

ORANGE PEEL

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LADDERS 101

For sixteen weeks fire recruits practice picking up, carrying and lowering ground ladders. They do this for hours upon hours until their bodies become sore and worn out. Outside of the academy, though, ground ladders seem to be the least used tool on the fire ground. Why is that? Is it because they are heavy and cumbersome? Is the 1st due truck overwhelmed with tasks that need to be performed? Or is it because the crews are lazy? The answer is a combination of all of the reasons along with the fact that some truck companies are not disciplined in their habits to throw ladders every time, regardless if there are needed or not. It seems that the use of ground ladders has fallen into the “low priority” category. However, if **you** were that trapped occupant above ground, you’d probably wish that laddering was the number one priority.

When should ground ladders be used? At every fire! Proper laddering serves many purposes: access to the fire area; victim removal; ventilation operations and most importantly they serve as a secondary means of egress for firefighters in above ground fires. The idea is that if you are searching on the second floor and fire conditions deteriorate, you can go to any window and a ladder will be waiting for you.

LADDERING RESPONSIBILITY

Whose job is it to throw these ground ladders? It is the job of the Outside Team of the 1st due truck to throw the initial ladder, whether that is for topside ventilation or above ground rescue. **(Photo 1)** The Outside Team of the 2nd due truck must complete the task of throwing ladders if it has not been completed by the 1st due truck. It should be the mindset of the 2nd due truck that the throwing of ladders is their top priority. However, the assignment of throwing the initial and all subsequent ground ladders can be deferred to the 2nd due truck, if the 1st due truck has committed all hands to a rescue or aerial operation. This is where company discipline is paramount.



Photo 1: The intimal ground ladder is the responsibility of the 1st due truck Outside Team.

The Outside Team must throw the proper amount of ground ladders and to the proper location before moving on to other operations. Here are a few tips for the Outside Team members to keep in mind when selecting the proper ladder:

RULES OF LADDERING

1. Know what function the ladder is being used for, Rescue or Ventilation? If being used for rescue, make sure the tip of the ladder is at or just below the windowsill or opening. If being used for topside ventilation, make sure there are at least three rungs and no more than five rungs above the eve or contact point of the ladder.



Photo 2: Throw multiple ladders and have secondary ways off a roof.

2. Choose the proper ladder for the job. Make sure the length of the ladder is sufficient to reach your objective. “Do not take a 24’ ladder to a 35’ fire”

3. Throw one...Throw two. Do not be satisfied with just one ladder up. Give yourself and your company members every opportunity to get out of an upper floor window or off a roof, if and when things go bad. **(Photo 2)**

4. Have a second way off a roof. If during ventilation operations, a rapidly moving fire cuts you off, there should be a second ladder available to you.

5. Ladder as many upper floor windows as possible. These can be used for entry, but more importantly, they can be used for egress by firefighters in distress. **(Photo 3)**

6. Avoid laddering over windows and doors. This should be common sense but I have seen this done too many times. The end result is that the fire vents out the window and envelopes the ladder and cuts off any means of egress. There is also the chance that the ladder gets knocked over by advancing hose lines.



Photo 3: Ladder as many upper floor windows as necessary using different ladders if needed.

7. **DO NOT MOVE A LADDER ONCE IT IS UP.** Go get another ladder if you have too. Remember, there may be someone who is expecting that ladder to be there when they return. **(Photo 4)**

TAKING UP

A sign of a proficient truck company is the amount of ground ladders thrown during a fire. Ground ladders should be used for many different operations. The main point is that they get used. The Outside Team can make the fire ground safer if they are quick and efficient with their ladder work. Training and discipline by the truck company to ensure that the proper amount of ground ladders are thrown to the correct place is paramount if the truck is to be successful in reaching their objectives, Rescue, Ventilation, and Entry. The ground ladder is a tool, USE IT!



Photo 4: Removal of a ladder will prevent a department member from getting out of a bad situation.