
Section: 4.4 "MAY-DAY" - Command Responsibilities

Effective Date: 07/01/2007

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SCOPE

This guideline applies to all South Metro Fire Department personnel responsible for emergency response.

PURPOSE

This procedure identifies individual, company and Command level activities for the search and rescue of a lost or trapped firefighter(s).

PROCEDURE**A. LOST OR TRAPPED FIREFIGHTERS**

The rescue of trapped or lost firefighters in a burning building is especially time sensitive. There is a very narrow "window of survivability" for a firefighter who is out of S.C.B.A. air supply or trapped by approaching fire. Individual firefighters must not delay reporting to Command if they become lost, trapped or in need of assistance. Company officers must also not delay the reporting of lost firefighters or inability to complete accountability reports. Command and sector officers must always assume that the missing firefighter is lost in the building until the firefighter can be accounted for. Command must also restructure the strategy and action plan to include a high priority rescue effort.

B. "MAY-DAY" RADIO MESSAGE

The radio message "May-Day" will be used by lost or trapped 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 followed by the emergency traffic tone. The term "May-Day" will be reserved ONLY to report lost or trapped firefighters. The term "emergency traffic" will be used to report other emergencies.

The term "May-Day" typically will be used in the following situations:

- By the member who is lost, trapped, or in trouble.
- By the company officer or other member who cannot account for an assigned firefighter who is operating in the hazard zone. This "May-Day" would generally occur following a PAR report that fails to locate/account for the suspected lost member.
- By a member who witnesses or has confirmed that a firefighter is lost or in trouble.

C. COMMAND RESPONSE TO A MISSING FIREFIGHTER

The incident Commander MUST ALWAYS assume that a missing firefighter is lost or trapped in the building until the firefighter is accounted for. Rapid, concise, decisions and actions must be taken to increase survivability. The following is a list of actions to be taken by Command for a reported missing or trapped firefighter. These are guidelines and do not necessarily need to be accomplished in the order listed. The first five (5) must be accomplished very rapidly.

1. EMERGENCY TRAFFIC

When a firefighter declares a "May-Day", Dispatch will sound the emergency traffic tone on ALL talkgroups, including both "Fire Mains", being used on the fireground. Personnel will be advised that a "May-Day" exists for a lost, trapped or injured fire fighter.

2. CHANGE THE PLAN TO A HIGH PRIORITY RESCUE EFFORT

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The incident Commander must restructure the plan to include a high priority firefighter rescue effort. A rapid, well thought out, rescue plan must be developed and the Command organization expanded. The plan and objectives must be communicated to other Command staff and officers for implementation.

3. IMMEDIATELY REQUEST ADDITIONAL ALARMS

At least one additional alarm should be immediately requested including a medical component. Additional multiple alarms may be requested based on circumstances and potential. Early consideration should be given to heavy equipment resources and TRT assistance in structural collapses.

4. FIREGROUND ACCOUNTABILITY

A Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) must be immediately requested from all companies operating on the fireground. This is especially important in situations of structural collapse. Command cannot develop an effective rescue plan until accurate information is available on the number of missing firefighters, their identify, their last reported work area and which companies are affected.

5. COMMIT THE RAPID INTERVENTION TEAM (RIT)

Deploy the RIT to initiate search and rescue efforts (typically the last reported work area). Additional available resources in staging may also be committed to rescue efforts.

6. CONFIRM THAT DISPATCH MONITORS ALL RADIO CHANNELS

Command must ensure that dispatch monitor all fire talkgroups. Should a lost firefighter declare emergency on a talkgroup other than the assigned talkgroup, Command must be immediately directed to the lost firefighters talkgroup for direct communications.

7. WITHDRAWAL OF COMPANIES FROM AFFECTED AREA

In some situations, such as collapse, crewmembers can get separated. The only practical method to obtain an accurate roll call for a PAR may be to withdraw crews to the exterior. 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 (PAR) and information on missing firefighters remains a critical priority.

