

ORANGE PEEL

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Rescue 3

VENT-ENTER-SEARCH

Searching for victims is one of the most hazardous tasks firefighters perform on the fireground. Firefighters must search on the fire floor and the floors above the main body of fire. Although it is preferable to conduct all searches with the protection of a charged handline, actual fireground experience shows that firefighters often search without this protection.

One method firefighters use to search for victims is VES, or vent-enter-search. You can perform this method from a ladder or a fire escape. Before using this tactic, however, you must understand the difference between venting for life and venting for fire.

Most fireground ventilation is venting for fire. It is performed after the engine company has water and is starting to advance on the fire. This gives the expanding gases, smoke, steam, and heat a place to be pushed by the handline. It also improves the conditions for any trapped victims and for firefighters operating in the fire area.

Venting for life is done before the engine company has water, which makes it a hazardous operation. Although such venting is usually performed when operating companies have relatively "good" information concerning trapped occupants, many experienced truck company personnel use this tactic every day as an additional search tactic.

When venting for life, you know that venting the window(s) of the fire apartment adds oxygen to the fire. Thus, you must not vent too many windows before attempting entry.

You also must make sure that the opening you make to enter the area to be searched is free of obstructions in case you must exit quickly due to extending fire conditions. When you enter an area to perform a search, immediately try to isolate the area from the main body of fire. You usually can accomplish this by shutting the door to the room you have entered. This slows the flow of air to the main body of fire and also gives the room in which you are conducting a search a chance to lift.

Once you have completed your search of the area, you can slowly reopen the door; do so with extreme caution, as the fire might be right outside the door or the engine company may be pushing heat and steam in your direction. If conditions permit, you may advance into the next room. If conditions are deteriorating, exit the way you entered and leave the door to that room closed. (Note: The time elapsed during the following series of photos is under one minute.)

Photo 1. From the rear fire escape of this multiple dwelling, the members of the first-alarm truck companies have made their way to the fire floor. After venting the "off" window (the window not on the fire escape) and then the fire escape window, one member already has entered the fire apartment while the other remains at the window. From this photo, it appears that the firefighter who entered the apartment has done a good job of removing the glass but left the cross sash in place. When entering a fire area from the outside, it is good practice to remove all obstructions on your way in so they will not impede your escape. As the firefighter searches toward the front of the fire apartment, he is met by a rapidly advancing fire condition.



Photo 1: *Venting off the window.*



Photo 2. The firefighter who entered the fire apartment is forced to retreat as the fire, fed by the flow of oxygen, rapidly extends into the room just off the fire escape. His partner, who has been waiting on the fire escape landing, now backs down a few steps as his partner exits the fire apartment.

Photo 2

Photo 3. The room just off the fire escape now flashes over. The firefighter who just left that room, minus his helmet, finds that even conditions on the same level as the window have become untenable. As he pushes down the fire escape to escape the extreme heat, his partner has to grab hold of the fire escape support to keep from being pushed off the balcony.



Photo 3

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- All members who work in an area remote from their officer should be radio-equipped.
- If no protecting handline is forthcoming, it is good practice to work in pairs.
- Venting for life must be done with the knowledge that the fire will be drawn to the opening you make to gain entry.
- Clear all openings for entry of all obstructions so that exit through these openings will be unimpeded.
- When entering a room from a ladder or fire escape, immediately try to isolate this area from the main body of fire by shutting the door to the room.
- If your department uses positive-pressure ventilation, you cannot use VES, as the window opening becomes an avenue to which to push the fire.

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