

ORANGE PEEL

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BY: ERIC GUIDA

Sacramento fire Department
Engine 57

LESSONS LEARNED: FDIC WEST 2002

All the training sites are quiet now. All of the instructors are back at home. But last week Sacramento was the center of fire knowledge. All of the countries best were here teaching us how do to the job and do it right. This “Lessons Learned” will comprise of the little things I picked up from the instructors. If any of you learned something new please email us and let us know about it.

I would like to say a couple of words about some ideals that the instructors seemed to stress. First, that there were “no Egos”. We had the nation’s best instructors here teaching us everything there is to know about fighting fire and rescuing people. But none of them carried the ego that went along with being the best. Brotherhood was the only cause for egos here. Whether you were from FDNY or a small rural department, everyone was treated the same. The second point was “passing it on”. The idea behind FDIC is to pass on the knowledge to you so that you can pass it on to those who could not make it. Help save your buddy’s life by giving him the same chance of getting out alive as you have. Share with the other shifts the same tricks so that they can make that grab too. FDIC is the stone in the pond and the knowledge that is shared is the ripples. Let’s keep those waves of knowledge going.

Now I must preface the lessons that I learned by saying that I got them as part of the “Ladders” instructor cadre. That’s right. This engine guy help teach ladders at FDIC. I learned as much as the students did, that’s for sure. I was brought into the ladders group and showed the ropes. The brothers responsible for bringing me in were Capt. Mike Dugan L-123 FDNY, soon-to-be Lt. Mike Ciampo T-44 FDNY, FF Bob Christie E-36 Richmond Fire, and FF Dan Kennedy E-6 Sacramento Fire. These guys made it so easy that by the end of the first day I actually knew which end of the ladder to raise. Thanks guys it was great teaching with you.

Lessons Learned:

1. When searching with a halligan, which is the tool of choice, hold it with the adz and point down. This will raise the handle of the halligan off of the ground. By searching like this, in zero visibility and on your hands and knees, if your knuckles all of a sudden hit the floor then you know that the leading adz/point end has found a depression in the floor. You can now carefully feel out in front to see if you have found a hole in the floor, or a stairway or basement covering that is gone or etc.

2. When footing the ladder, foot it from the front. I know that footing from the back is being taught in the academies because it is the most stable way to foot the ladder. But by footing the ladder from the front, done by facing the ladder and putting your foot on the foot of the ladder, you are an extra set of eyes for your brother going up into the window. If conditions are poor, then he will be hitting the floor once he gets off the ladder. He will not be able to see what is going on above him. If the rooms show signs of lighting up you will see them before he will. Plus you will be able to see what is going on in any adjoining room. If a victim appears in some other window you will see it. If you are footing the ladder from the back all you will see is what is going on in the neighbor's back yard.
3. Speaking of laddering windows for rescue here is a trick I learned when it comes to taking windows. We have learned that it is important to take the entire window (sash and all) to ensure the best exit possible. But when it comes to taking other windows in the same room, take only the glass. By leaving the sash in the other windows you will have an indication of which window your ladder is at. That is, the window that is totally cleaned out is the one that has your ladder. If you are crawling and you're looking for that window, you will be able to tell by running your hand in the opening. If your hand hits a sash then you know your ladder is not at this window. If your hand doesn't hit anything, then you know you have found the opening that has your ladder.
4. If you are going above the fire to search and you're using a ladder to get there, and visibility is poor, take a pike pole or other long tool with you. You can hook the windowsill and search a large portion of the room without ever losing contact with that sill. Just hold on to the handle of the hook and swing out from the window.
5. (I actually learned this next one from Andrew Fredericks at FDIC West 2000)
Using nails to chock doors. Take the point of the nail and place it in the doorjamb then shove the head into the side of the door. You can set the nail by closing the door and pushing the nail into the jamb. Now the nail is set and won't fall out even if the door is opened further. I learned a second way this year in which you place the head of the nail in the jamb and the point of the nail in the hinge, preferably into the screw that holds the hinge. Either way, by using nails, it gives you an easy way to chock a lot of doors without having to carry a lot of wedges. The rubber band that holds broccoli bunches together can hold ten to twenty nails, which easily fits into your turnout coat pocket.
6. When you're by yourself and you need to move a ladder from one window to another. Don't slide it, roll it. If you lose control of the ladder when rolling it, it will still come to rest on the building. If you lose control of the ladder sliding it, it could slide off the building and onto the ground.
7. 7. When laddering to rescue people from windows, be ready for anything. People who are panicking will do anything to get out of the situation that they are in. Take control of the scene, keep your eyes on them at all times and be ready to catch people jumping or being thrown. (I.e. small children being thrown by their parents) Dump the ladder if you have to. Just be ready.

Well that's about enough ladder stuff for now. But let me leave you with this. FDIC reconfirmed what I have always known in my heart. **THIS IS THE BEST DAMN JOB IN THE WORLD.** We are part of a brotherhood that is second to none and by seeing (and learning from) our brothers from all over; I was once again filled with the intense pride that is the fire service.

Be safe brothers, until next time.