



HR/LF

FFCC—Policy/SOG Program

Operations

Safety—Lost/Trapped Firefighter-
Command Actions

Policy # 09-04

Issued: 04/30/09

Subject: Lost/Trapped Firefighter—Command Actions

Purpose: This policy outlines Command procedures for incidents involving lost or trapped firefighters.

Scope: This policy applies to all personnel of the Fire Department.

Policy:

The rescue of lost or trapped firefighters in a burning building is especially time sensitive. There is a very narrow "window of survivability" for a firefighter who is out of SCBA air supply or trapped by approaching fire. **Individual firefighters shall immediately radio Command if they become lost, trapped or in need of assistance.** Company officers shall also not delay the reporting of lost firefighters or inability to account for crewmembers. Command and Division/Group supervisors shall always assume that a missing firefighter is lost in the building until the firefighter can be located. Command shall initiate an action plan to incorporate a high priority rescue effort.

"MAYDAY" radio message

The radio message "MAYDAY" shall be used by lost or trapped firefighters to report their status as being in trouble and needing rescue. Any member shall use "MAYDAY" to report a lost firefighter. Any report of "MAYDAY" shall receive priority radio traffic, meaning all non-essential radio traffic shall cease. The term "MAYDAY" shall be reserved **ONLY** to report lost or trapped firefighters. The term "Emergency Traffic" shall be used to report other emergencies or high risk hazards.

The term "MAYDAY" typically shall be used in the following situations:

- By personnel who are lost, trapped, or in trouble
- By the company officer, division/group officer, or other member who cannot account for an assigned firefighter who is operating in a hazard zone.
- By a member who witnesses or has confirmed that a firefighter is lost or in trouble

Survival actions for the firefighter(s) declaring the MAYDAY are included in policy # _____, *Firefighter Survival Actions*.

Once a MAYDAY has been declared, all fireground companies except the affected companies and the RIT team(s) shall be moved to another radio channel. This shall be initiated by the IC.

Command response to a missing firefighter

The Incident Commander **SHALL ALWAYS** assume that a missing firefighter is lost or trapped in the building until the firefighter is located. Rapid, concise, decisions and actions shall 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 need not be accomplished in the order listed. They must however, be accomplished rapidly.

1. Change the plan to a high priority rescue effort

The Incident Commander must restructure the Incident Action Plan to support the firefighter rescue effort. A rescue plan must be developed and the Command organization expanded. The plan and objectives shall be communicated to other Command staff and Division/Group supervisors for implementation.

2. Immediately request additional alarms

At least one (1) additional level of both a fire and EMS alarm shall be immediately requested. Upgraded alarms may be requested based on circumstances and potential. Early consideration must be given to heavy equipment resources and TRT assistance in structural collapses.

3. Fireground accountability

A Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) shall be immediately requested from all companies operating on the fireground. In some situations, such as collapse, crewmembers may be separated. The only practical method to obtain an accurate 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 PAR and information on missing firefighters remains a critical priority.

4. Commit the Rapid Intervention Team (RIT), assign a RIT Chief and Safety Officer

The RIT shall be deployed to begin the rescue effort typically beginning at the last reported work area. A RIT Chief should be assigned to direct the overall RIT effort and to coordinate with the Incident Commander.

If not already in place a Safety Officer shall be assigned to monitor activity and evaluate the safety of the operation. Other Safety Officer responsibilities will be to conduct an assessment of the hazards, thus allowing the RIT Chief to concentrate on the rescue effort. Division/Group supervisors must coordinate efforts to ensure that a safe and effective rescue operation is conducted.

5. Confirm with Dispatch that all radio channels are being monitored

Command shall ensure that Dispatch monitors all radio channels. If a lost firefighter declares emergency on a channel other than the fireground operations channel, Command must be immediately directed to the lost firefighters channel for direct communications. Upon receiving a portable radio emergency traffic activation (emergency button), Dispatch shall immediately contact the IC and announce the identification of the individual assigned that radio. Contact shall be immediately attempted to determine if an emergency exists.

Additional strategic and tactical considerations

Reinforce firefighting positions

Firefighting operations shall not be discontinued during the rescue operation. Command and fire crews shall take aggressive measures to protect trapped or missing firefighters from the effects of the fire. Efforts shall be concentrated on reinforcing existing positions, keeping the fire out of the rescue area, and providing appropriate ventilation and lighting. In some situations it may be appropriate to cease operations in some areas of the building in order to relocate companies to better protect the rescue effort.

Open/unlock all doors

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

Establish treatment and transportation groups

The Incident Commander should assign EMS personnel to immediately treat any rescued firefighters. A transportation group should also be in place and coordinating activities with the treatment group.

Media control

Command will need to control the media early and throughout the incident. Information on the identities and conditions of lost firefighters shall be restricted until after families are notified. Media film crews shall be restricted to areas which are at a safe distance and that will prevent visual/facial identification of any victims. A Public Information Officer (PIO) should be assigned to assist Command.

Family needs

A Family Group shall be established early. This will aid in notification of families and allow Command to stay ahead of the media's release of information. A Chief officer should be assigned to direct this important function.

By the order of: _____
Fire Chief

Date:

References:

- NFPA 1500, *Fire Department Occupational Safety & Health Program*, 2007 edition, section 8.2
- NFPA 1561, *Emergency Services Incident Management System*, 2005, section 6.3

Resources (*click title to access resource*):

- [Case Study—"Firefighters Trapped"](#)
- [Firehouse.com – February 2005 WebCast "Firefighter Safety: Calling the MAYDAY" \(also includes articles by Dr. Burton Clark, NFA\)](#)
- [Command Actions Checklist](#)