

Fire Engineering

FIRE ENGINEERING 2009/LT. MIKE MASON

COMPETENCIES IN RAPID INTERVENTION FOR THE FIRE

SERVICE/ By Lt. Mike Mason

Over the past 15 years within the fire service regarding Rapid Intervention we have come an enormously long ways including the attempt in defining through administrative codes and federal guidelines the scope of firefighter's responsibilities in this role. It is without question a very potent subject involving Rapid Intervention Teams and their success as well as their applications at any given incident involving a Mayday. As a lecturer, author and instructor in the disciplines pertaining to firefighter rescue and survival over the past 13 years of my 29 year career I would like to provide some desperately needed answers. Let's begin by addressing the safety of firefighters about to enter an IDLH environment which involves structure fires.

It's simple and yet articles, guidelines and standards still seem to confuse the fire service regarding their well meaning intent. We all know that the dynamic fireground starts with a mode of operation meaning Offensive or Defensive. Any offensive strategy means more than likely we will be entering an IDLH environment and that the priority standard is to provide the 2 in/2 out rule without questions. This should not be misconstrued that the 2 firefighters on the outside will be the answer in establishing rapid intervention needs. 2in/2out can be very fluidly disguised at the beginning of any incident. Meaning that so many task involvements are occurring in a fast moving dynamic that most firefighters are subconsciously following it but as we know the 2 on the outside are moving ever so closer in their involvement and focus into the firefight; Whether this is assisting at first with hose line deployment or raising ladders their potential to enter the structure is imminent especially when we involve life rescue. People need to be saved that can be saved and hose lines need to reach the fire. My point is that these 2 outside individuals should never be consider a Rapid Intervention Team, it's simply 2in/2out to meet the standard and definitely has no intention of meeting any known standards as having established rapid intervention protection.

Many departments across America can barely afford the manpower that establishes RIT presence on the fireground especially in the very early stages of any given incident but yet every department in America must try. Whether it is a 2, 3 or 4 man team we need the presence of well trained firefighters in the techniques and maneuvers of Rapid Intervention that will answer the call to any Mayday to save our brothers. A poorly staffed department establishing a 2 man RIT should build on it bringing it up to at least a 3 man if not 4 man team when more troops arrive.

Rapid Intervention and Job Performance Requirements

This brings us to the next unclear controversy of training firefighters to standards or job performance requirements pertaining to Rapid Intervention.

Job Performance Requirements, JPR's as their called may not be as easily defined regarding specific absolutes as other JPR standards may provide when it comes to Rapid Intervention. This does not mean we can't establish JPR's or standards but we must keep in mind the ever changing landscape of techniques and maneuvers that keeps Rapid Intervention a winning situation for the multitude of different presenting Mayday's that continue to occur throughout the fire service each year. At the national program R.I.C.O. Rapid Intervention Company Operations that occurs each year in the Chicago land area the addition and deletion of the numerous training modules is forever introducing new concepts and techniques in rescuing our own as well as providing all the proactive behaviors that a RIT should be providing at any given incident. Not only does this organization provide firefighters throughout the country and overseas these well needed disciplines but they also provide chief officers training enlightenments in commanding maydays and rapid intervention operations; while helping these leaders understand the full capabilities that a well trained proactive RIT can provide to any fireground.

Some texts and article publications have inferred that being trained to the firefighter I or II level is enough to perform the basic skills of Rapid Intervention and what it encompasses. This in my opinion is a misconception and while part of this philosophy may be true to a small degree it is without a doubt short changing and endangering the Rapid Intervention concept. At the firefighter I and II level we are just scratching the surface of what initial candidates/rookies should obtain and posses regarding skills in all aspects of the fire service, from fire behavior, basic and intermediate SCBA skills, appliances, apparatus operations, awareness operations and so on and so on: all which by the incorporate Job Performance Requirements. What is even more astounding throughout many departments across America that we have engaged with is that many members are precariously introduce to less than the Firefighter I or II and given SCBA,s and functioning on the

fireground endangering themselves and lives of their fellow members. I'm all for hands on experiences but this philosophy is putting us in harms way let alone speaking volumes as to the professionalism of the fire service. Simply put firefighter I and II level certifications should be just what they are strong specific basic skills to function on the fireground through close supervision by solid mentors with experience. The next step after these certifications and I mean right on the heels of these certifications is programs specifically concentrated in the areas of firefighter rescue and survival. This means solid doses of self survival skills immediately followed up with Rapid Intervention skills.

