

ORANGE PEEL

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Engine 16

THE BACK-UP FIREFIGHTER

WANTED: A person who can multi-task, and has a high degree of self-discipline. Must be well trained and able to think on their feet with little direct supervision. Must also have a strong back, be willing to do the dirty work and be well versed in the art of adaptation. This position does not come with well-deserved recognition .

Persons who do not meet these requirements need not apply for the position of Back-Up Firefighter.

One of the most underrated positions on the Engine Company, but one of the most important is the Back-Up Firefighter. The scope of responsibility is enormous and should the Back-Up Firefighter not fulfill their duties in a timely fashion, the entire Engine Company's performance will be greatly diminished. So what is the job and responsibilities of the Back-Up Firefighter on residential fires?

Two factors that must be considered are the arrival order and the conditions on arrival. They will dictate what tools the Back-Up Firefighter will need to bring and the tasks that will need to be completed.

TOOLS OF THE BACK UP FIREFIGHTER:

There is an old saying in the fire service: "You have two hands, Cary two tools". This saying can certainly be applied to the Back-Up position. The five tools for the Back-Up Firefighter are: **(Photo 1)**

1. The Irons
2. The Can
3. A Hook
4. An Attic Ladder
5. A Rope Bag



Photo-1: Tools of the Back-Up Firefighter

The Back-Up Firefighter will have to choose two of these tools every time they show up on a fire. While we can't plan for every fire, there are a few common situations that we can prepare for. Here a few situations where the Back-Up Firefighter can pre-plan for:

1ST DUE-NOTHING SHOWING:

- **TOOLS:**

The Can
The Irons

- **DUTIES:**

In the investigation mode, the Back-Up Firefighter will go with the Officer inside to assist with the investigation and: 1) facilitate entry into the structure; and 2) help hold a small fire in check with the "Can" should one be discovered, while the Officer radios to the Nozzle Firefighter, who is standing by at the engine, the need for an attack line inside.

1ST DUE-WORKING FIRE

- **TOOLS:**

The Irons
The Hook

- **DUTIES:**

On arrival of a working fire in a single family dwelling or multi-family dwelling, where a tankline (Pre-Connect) is going to be deployed as the attack line, the Back-Up Firefighter is responsible for "Light" forcible entry for the fire attack team. Usually this involves the use of the halligan to force the front door.

Once entry is complete and the attack line is ready to make entry, the Back-Up Firefighter places the irons and hook next to the door, so as not to become a trip hazard, wedges the door open for the attack line, and chases kinks to ensure proper pressure at the nozzle. They may have to chase kinks all the way back to the engine but adequate pressure is imperative prior to the Attack-team entering the structure.

Once the kinks are removed and the Back-Up Firefighter is back at the front door, their job is to feed line to the attack team, and to make sure that the line keeps moving in. Depending on the conditions inside, the Back-Up Firefighter may enter the building and stop at the first bend that the hose has made and continue to feed hose from there.

As the attack line advances to the seat of the fire, the Back-Up Firefighter will have to continually “Bump Up” toward the nozzle team to ensure they are getting the required amount of hose for the advancement.

Once the attack team has reached the seat of the fire, an experienced Back-Up Firefighter may brake off and begin a primary search behind the line.

After knockdown, the Back-Up Firefighter will assist the attack team in searching for any hidden fire in the areas where the truckers have not gotten to yet.

1ST DUE-LAYING IN DRY

- **TOOLS:**

The Irons
The Hook

- **DUTIES:**

When the Officer decides to lay-in (forward) dry to a working fire, the Back-Up Firefighter is responsible for securing the supply line at the hydrant. When the Engineer spots the hydrant, the Back-Up Firefighter will wrap the hydrant with the supply line of choice, leaving the hydrant bucket at the hydrant and return to the engine for the lay in.

Due to the risk of being hit by couplings, the Back-up Firefighter should not ride tailboard.

Once at the fire, the Back-Up Firefighter duties are the same as they would be on 1st Due Working fire: Entry, chasing kinks, feeding line, primary search and pulling ceiling.

1ST DUE-LAYING IN WET

- **TOOLS:**

A Hook

- **DUTIES:**

When the order is given to lay-in (forward) wet by the Officer, the Back-Up Firefighter is responsible for all hydrant work, which includes selecting the appropriate supply line, flushing and hooking up the supply line to the hydrant.

