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Report of the Week

"I thought you said the power was off?"
10/21/2010

Report Number: 10-0000247

Report Date: 02/09/2010 13:17

Synopsis

Electrical explosion endangers crew.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Battalion Chief / District Chief

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 43 - 51

Years of fire service experience: 21 - 23

Region: FEMA Region V

Service Area: Suburban

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 12/01/2009 00:00

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Witnessed event but not directly involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Human Error
- Procedure
- Command

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Lost time injury

Event Description

I was assigned to incident command of a single story, wood framed residential fire. The fire was a single room and contents with smoke and possible fire extension into the attic space. Vertical ventilation was ordered. Vertical ventilation was completed and the ventilation company dropped the interior ceiling. The initial company on the scene had advised that utilities had been secured almost immediately following the initial interior attack. As the ceiling was breached by the ventilation company, a large section of drywall swung free striking the HVAC unit in the garage, knocking it off its base. This action caused a large arcing and electrical explosion, exposing crews entering through the garage including an officer who had walked to the threshold without secured PPE. No one was injured and the electrical utility was immediately secured.

"I thought you said the power was off?"

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Lessons Learned

Command should notify interior crews of ventilation operations to coordinate and make them aware of potential for structural debris.

Request clarification from companies reporting utilities secured to insure which utilities were specifically secured and not assume the communicator meant both gas and electric.

Enforce that all individuals in hazard zone are wearing PPE.

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Securing utilities at the incident scene is a basic scene function that improves firefighter safety. Incident commanders rely on reports to confirm actions have been taken. These reports give the IC the confidence that the incident is under control and risks are being reduced. When the reports turn out to be erroneous, risk (the exposure to harm) increases and the rhythm of a fireground on the way to under control suffers a setback. Vulnerability increases and before you know it, everyone is exposed.

"...I was assigned to incident command of a single story, wood framed residential fire. The fire was a single room and contents with smoke and possible fire extension into the attic space. Vertical ventilation was ordered. Vertical ventilation was completed and the ventilation company dropped the interior ceiling. The initial company on the scene had advised that utilities had been secured almost immediately following the initial interior attack. As the ceiling was breached by the ventilation company, a large section of drywall swung free striking the HVAC unit in the garage, knocking it off its base. This action caused a large arcing and electrical explosion, exposing crews entering..."

A post incident critique pays huge dividends when a near miss occurs. The IC in this event relied on the radio report that the utilities had been secured, but the free swinging drywall proved otherwise. It would be important to determine the contributing factors of the incorrect transmission that the utilities were secured. Once you have read the entire account of [10-247](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. What are some possible explanations why the company securing utilities in the opening moments of the incident didn't disconnect power to the HVAC unit in the garage?
2. This fire was a room and contents fire in a one-story, wood framed residence. Should the garage have been considered part of the "hot zone" requiring full PPE?
3. What coordination practices does your department use when ventilation teams and interior crews are in close proximity to each other?
4. Are there any secondary hazards you can identify related to the HVAC unit falling off of its base?
5. Had this event occurred in your department, what would have been the after action approach?

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Securing Utilities

[05-429](#)

[06-088](#)

[07-986](#)

[08-073](#)

[09-159](#)

Don't let this happen to someone else. Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today so everyone goes home tomorrow.

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.