We must remember that these two areas are so intimately related to each other that they should be covered in depth together. What we as instructors and lecturers have learned or should have learned by now is that a firefighter in distress knowing the proper communications, skills and techniques in helping himself out of a situation can increase his chance of survival tenfold. If this same firefighter also possessed Rapid Intervention skills he can also help those coming to get him (meaning a well trained RIT) regarding his needs and even a plan of action; additionally the well trained RIT can also predict the distressed firefighter's actions regarding the Mayday presented. When a firefighter/s for example on hose line advance into an unrecognized fire below them and one or more fall through the floor immediate actions and needs provide a plan for fast rescues to themselves and those responding such as a RIT because everyone on the fireground has the self survival and rapid interventions skills to bring our brother/s home.

The bottom line here is that fire service members should take solid programs in self survival and rapid intervention taught by well trained instructor's right after their firefighter I and II. Many of the instructors involved in self survival training and rapid intervention are impassioned with getting it right for the next guy because they have truly experienced the loss of one of their own.

Job Performance Requirements can and should be developed for self survival and Rapid Intervention skills but we must faithfully realize that these JPR's can never be etched in stone because of new techniques and maneuvers that are constantly changing through new information and new unfortunate Maydays and line of duty deaths. JPR's should be established around the sound principles and techniques that have endured the test of time as well as their worth regarding simplicity and successful functionality under high stressful environments.

THE COMMONALITIES of SKILLS IN FIREFIGHTER RESCUE and SELF SURVIVAL

So where does this leave us regarding self survival and Rapid Intervention regarding the skills needed to be obtained to be competent and confident with those entrusted to be there and perform these skills if the unthinkable occurs. At the national level through the not for profit organization RICOFIRERESCUE there are 8 hour awareness programs in RIT, 16 hour hands on programs, 20hr hands on programs and the complete 40 hour college accredited hands on program. This is done in order to provide departments throughout the country the opportunity to bring the necessary level of training they desire to their members while relating to the budgets and funding available. There other great self survival and RIT programs out there providing similar services. There unfortunately a lot of individual instructors out there providing less than adequate services to unsuspecting departments who may have not researched what this training entails and are driven by costs thinking that cheaper is better. Needless to say get the right training with the right people, instructors who have been teaching it for a long while, instructors that have a personal stake in it through either true experiences of firefighter rescues or who have experienced the loss of one of their own.

So how do we recognize the good from the bad in getting our members trained to the caliber of what we expect from this profession? The following information is what you should be looking for in and Rapid Intervention program. If there is any future in acquiring proper standards and providing certifications like we have for everything else in the fire service then the following areas are what should be the principles and content of any, standards, programs, department trainings or any certification or certificate acquired. By making sure of consistent content we can provide enhanced job performance and success in the disciplines of firefighter rescue and survival.

In order and with a short explanation of content are the **11** areas of concentration in firefighter rescue and survival as well as Rapid Intervention.

1. **SCBA SELF SURVIVAL:** Individual/SCBA Rope slide/Rapid egress systems/Ladder Bails/Mayday communications
2. **ROPES and KNOTS:** Webbing assemblies/Water knot/ Handcuff knot/ Self tied bowline/Figure 8 on a bight/Over hand knot/ Barrel knot or Fisherman knot
3. **MOVING DISTRESSED FIREFIGHTERS:** Drags and carries/Upstairs, Down stairs/ 2, 3 and 4 man team/Harness conversions/Simple mechanical advantage
4. **WALL BREACHING:** Interior, Exterior/hand and power tools

