THE S.A.F.E. METHOD FOR APPROACHING A DOWNED/TRAPPED FIREFIGHTER

By:
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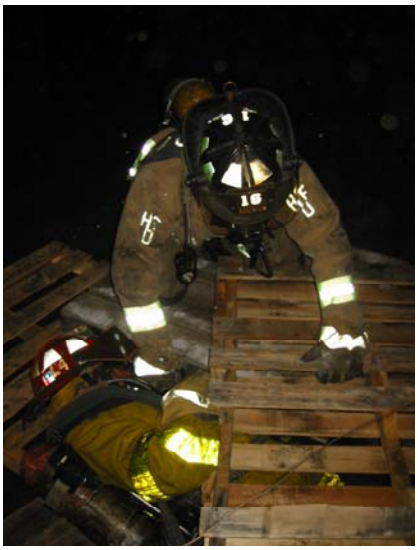
INTRODUCTION:

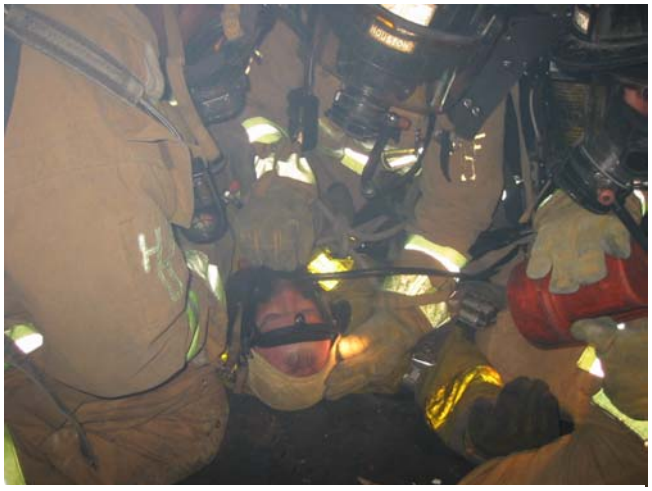


A Safety Engine/RIT Crewmember approaches a trapped firefighter

The fireground "Mayday!" is unquestionably the most stressful and self-taxing incident encountered by firefighters today. The need to establish a standardized approach and method to locating, approaching and extracting the downed/trapped member cannot be overemphasized. In 1997, then Assistant Chief Rick Lasky (Darien-Woodridge Fire District, IL) and Lieutenant Rick Kolomay (Schaumburg Fire Department, IL) wrote the article *"Saving Our Own: Approaching a Downed Firefighter* (Fire Engineering, Sept. 1997) detailing the proper method of approaching a downed firefighter. After reading this article, firefighters across the country (myself included) took the advice of these two fire service professionals and began working to implement these methods into their department's firefighter survival programs.

Since 1997, I like many others have had the opportunity to establish a number of additional considerations to be included when approaching a downed/trapped firefighter. This article has been designed to compliment the recommendations described by Chief Lasky and Lieutenant Kolomay while at the same time refining the firefighters skill base and proficiency levels as it pertains to firefighter safety & survival.

PRESENTATION:



Safety Engine / RIT Crew personnel assess the downed member and begin to secure a secondary air supply.

Upon receipt of the fireground "Mayday!" actions on the fireground typically replicate that of extreme chaos and frantic actions. As described in previous articles, standardization creates predictability and predictability creates manageability. Approaching a downed/trapped firefighter is no different. Personnel safety **MUST** remain the top priority throughout the operation and proper risk analysis is paramount to the successful extraction and treatment of the downed/trapped firefighter.

As has become commonplace in the fire service the use of acronyms allow the firefighter a quick, user friendly method of accomplishing the required tasks. When the approaching a downed/trapped firefighter, the use of the acronym **S-A-F-E** will provide the rescuer(s) with a mental checklist to ensure these task are performed in an orderly fashion.

S – SITUATIONAL SIZE-UP - STABLIZATION - SAFETY (RESCUER/VICITM)

Safety Engine / RIT Crew personnel should always assess the are for stability and potential hazards.

Assess the immediate area for structural collapse and the potential for a secondary collapse. In cases of potential floor collapse consider stabilizing the floor with existing doors, tables, etc. to distribute the weight of rescuers approaching the downed/trapped member. ***Extreme caution should be used anytime a downed/trapped member is approached to ensure the safety of the rescuers and the victim(s).***

Assess the immediate area for impinging fire, if necessary request a hand line to assume a blocking position (Place the handline between the fire and the victim). If attack crews have been deployed in the immediate area, request that they be redirected to a blocking position per command. In extreme conditions, consider venting (i.e. horizontal or vertical) away from the downed/trapped member to redirect the fire spread away from the victim if possible.

