

## Lost Firefighter / MAY DAY Communications

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### Purpose:

The purpose of this guideline is to identify the roles and responsibilities of all the parties involved at an incident where a lost firefighter or a "May-Day" call has occurred. This policy will define the procedure of initiating a "May-Day" and the procedures to be followed by others on the fire ground responding to a "May-Day"

### Scope:

This standard pertains to the initiation of, and response to, a report of a lost, trapped, or downed firefighter/s at a structure fire.

### Safety:

The rescue of lost, trapped, or downed 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 or trapped by approaching fire. Understanding this policy will help ensure that during such an event, proper procedures will be followed, allowing for the best possible rescue scenario.

### Procedures:

"May-Day" procedures are to be used by anyone on the fire ground, in particular, personnel operating within a situation identified as an Immediate Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH) atmosphere in the event they become lost, trapped, injured or find themselves in any situation that requires rescue. Any member may use the "May-Day" procedure to report another firefighter found in the aforementioned situation(s). Individual firefighters must not delay reporting to Command if they become lost, trapped, or in need of assistance. Additionally, Company Officers must not delay the reporting of lost firefighters or the inability to complete an accountability report. Command must also restructure the strategy and action plan to include a high priority effort.

**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 a firefighter in the situations mentioned above.**

Members that become lost, trapped, injured or find themselves in any situation that requires rescue by others on the fire ground should execute the following procedure:

1. Relocate to a wall (if possible) and try to orient yourself to your surroundings
2. Give three (3) "May-Days" consecutively over the radio
3. Wait for the channel to be cleared and "May-Day" acknowledged by the Incident Commander
4. Prepare to give LUNAR information:
  - a. Location – "B side, outside wall"
  - b. Unit – "Engine 121"

## Lost Firefighter / MAY DAY Communications

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- c. Name – “Firefighter John Doe”
- d. Assignment/Air – “Interior Search Team-900psi”
- e. Resources Needed – “near a door, bring forcible exit tools”
5. Activate PASS device on the SCBA (turn off PASS when transmitting on radio)
6. Point beam of flashlight on the ceiling or straight up
7. Perform “control or skip” breathing to conserve air
8. Remain calm and remain in the same location

Incident Commanders should be prepared to illicit LUNAR information from the downed firefighter, who is likely to be overcome by stress and anxiety, and may be unable to provide LUNAR information without prompting.

### **Command Responsibilities:**

Command will maintain an awareness of the location of the firefighters on the fire ground through assignments and the fireground accountability system. In the event a firefighter cannot be located through a PAR, or any other time a firefighter is missing, the Captain or any other member should announce a “May-Day”. The Incident Commander shall respond to a “May-Day” by implementing a rescue plan for the firefighter(s).

Upon the initiation of a “May-day”, the IC should brief the RIC team with as much information as possible regarding the circumstances of the “May-Day”. RIC should be mobilized to effect firefighter rescue.

Company Officers and individual firefighters who suspect a firefighter is missing must notify the Incident Commander immediately. The IC must always assume that the missing firefighter is lost inside the building until the member is accounted for. The rescue plan must include the ability to identify when a firefighter is going to be delayed beyond his/her SCBA airtime. The plan should include:

- Balance to Alarm (Greater Alarm) request for additional resources
- Fire Operations during rescue efforts
- Expanding ICS
- Establish/Deploy RIC
- Assign a Chief Officer to manage the Rescue Group (if possible)
- Medical Operations
- Family Liaison
  - Member support (debriefing, etc)
  - Relief of on scene personnel by other departments
- Logistics – specialized equipment
- Safety
- Support Activities
- Media Control

## Lost Firefighter / MAY DAY Communications

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### **Change the Strategy and Plan for a High Priority Rescue Effort:**

The Incident Commander must restructure his/her strategy and action plan to include a firefighter rescue effort. This may seem obvious to most, however Incident Commanders can be overwhelmed by emotion related to the crisis at hand and may react to tasks rather than look at the global picture. This can lead to disorganization and delays that could be fatal to the missing firefighter.

Accurate information must be quickly obtained and acted upon. Additional resources must be immediately obtained. Rapid commitment of the RIC must occur. These resources must be organized and controlled. The strategy plan and objectives must be quickly communicated to other Officers. The plan and rescue activities must be continually monitored and revised as necessary. Conditions and updated information causes changes in the plan and objectives. The Incident Commander must communicate any other changes to the other staff and Officers.

### **Immediately Request Additional Resources:**

In many situations, all resources on scene may already be committed to firefighting positions. Some firefighters may already be approaching physical exhaustion and the SCBA may be nearly empty. Relocating committed forces is difficult and slow. Requesting additional resources that may double the number of units and personnel should be requested. This will insure adequate personnel to continue firefighting activities, provide sufficient personnel to assist firefighter rescue (12 rescuers to 1 down firefighter), and will allow relief of fatigued and emotionally effected personnel on scene.

