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R.E.C.E.O. Re-visited: Confinement & Extinguishment

If you have had the opportunity to read the last two “holding court” sessions, you probably get the drift of the direction I’m heading. As someone once told me, this isn’t “rocket science”. Confine the fire, and put it out (extinguish it)! This really is the essence of what we are here to do. As I said before, “put water on the fire, and everything gets better”. Confine the fire, and put it out (extinguish it) is just another way to say “put water on the fire, and everything gets better”. People like to change it, complicate it, analyze it or just plain screw it up so they can sell a new book, teach at a seminar, or make it appear that they are an expert in the Fire Service.

You will love this one! Many-many years ago I was working as the “tiller” on the truck. We got a working commercial fire in our first-due. The engine arrived on-scene to find a well-involved auto body shop. The Captain made an aggressive move to a plug, pulled a 2 ½” hoseline (right line for a commercial of this type), and made an aggressive interior attack. The truck arrived, and made an aggressive move to the roof to ventilate for fire attack. As I have said before, ventilation isn’t a support function (another article)! It is a primary function done for an aggressive fire attack. After the cuts were made, I noticed that there was a cone of water from the c-side of the roof as if the c-side of the fire building was being protected by a horizontal sprinkler head. We walked to the parapet, and couldn’t believe our eyes. The C-side of the building was a vacant lot! There we saw one of our companies with a 2 ½” hoseline in a circle on the ground on a full-fog pattern spraying water in the direction of the fire building. The water was landing 3-5’ short of the fire building itself. I will never forget it! The entire crew is retired, so the story can be told. I know this will sound out of character for me, but after the fire I approached the Captain to ask him what he was doing. His reply, “I’m confining the fire.” I don’t think the “founding” father of RECEO had this in mind.

As a side-bar, Lloyd Layman brought us RECEO, shipboard firefighting, and the most misunderstood interior fire tactic of all time, the fog-pattern (another article).

So, let’s see if we can bring it together. There are two strategic modes; offensive mode and defensive mode. Remember, RECEO are the strategic priorities for both strategic modes. Additionally, we can move from offensive mode to a defensive mode (offensive/defensive) or from a defensive to an offensive mode (defensive/offensive). That’s it! Don’t believe all the other stuff you read. There is no such thing as a rescue mode, transitional mode, or interior defensive mode (another article).

If we are going to protect the occupants (rescue), and/or personal property, and/or the building, we are in an offensive mode. Keep it simple! **If we are going to write-off the building, its contents, and protect the exposures, and/or control burn the building, we are in a defensive mode.** Keep it simple!

If we are in an offensive mode, it is considered that confinement and extinguishment takes place as a result of an aggressive fire attack with aggressive ventilation. If we are in a defensive mode, then confinement is generally independent of extinguishment. However, we must not forget the basic truth, by putting water on the fire; we are confining the fire, and reducing the exposure problem. As a side-bar, there is a fine line in a defensive operation between placing too many lines for confinement, and not enough lines on the fire itself. Once we have the fire confined in a defensive operation, we then can work to extinguish the fire rather than let it burn.

After taking a look at RECE of RECEO, and with a better understanding of what they mean, we can come to the following understanding:

- Protect Occupants/Offensive Mode = Rescue, Exposures, Confinement, and Extinguishment are taken care of by an aggressive fire attack with aggressive ventilation.
- Protect Personal Property/Offensive Mode = Exposures, Confinement, and Extinguishment are taken care of by an aggressive fire attack with aggressive ventilation.
- Protect Building/Offensive Mode = Exposures, Confinement, and Extinguishment are taken care of by an aggressive fire attack with aggressive ventilation.
- Write-off Building/Defensive Mode = Exposures are protected by Confining the fire, then Extinguishing the fire.
- Write-off Contents/Defensive Mode = Exposures are protected by Confining the fire, then Extinguishing the fire.
- Protect Exposures/Defensive Mode = Exposures are protected by Confining the fire, then Extinguishing the fire.
- Control Burn the Building/Defensive Mode = Exposures are protected by Confining the fire, then Extinguishing the fire.

Remember when in a defensive mode, there is a fine line between placing too many lines for confinement, and not enough lines on the fire itself. “Put water on the fire, and everything gets better”.

As a side-bar, there are several other factors that can assist you in the determination of whether you should choose the offensive mode or defensive mode. A couple of acronyms are FPODP, WALLACE WAS HOT, or BELOW. They all have there own merit, and you should choose one that is easy to remember, and easy for you to use (another article).

As you can see, this whole thing is very simple. Attack the fire (put water on the fire) in an offensive mode or defensive mode, and the Strategic Priorities take care of themselves. I think this is what Tom Brennan was trying to teach us! Keep it Simple!