

COLUMBIA COUNTY OFFICE OF FIRE COORDINATOR

85 INDUSTRIAL TRACT HUDSON, NY 12534 OFFICE (518) 822-8610 CELL (518) 851-9362

TRAINING NEWSLETTER

JULY 2021

Fighting Fires In Private Homes

When I joined my local fire company here in Churchtown I wanted to talk about fires in private homes and what I heard was what would a FDNY firefighter know about fires in rural private homes.

If you haven't spent much time in NYC you probably imagine a lot of large buildings; commercial, residential and industrial. And you would be right. However, I would say it is safe to say there are somewhere between 5,000-10,000 private homes with peaked roofs. They are predominantly in Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island with pockets in the Bronx. My last 6-7 years were spent in Rescue 4 which covers the entire borough of Queens. We would average on a daily basis responding to 1-3 working structural fires in private homes.

So what's my point? The FDNY has spent a long and extensive period creating and refining standard operating procedures for fires in these buildings. They have been tried and tested in the field daily for over 60 years. Our books are written in blood and much was learned through trial and error and occasionally a line of duty death. Private home fires are no joke. A basement fire in these is probably the most serious threat to your life as a Columbia County firefighter (not including standing on the shoulder of the Taconic at a car accident in the middle of a 4 am downpour).

So whether the fire is on Rigor Hill Road in Chatham or 67th Street in Queens the fire is the same. As the fire burns and spreads through that house it doesn't care where the house is or who is coming to fight it.

The points I want to introduce through this newsletter are as pertinent here as they are anywhere in NYC. Having spent the last 3 years with the volunteers here has made it very clear to me the unique set of challenges we are presented with. The manning issue is obvious. Who is responding is as arbitrary as is their level of experience. And of course there are the water issues. Some communities here have hydrants but most don't.

What is of concern to me is that there is very little or no uniformity across departments in certain areas of our attack. Yes, there are many drills within a number of departments but there is no standardization with the minutiae of firefighting. You all take the same training, IFO, but then it gets filtered through the individual companies. The truth is 4 guys could be operating in a room in a house fire from 4 different departments with 4 different ways of doing things.

One of my goals is to introduce some procedures and manning positions on the engine company that will maximize use of who you have and also, very importantly, help minimize duplication and elimination of fireground tactics. And we can adjust these guidelines to every fire company depending on their individual manpower issues and concerns.

I'm really going to want to talk about the first handline being stretched into the fire building. One of the gospels of the FDNY is as follows: THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT IN AFFECTING THE OUTCOME OF A FIRE IS THE POSITIONING AND OPERATION OF THE FIRST HANDLINE.

What this means is that how efficiently that handline is stretched and maneuvered through the building coupled with knowing how to control the nozzle and conservatively use however much water you may have will have more impact on the success of the operation than anything else.

Moving a charged 1 3/4" handline through a house fire can be way more challenging than it sounds if it is really going to be done well. Everybody on that line must be on the same page. There has to be a ton of coordination and awareness of what is going to happen next and what is expected of you and the other members on that handline. Communication between members on the line is a must. The pace should follow that of the nozzleman.

If that handline cannot move smoothly and unimpeded our mission might fail. The person on the nozzle should not have to do anything but use that nozzle. The team behind him must make sure he has enough hose to reach his objective. The stretching gets complicated when there are many turns to be made. Going around a wall. Then turning through a doorway. Then around a bannister and up the stairs. Then make a U turn to go from the rear to the front around the top of the stair. Top this off with zero visibility and the confines of your SCBA. There must be people dedicated to that hoseline and nothing else until the fire is under control. When the nozzleman needs to move everyone else on that line should be moving the line just enough to suit the nozzleman's needs. I suggest no less than 2 people behind the nozzle man with 3 or 4 even better.

I'm hoping that in the near future we can get some classes going and get a hands on approach to hoseline advancement and engine company personnel assignments.

Stay tuned for the next newsletter. I will begin to go over the individual assignments of each person on the engine company and operating inside private home fires. Please remember that I'm more than happy to work with any company on modifying this to fit their manpower situation.