### **Include a Medical Component when Requesting Additional Resources:**

Medical personnel will be needed to treat rescued firefighters. The IC must ensure that an adequate number of paramedics are responding, as well as an adequate number of ambulances. It is advisable to not rely on ambulances already on scene. Personnel arriving on these medic units often become involved in firefighting activities and would not be immediately available. Consider dispatching additional ALS ambulances, from mutual aid agencies if necessary, during the early moments of a "May-Day." These personnel will not become engaged in the firefighting/rescue operations and will remain ready to transport once the lost firefighter is rescued.

### **Utilize Level 2 Staging:**

Consider the use of Level 2 staging during a "May-Day" situation. The Incident Commander should commit resources from staging based on needs at the site. Staging controls resources and ensures that there is a route in and out of the scene, free of congestion, for ambulances to transport recovered firefighters.

Withdraw companies/personnel from the affected area, if appropriate, to obtain PAR and any reconnaissance information. In some situations, such as collapse or explosion, crewmembers

## **Lost Firefighter / MAY DAY Communications**

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may get separated. The only practical method to obtain an accurate PAR of effected crews may be to withdraw them to the exterior. In addition, withdrawal may be the only way to quickly obtain accurate information and reconnaissance on exactly where trapped members may be, routing to victims, debris locations, and the type of rescue equipment needed. Once the roll call and reconnaissance information is obtained, crews can be reassembled into a more organized rescue effort. Withdrawal is a judgment call based on the circumstances at the time, information available, and resources. It may not be practical or possible to do so, however, the absolute need for an accurate roll call and information on missing firefighters remains a critical priority. If it is determined not to withdraw, a detailed roll call must be obtained from each Captain for all personnel operating under his/her direction.

### **Do Not Abandon Firefighting Positions – Hold positions and Prevent Fire Spread:**

The reasons for the Rapid Intervention Crew, and the immediate request for additional resources, become very clear with this critical fire ground need. If a missing firefighter is to survive, the firefighters must keep the fire out of the rescue area. Any rescue effort will be significantly delayed without the rescue teams in place. Options would be: to relocate companies committed to fire suppression to the rescue effort and allow the fire to spread, or, to hold the fire positions and wait for additional resources for the rescue effort. With the RIC team in place, the IC can initiate an immediate effort without withdrawing or relocating fire suppression companies.

In most situations, the IC cannot allow the fire to spread. If anything, these fire suppression positions need to be reinforced. Additional companies should be sent to priority positions to keep the fire out of the rescue area. Large caliber handlines and master-stream appliances should be deployed when safe to do so. Adequate water supply must be obtained for this reinforced response.

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 are to remain unlocked.

Ventilate the building and maintain tenability and lighting. Reducing smoke conditions, through effective ventilation, improves 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.

### **Assign a safety Officer to the Rescue Operations:**

Rescue operations are high risk. The IC must avoid sustaining additional injuries. Each additional injury requires a resource commitment that will draw away from the priority rescue effort. A safety officer in the affected area will help control the risk taking. The Safety Officer will be able to conduct an assessment of the hazards, allowing time for the RIC to concentrate on the critical rescue effort.

## **Lost Firefighter / MAY DAY Communications**

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### **Individual Responsibilities:**

- To follow directions from Superiors
- To continue with assignment unless otherwise directed – DO NOT FREE LANCE
- To remain calm

Every member on the scene should listen specifically for a "May-Day" as fire ground noise could cover a call for "May-Day"

Strong supervision and control of activities will be required by all Officers. Emotions will be very high. Firefighters in this situation tend to want to free lance or take more and/or greater risks. It is strongly advised to guard the entrances with Chief Officers to prevent unauthorized entrance into the building by fellow firefighters (recommended by Phoenix Fire, as apparently, this was a huge problem after FF Tarver went down. Several additional May-Days were called after this due to unauthorized, and unbeknownst, rescue attempts). Ambulance personnel will need to be restricted to only those needed. Crowd control of our own non-essential personnel may be required. Anticipate the unexpected arrival of family members to the scene.

### **Dispatch Responsibilities:**

When a firefighter is declared lost, trapped, or injured, dispatch will sound an emergency traffic tone; personnel will be advised that a "May-Day" exists for a lost, trapped, or injured firefighter.

All channels will be monitored closely for any transmission from the missing firefighter. It is essential that once communications have been established, that they are not lost.

Once the firefighter has been recovered, or at the conclusion of the incident, all personnel and outside agencies will be notified of the conclusion of the "May-Day."