require assistance. A simple entanglement, a low air supply, a partial collapse?or any number of other things may occur which cause the member to require assistance. Assisting the firefighter may be simple and allow your company to continue operations-or it may require you to issue a fireground MAYDAY while you attempt to resolve the problem. No matter what the situation, immediate assistance and rescue of the firefighter comes from the crew members operating with the member.

### ***ASSISTING A FIREFIGHTER ENCOUNTERED DURING INTERIOR OPERATIONS***

While performing on the fireground you may encounter another firefighter who is in trouble. Solving the firefighters' problem should become your number one priority but you must also communicate the problem to Command so that help (RIT) can be deployed. While assisting a firefighter encountered during interior operations will take precedence over all other operations, the original fireground functions (attack, search, etc.) must be continued or you're likely to become part of a larger problem. Tunnel vision during this type of rescue may jeopardize all firefighters on the fireground.

## ***ASSISTING A FIREFIGHTER AS PART OF A RAPID INTERVENTION TEAM***

Performing a firefighter rescue as part of a rapid intervention team is a fireground operation that will require precise communication, solid fireground skills, teamwork and, more than likely, additional rescue teams. The rapid intervention team operates under the most intense fireground conditions-a firefighter in trouble-and must locate, stabilize/package, and remove the firefighter (or crew). These stressful conditions (as with all firefighter rescue situations) require solid leadership and previous training if there is to be any chance of success.

A known emergency-a firefighter in trouble-active fireground conditions and a time-sensitive rescue mission all combine to make a rapid intervention team operation one of the most difficult missions encountered on the fireground. Training, preparation, and a proactive attitude (by both firefighters and the department) are essential components of any successful firefighter rescue.

### ***WHEN WILL IT HAPPEN?***

Indianapolis?Pittsburgh?New York?Worcester?Houston?Phoenix?St. Louis. There are many more cities and departments that could be listed. It's happened before and it will happen again. ***Has it happened in your department?*** Could it? YES!

A fireground emergency could happen, resulting in the need for a firefighter rescue, the next time you respond. Many firefighters feel that it will never happen to them, for whatever reason, but they couldn't be further from the truth. There are a number of variables that lead to an emergency, some can be controlled and some can't, and the individual firefighter is only one of them. Don't fall victim to complacency when it comes to planning for firefighter rescue.

Every year an average of 100 firefighters die in the line of duty. 30 - 40 of those firefighters are performing fireground operations when it happens. That's one firefighter every 10 days, give or take. When was your last work shift? When was your last fire?

A firefighter may need assistance the next time you respond. Are you and your department ready? Advancing a hose line, searching for victims, performing ventilation, searching for the seat of the fire-trouble can occur at any time on the fireground. There's just no way to accurately predict when it will happen. Anticipate trouble on every response and prepare for firefighter rescue before it's needed.

### ***WHAT WILL A FIREFIGHTER RESCUE REQUIRE?***

A Firefighter rescue requires information, skilled firefighters and a lot of luck. That's right, luck! No matter how much information there is about the situation, no matter how skilled the firefighters performing the rescue are, things still have to go your way for success. Whatever you call it-luck, good fortune, catching a few breaks-if things don't fall into place then it still may not work out. However, prior training in firefighter rescue skills and techniques is an essential component of a successful rescue.

## ***Information***

A successful firefighter rescue requires a constant flow of information. Where is the firefighter? What happened to cause the emergency? Can the firefighter help with the rescue? Can the firefighter help you in pinpointing his exact location? All of these questions, and more, must be answered as soon as possible during the emergency. A continuous flow of information, and updates, must continue throughout the emergency.

## ***Skilled Firefighters***

Let's face it, when it's time to rescue one of your own you better know what you're doing! This will be the most stressful situation you've ever been a part of and it's not the time to figure out you're not ready for it.

A solid knowledge of basic firefighting skills-engine work, truck work, rescue work, building construction, fire behavior, size-up, communications, etc.-is essential if you're going to pull off a rescue. There's no time to 'learn as you go' when a firefighters' life is on the line. Sure, you may come up with some new techniques (based on what you know) when performing the rescue but they usually come from a modification of something you already know.

Unfortunately, many departments just randomly assign companies as rapid intervention teams to comply with national standards and department standard operating procedures. That's liability not rescue! Being a part of a firefighter rescue team requires a personal commitment that you'll be up to the task and provide the best possible chance for a successful outcome. It's a bond between the rescuer(s) and the firefighter(s) being rescued.

## ***SUCCESS VERSUS FAILURE***

There's no doubt that luck plays a role in any successful firefighter rescue but the commitment of the individual firefighters and the entire department plays a more important role.

Supporting a firefighter rescue and rapid intervention team program requires more than simply writing it down and providing a 'lip service' response. It requires a conscious effort on the part of all involved-along with frequent and realistic training-to be prepared for whatever might happen.

Being prepared means having a basic procedure in place, having a rapid intervention team on the fireground standing by and ready to perform, having all firefighters trained in individual survival and firefighter rescue skills, and, most of all, trying to prevent fireground emergencies by being proactive both before and during the fire.

## ***THERE ARE NO SECOND CHANCES!***

There are no second chances when it comes to rescuing a firefighter. A fireground emergency may happen at any time and a team must be standing by and capable of solving the emergency.

Being part of a rapid intervention team is not the most glorious assignment-a successful operation means you won't get 'a piece of the action'-but it's the most important assignment on the fireground when something goes wrong. There are absolutely no excuses, NONE, for not being 100% ready to rescue one of our own on the fireground!

Sometimes no matter how much preparation has been done, things still go wrong, but we all know the difference between a true tragedy and a failure to prepare. ***There are no second chances.***

*Jim McCormack has been a firefighter for 15 years and is currently with the Indianapolis Fire Department. Jim is also the founder and president of the [Fire Department Training Network](#), a membership network dedicated to firefighter training.*