5. **WINDOW RETRIVALS:** At Grade/ Above grade 2 and 3 story/Ladder positioning/Interior to exterior distressed firefighter presentations/Simple mechanical advantage/Harness conversions/Grade Level/Denver Drill/Modified Piggy Back Denver/Modified Backboard or Ladder Fulcrum
6. **BELOW GRADE RETRIVALS:** Through the floor/Hand cuff raise/The W raise/Hose line raise/Simple mechanical advantage raises. Ladder through the floor raise/Basement window retrievals.
7. **RIT AIR PACK MANAGEMENT:** UAC Transfill/Face Piece Changeover/ Regulator Changeover/EBSS/Securing RIT pack procedures
8. **ROPE ASSISTED SEARCH PROCEDURES:** Large Area/ Commercial/Assemblies/ Industrial/ Mega Mansions.
9. **THERMAL IMAGING:** Contrasting Distressed Firefighters/Thermal Layering/Thermal Movement/Thermal Investigation Size Up/Thermal Imaging Large Area/Thermal Imaging Residential
10. **SCENARIO and CHALLENGE DRILL TRAINING:** Scenarios encompassing Maydays and Firefighters down/LODD based scenarios/Challenge drills of 12 minute durations.
11. **RIT PROACTIVE ON SCENE BEHAVIORS:** Scene size-up activities/Positioning and Sectoring/Providing

The above listed areas are just an intricate example of what a comprehensive RIT program should entail. This is just a glimpse of techniques and maneuvers into the makeup of what any full 40 hour program or what your department training should be focusing on. I cannot emphasize enough that being trained by competent and reality based instructors that deliver these competencies regularly should be sought after before delivering any department training to its members.

ADDRESSING THE DEPARTMENTAL RAPID INTERVENTION RELATIONSHIP

In closing what is your department's commitments in establishing a sound firefighter rescue and survival relationship? Every member, officers, training officers and chief officers need to make RIT an important part of its philosophy for the fireground no matter how small or large your department is. You can start by assembling standard operating guide lines that address your needs and most importantly that they are realistic and can be followed by all members. It does little to design protocols that involve 4 member teams and trying to apply them early into your operations which are the ideal situations when your staffing and mutual aid reliance isn't there from the start. Be sure to address these deficiencies into a more realistic goal such as assembling possibly a 2 to 3 member team as early on in the firefight with the idea that it should be built on as quickly as possible during fireground operations. Make sure that RIT presence is set up early in your response procedures. Be sure to stress the importance in proactive behaviors that even a 2 man RIT can provide on the fireground and realize its limitations.

Finally ensure that all members are getting the proper training from the right instructors. Make sure the training in RIT techniques and maneuvers are base in simplicity so they can be performed under stress in a moment's notice if the unthinkable should occur. If we educate and train every member that is wearing an SCBA that is facing the potential for entering any IDLH environment the odds are that if a member is fallen into distress that the reaction and possible solution to his survival will be tenfold. Training officers whenever possible should incorporate firefighter rescue and survival training into most of their other areas of fire disciplines especially when delivering scenario based evolutions. Make sure that Chief officers understand the value of a well trained proactive RIT team which will help them understand the importance in establishing their presence on every fireground so That Brothers and Others May Live.

Continued bio information on Lt. Mike Mason (see next page)

Lt. Mike Mason is a 29 year veteran of the fire service; 23 of those years with the Downers Grove Fire Dept, IL. He is also the Director and Founder of the not for profit training organization RICOFIRERESCUE INC which has trained over 6,000 firefighters across the USA since 2001 in all aspects of rescue and survival. He is the co author of the most widely used text on Rapid Intervention entitled Rapid Intervention Company Operations R.I.C.O. and founder of the national training programs R.I.C.O., Commanding The Mayday and Rapid Intervention Operations, Fireground Search: That Others May Live, Fireground Rapid Egress, RIT Air Pack Management and Survival of The Fittest: Situational Awareness. He is presented through numerous article publications as well as seminars throughout the country.

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