It is important to remember, when the Back-Up Firefighter is delayed in getting to the door because of other assignments, the Officer **MUST** assume those Back-Up responsibilities, including forcible entry for the attack line, and chasing kinks, until the Back-Up Firefighter can catch up with the attack team.

Once the supply line is secured, the Back-Up Firefighter will report directly to the engine the hook, and chase kinks to the front door. Entry should have been completed by the attack team, however if not, assist with forcible entry. The remainder of your duties is the same as being 1st due.

1st DUE-LAYING OUT

- **TOOLS:**

The Irons
The Hook

- **DUTIES:**

If the Officer chooses by either necessity or SOP's to drop attack line(s) and lay-out (reverse) with the supply line, the priority must be to get the hose on the ground and get the engine off to the water supply as soon as possible. This type of operations requires more time and effort by the company members. As with any hose lay, the Back-Up Firefighter will play a key role in the success of this operation.

First, the Back-Up Firefighter must assist with the hose and tool drop before the engine lays' out. Second, the Back-Up Firefighter must stay with the engine to assist the Engineer with breaking the hose from the bed and hooking up the hose that is going to be used to supply the attack line to a discharge. Having the Back-Up Firefighter stay with the engine during this crucial time in the evolution, will free up the Engineer so they can concentrate on making the hook up to the hydrant.

After breaking and hooking up the attack line, the Back-Up Firefighter returns to where the attack team is operating, and assists with entry and hose movement just as before.

2ND DUE

- **TOOLS:**

A Hook
An Attic Ladder

- DUTIES:

Flexibility is the key in this situation. The Back-Up Firefighter must be able to rapidly adapt and switch gears based on the progress and success of the 1st due engine.

One of the big changes in being 2nd due is the tool selection. The Hook and Attic ladder are the tools of choice. The needed tools for this assignment are used to support the 1st due engine. By now, forced entry at the front has been completed by the 1st due engine, and they have pushed into the fire room by now. The truckers are busy doing truck stuff, so that leaves it upon the 2nd due to get into the overhead and check for extension.

Bringing the hook and ladder to the front door and placing it off to the side, will facilitate getting to the overhead when you are ready. There will be no need to go back to the engine “Take a minute to save a minute”.

The 2nd due engine most likely will be assigned water supply for the 1st due engine. If this is the case, then those responsibilities will fall on the shoulders of the Back-Up Firefighter of the 2nd due engine, whether that means laying-in, laying-out or hand jacking supply line. Once a water supply has been secured, the 2nd due engine has a decision to make, assisting the 1st due engine with their line, or pulling a back up line

Most departments have standard rules or procedures that state the 2nd due engine is responsible for deploying the back-up line and backing up the fire attack team. While this may be true, there is a higher priority that MUST be addressed before the back-up line is placed into service, and this is to ensure the fire attack line is in service, and moving toward the seat of the fire.

If that initial attack line is bogged down for any reason, kinked or because of a difficult or complicated stretch, the Nozzle Firefighter and the Back-Up Firefighter of the 2nd due must assist in the movement of advancement of that attack line.

Check with the Back-Up Firefighter of the 1st due and see if they need a hand. If things are good with them, then the Nozzle FF of the 2nd due will go get a back-up line or an exposure and the Back Up Firefighter of the 2nd due will feed line from the door, while the Back Up Firefighter from the 1st due will “Bump-Up” inside to assist the attack team. It cannot be stressed enough, if the 1st line is not advancing to the seat of the fire, then all hands must assist with the completing of this task, before back-up lines are pulled.

The typical residential scenario usually plays out like this:

1st due engine arrives on scene, and deploys their attack line, passing water supply and Command to the 2nd engine.

The 2nd due Officer selects the best way to secure a water supply for the 1st due engine. (Laying- in or laying-out). The Back-Up Firefighter handles the hydrant work in a lay-in or assists the engineer on the layout. In the mean time, the 2nd due Nozzle Firefighter is checking with the 1st due attack team and assisting them if needed.

After the water supply has been completed, the Back-Up Firefighter will grab the 2nd due tool assignment and assist with the 1st due attack line.

As one can see, the Back-Up Firefighter has many roles and responsibilities, and must often think on the fly to ensure a smooth and successful operation. A knowledgeable Back-Up Firefighter understands the tools, and knows how to apply these tools and complete a variety of tasks that may be assigned to them.