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Report of the Week

"Do we have an All Clear at this time?"
1/19/2012

Report Number: 11-0000401

Report Date: 12/28/2011 13:25

Synopsis

Investigators need PPE too.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Assistant Chief

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 52 - 60

Years of fire service experience: 24 - 26

Region: FEMA Region VIII

Service Area: Urban

Event Information

Event type: Fire emergency event: structure fire, vehicle fire, wildland fire, etc.

Event date and time: 01/01/2011 03:00

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Individual Action
- Decision Making
- Communication
- Command

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury

Event Description

Recently I was in command of a fire at a small strip mall that had a dry cleaner, a pizza joint, and a card shop. The fire was in the dry cleaner. Following the successful knockdown and the fire out and under control, I let the arson guys go in and do their thing. After about 15 minutes I witnessed that neither of them had on SCBA and were basically working next to a vat of fuming chemicals. My special ops chief called them out and we regrouped and re-established a safe scene.

Lessons Learned

I need to use my safety officer more to my advantage. The old tradition of

"Do we have an All Clear at this time?"

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"leather lung" firefighting doesn't work anymore. We owe it to each other to make sure all PPE and safety equipment is in order and worn.

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Consistent use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and self contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) is critical to firefighter safety, health and survival. Synthetic fuel loads are producing thousands of dangerous byproducts of combustion which creates carcinogenic atmospheres during all phases of fire attack. Often times we overlook the fact that since we cannot see fire and smoke, we must be safe. The incident commander and the officers that oversee these operations must be self courageous leaders to enforce the policy and practice of wearing PPE and SCBA during all phases of fire attack. This includes post-control operations and arson investigations. In Report [11-401](#), the incident commander pulled back the arson team for corrective actions.

"Recently I was in command of a fire at a small strip mall that had a dry cleaner... The fire was in the dry cleaner. Following the successful knockdown and the fire out and under control, I let the arson guys go in...After about 15 minutes I witnessed that neither of them had on SCBA and were basically working next to a vat of fuming chemicals. My special ops chief called them out and we regrouped and re-established a safe scene...I need to use my safety officer more to my advantage. The old tradition of "leather lung" firefighting doesn't work anymore. We owe it to each other to make sure all PPE and safety equipment is in order and worn."

Mistakes are going to happen on scene regardless of how hard we train. The ability to recognize an unsafe practice and take corrective action, as the incident commander did in Report [11-401](#), is what needs to happen to ensure firefighter safety. One way to ensure this is to develop and implement an "all clear" policy that dictates when it is safe to remove your PPE and SCBA. Once you have read the entire account of [11-401](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. Does your department have a policy that addresses appropriate level of PPE and SCBA for post-control operations?
2. Do you have the capability to constantly monitor the air quality during post-control operations?
3. When was the last time your crew trained on the dangerous byproducts of combustion and identified the immediately dangerous to life and health levels?
4. How could your safety officer help enforce a "best practice" approach on your next fire?

The recognition and identification of a hazardous atmosphere must be realized and respected by all firefighters operating on the fireground. The lessons learned from Report [11-401](#), will make a difference at your next fire.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Safety Officer/Hazardous Atmospheres

[10-731](#)

[05-366](#)

[11-015](#)

[10-1139](#)

[11-414](#)

Have you had to implement corrective actions to ensure firefighters are wearing appropriate levels of PPE and SCBA? Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today to pass on your experience.

Note: The questions posed by the reviewers are designed to generate discussion and thought in the name of promoting firefighter safety. They are not intended to pass judgment on the actions and performance of individuals in the reports.