8. DO NOT ABANDON FIREFIGHTING POSITIONS, PROVIDE REINFORCEMENT

Abandoning firefighting positions during the rescue effort should be avoided. Command and crews should take aggressive measures to protect trapped or missing firefighters from the effects of the fire. Efforts should be concentrated on reinforcing existing positions and keeping the fire out of the rescue area and providing appropriate ventilation and lighting. In some situations it may be appropriate to write off some areas of the building in order to relocate companies and crews to better protect the rescue effort.

9. ASSIGN AN OFFICER TO THE RESCUE BRANCH

An officer should be assigned to direct 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. The officer will assign specific areas or grids of the building to each rescue team (company) to conduct searches before entering the building. Search efforts must be closely coordinated and Command must be kept informed.

10. ASSIGN A SAFETY OFFICER TO THE RESCUE EFFORTS

Rescue operations are high risk. The rescue operation may be taking place in post-collapse conditions or a flashover environment. Emotions may be high and firefighters will tend to want to free-lance and take chances. A Safety Officer must be assigned to monitor activity and evaluate the safety of the operation. An officer should assume this position as soon as possible. Other Safety Officer responsibilities will be to conduct an assessment of the hazards, thus, allowing time for the rescue officer to concentrate on the critical rescue effort. These officers must work hand in hand to insure that a safe and effective rescue operation is conducted.

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11. EXPAND THE COMMAND ORGANIZATION

With additional resources enroute, along with the critical rescue needs, the Command organization must expand ahead of the demand. The incident may eventually escalate to a Branch level operation. The incident Commander must be proactive and aggressive in developing and expanding the Command organization.

12. SPECIAL CALL CHIEF OFFICERS

Additional chief officers will be needed to fill Command team positions. Command should special call additional chief officers, and initiate a call back of off-duty chief officers, as needed.

13. EARLY ESTABLISHMENT OF MEDICAL RESOURCES

The incident Commander must have medical personnel in a position to immediately treat and transport any rescued firefighters.

14. OPEN/UNLOCK ALL DOORS, IF APPROPRIATE

All doors in the immediate area should be unlocked or forced open, and at least the immediate interior area quickly searched. Where practical, the doors should be left open to provide an emergency escape route, unless doing so will have negative effects on the fire. In all cases, the doors must remain unlocked.

15. VENTILATE, MAINTAIN TENABILITY/LIGHTING

Reducing smoke conditions, through effective ventilation, improves the air quality for any victims, and will enhance search and rescue capabilities through increased visibility of the interior. Ventilation should be aggressively employed. Early lighting of the operation (both interior and exterior) needs to be included.

16. COORDINATE AND CONTROL THE SEARCH EFFORTS

The incident Commander and Rescue Branch officer must insure that a complete, coordinated and controlled search is conducted. Close coordination of all search efforts is a must in order to eliminate duplicate searches that waste time. All areas must be thoroughly searched.

17. RIT/SCBA KIT

Each rescue team should enter the building with at least one RIT/SCBA Kit for each reported lost/trapped firefighter. Missing firefighters may have exhausted their S.C.B.A. air supply or may be trapped and cannot be quickly extricated. In each case the firefighter must be provided "clean" air to increase survivability. The kits have a quick refill capability.

18. TECHNICAL RESCUE TEAMS

Technical Rescue Teams (TRT) and other specialized equipment should be requested at all structural collapses that have trapped firefighters.

19. WATCH FOR STRUCTURAL STABILITY OF THE BUILDING

Command and all personnel must watch the structural stability of the building throughout the rescue effort. Where a structural collapse has occurred, or the fire or other event has compromised the structural integrity of the building, a structural specialist should evaluate the structure. Technical Rescue Teams (TRT) may be called upon to assist with shoring the rescue area, or for the use of other specialized equipment.

20. MEDIA CONTROL

Command will need to control the media early and throughout the incident. Information on the identities and conditions of lost firefighters must be restricted until after appropriate notifications are made. Media film crews should be restricted to areas that are safe and at a distance that will prevent visual/facial identification of any victims.