If a search line has been deployed, secure the line in the immediate area (DO NOT SECURE THE LINE TO THE VICTIM) to ensure all additional support members have a tractable means of access to assist as necessary. The search line should also be used for orientation and rapid egress as necessary.

****NOTICE: BE PART OF THE SOLUTION, NOT PART OF THE PROBLEM.***

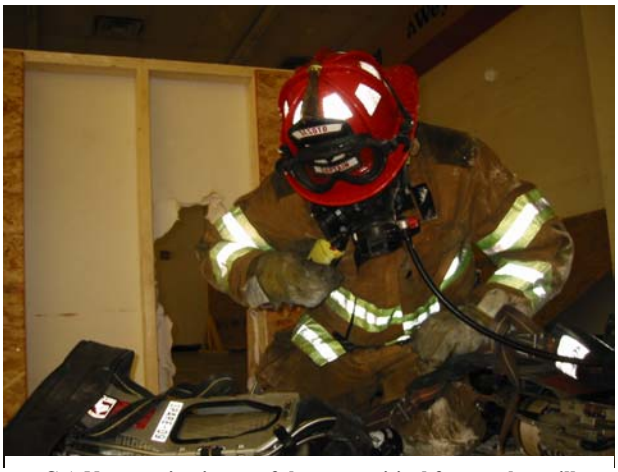
A – ASSESSMENT OF THE DOWNED/TRAPPED MEMBER(S)

Firefighters must routinely train on how to approach and assess a downed/trapped firefighter.

Upon reaching the downed member, if the victim(s) P.A.S.S. alarm is activated, reset the P.A.S.S. alarm to enhance rescuer communications. Immediately assess the victims breathing status – **ABC's - A –** ***Air Exchange*** - Listen for air exchange by pulling the facepiece slightly away from the downed/trapped members face or by inserting one or two fingers between the victims cheek and facepiece. If no exchange is noted, quickly check the **B –** ***By-pass or purge valve*** for airflow. Determining airflow from the by-pass or purge valve can be done by simply turning the valve a quarter turn and checking for an immediate rush of air. If no airflow is noted, quickly assess the **C -** ***Cylinder gauge/valve***. If it is determined that the victim(s) air supply is exhausted, immediately establish a secondary air supply via a rescue pack or secondary S.C.B.A. (a secondary air supply – Rescue pack or S.C.B.A. should be brought in as part of the standard equipment of the Safety Engine/RIT crew upon deployment).

Once the air supply has been assessed and/or secured, assess the victim(s) level of conscious. If the victim is capable of assisting with the extraction process, direct him/her to do so upon request. Prior to initiating any removal process, ensure the victim is not trapped or entangled amongst the debris; failure to do so may further complicate the extraction process.

F – FIREFIGHTER(S) NEEDS REPORT (a.k.a. C.A.N. Report)

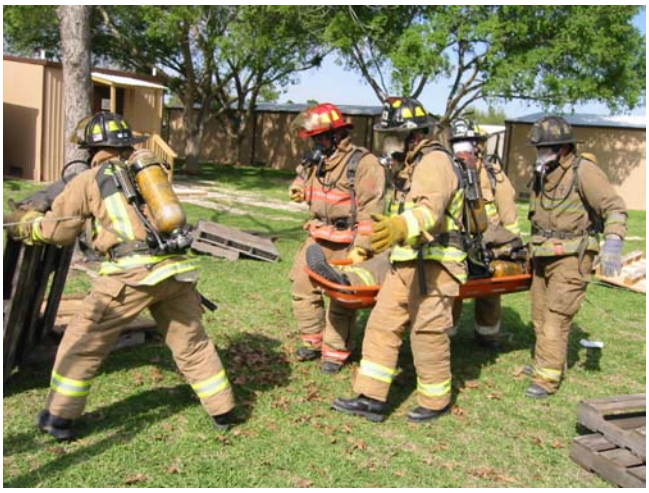


C.A.N. reporting is one of the most critical factors that will lead to an effective rescue of a downed/trapped firefighter.

Upon completion of the initial victim(s) assessment a progress report MUST be provided to command to ensure the necessary preparations (i.e. Request for specialized equipment – air, extrication, etc.) are initiated as necessary. The progress report should include: **C** – ***Conditions*** – "We've located a downed firefighter Division 2, Sector B." **A** – ***Actions***, "We're attempting to establish a secondary air supply at this time." **N** – ***Needs –*** "Requesting two additional firefighters to support in extracting the downed member.")

NOTE: Failure to provide the necessary progress reports to command will delay the response of any specialize equipment and/personnel that may be needed to successfully extract the victim(s).

E – EXTRACTION/EXTRICATION PROCESS



Extracting a downed/trapped firefighter requires strict discipline and coordination amongst all personnel involved.

Once the necessary equipment and personnel are available, the rescue action plan should be initiated in an effort to extract/extricate the downed/trapped member.

Once the victim has been successfully removed from the occupancy, the victim should be transferred to the awaiting medical crew and an immediate personnel accountability report (PAR) / Role call initiated to ensure that all members have been successfully removed from the occupancy. An immediate debriefing of all involved personnel should follow termination of the incident in efforts to begin the recovery process.

SKILL SHEET

APPROACHING A TRAPPED/DOWNED FIREFIGHTER

Scenario: A trapped/downed firefighter has been located. These are the suggested steps to be addressed in the approximate/suggested order.

ACTIVITY STEPS:

- **<u>SITUATIONAL SIZE-UP / STABILIZATION</u> - Confirm personal safety**
  1. Structural collapse/Secondary collapse potential survey
     - *Stabilize scene/area if applicable (floor, truss, etc.)*
  2. Fire conditions survey (Identify potential for fire impingement)
     - *Request hand line if applicable to hold fire in check*
     - *Isolate area via interior doors if possible*
- **Shut off victims P.A.S.S. device (to enhance communications)**
- **<u>ASSESSMENT OF DOWNED/TRAPPED MEMBER(S)</u> - Check breathing status of victim(s) A.B.C.'s**
  1. **A** – Air Exchange - Listen for air exchange (Place ear near facepiece/regulator)
  2. **B** – By-pass/purge valve - Open purge valve (Bypass) ¼ turn to ensure air supply
  3. **C** – Cylinder valve - Check cylinder valve – Assess gauge for air supply reading, establish secondary air supply (if necessary)
  4. Check level of consciousness (LOC)
     - Can the victim assist with rescue/extraction process?
     - Determine extent of injuries (rapid heat to toe scan)
  5. Assess for entrapment
     - Debris/truss
     - Entanglement
  6. If possible, move to a safer location or an area of refuge
     - Window
     - Hallway
     - Stairwell
- **<u>FIREFIGHTER NEEDS REPORT -</u> Advise command of status (C.A.N.)**
  1. **C** – Conditions ("Located a downed firefighter Division 2")
  2. **A** – Actions ("Attempting to secure a secondary air supply.")
  3. **N** – Needs ("Need an additional two (2) person crew to assist in extraction")
- **<u>EXTRACTION / EXTRICATION OF DOWNED/TRAPPED MEMBER</u> - Initiate removal/extraction action plan**
  1. Provide medical aid
  2. Initiate personnel accountability report (PAR) / role call

SUMMARY:

Approaching the downed/trapped firefighter, like so many other Safety Engine/RIT crew actions are oftentimes chaotic if not trained upon on a regular basis. Establishing a standardized, trained upon method enables responding members to properly analyze the scene for their safety and the safety of the victim.

Although the aforementioned actions detailed in the **S-A-F-E** acronym cannot guarantee the survivability of the downed/trapped member, it can ensure that we (the rescuers) do not further complicate the incident by becoming victims ourselves. Standardized actions relating to area stabilization, victim(s) air supply, fire containment and extraction should not be allowed to be overlooked during these times of adrenal haste. Your safety and the safety of your responding crewmembers are dependent on your controlled, planned, and trained upon actions. **DON'T BECOME PART OF THE PROBLEM!!!** Lets learn from the past, **NOT REPEAT IT!!!**

DEDICATION:

As I conclude this article, I would like to recognize and extend my sincere thanks to Chief Lasky, Lieutenant Kolomay, and the staff of the Illinois Fire Service Institute for their continued efforts directed towards firefighter safety & survival. Your heartfelt vision of firefighter safety and survival continues to be pursued by the hundreds if not thousands of firefighters and instructors who continue preach your enlightening words.

This article is dedicated to ensuring that we the fire service learn from the past in hopes of providing a safer future.

PROGRAM DEVELOPER:

Tim is a 17 – year student and educator of the fire & emergency services currently working as Chief of Fire Training for Savannah Fire & Emergency Services, Georgia. Tim previously served as a Firefighter/Paramedic with the Kansas City, Kansas Fire Department and Assistant Fire Chief with Missouri City Fire & Rescue Services, Texas. Tim has earned B.S. degrees in Fire Administration, Arson and an A.S. degree in Emergency Medical Care from Eastern Kentucky University. Tim is currently the 1st Vice President of the International Society of Fire Service Instructors (ISFSI), and a student of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program.

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