

ORANGE PEEL

April 13, 2003

BY: ERIC GUIDA

Sacramento Fire Department
Engine 57

LESSONS LEARNED- PART 2

Here are a couple of points to ponder.

First of all let's talk about car fires. Yea, they're not the tactical fire problem that structure fires present but you can still practice sound basic attack principles. So you pull up to a well-involved auto fire. What do you do? You should operate in the same mode as you would for a single family dwelling fire. By this I mean the tool guy should still be coming off with the irons, ready to force entry, and the hose guy should be pulling a tank line. (If it reaches, a trash line or bumper line will do) Stay away from pulling a hose reel line. By pulling a 1 ½ or 1 ¾ tank line instead, you get the benefit of practicing that hose pull, which can't be practiced enough. Plus, you get all the water you could need. Leave the rubber hose reel for grass fires. The irons guy should be ready to force the hood and trunk.

A well-involved engine compartment can offer quite a battle. The old days of bashing the hood locking mechanism until it fails has been replaced with finding the cable that runs from the hood release latch to the hood lock. (This is assuming the car is new enough to have a cable) This cable will almost always run along the driver side of the engine compartment then turning and running along the front of the compartment near the top of the radiator. If the engine compartment is well involved the irons guy should first pry open the hood enough to flow some water onto the fire. Then, with the halligan, the irons guy should remove the grill and feel for the cable that will be under the metal frame member running to the lock. Once found, the cable should be pulled on, sometimes requiring a pair of channel locks, which usually releases the primary locking mechanism. The hood can then be opened and full extinguishment can be made. Unfortunately, the trunk is not as easy to open. The easiest way I have found is to put the point of the halligan on the lock and drive the lock thru into the trunk. Hopefully, this will release the trunk without too much extra "bashing."

Now let's talk about the fire that forces us to think about stretching down the driveway or around the house to a rear entrance. Let me explain. We just had a fire where we, upon arrival, had a large body of fire to the rear of a single family, single story structure. As we pulled up I couldn't tell if the fire was an exterior fire on its way in or rear bedroom fire. All I knew was that we had heavy fire to the rear of a rather long house. As it turns out, the fire originated in an exterior, enclosed porch and was now moving into the house via a bedroom window and the attic. The porch was approximately 20' X 30' and was fully involved, which accounted for the large body of fire we saw on arrival.

Now it would have been very easy to pull line down the side of the house and attack the porch fire. That would have gotten water on the fire quicker and been an easier stretch. What about the fire that was already in the house? An exterior attack would have pushed the fire further into the house. By stretching the line thru the front door and down the hall to the rear bedroom it allowed us to stop the fire from advancing any further into the house. By being inside already we were in position to attack the attic fire, which is where the fire had extended. Attacking from the outside would have allowed for extinguishment of the porch at the expense of the rest of the house. We actually ended up jumping out the bedroom window and stretching the line out the window to get to the porch, once we had stopped the fire from advancing into the house.

This sort of attack also works for fires in the front rooms of houses. Pulling line around to the rear of a house because the front is too involved with fire is asking for disaster. The front door is the quickest and cleanest way to attack a house fire, regardless of where the fire is. There is no telling what you will encounter in the rear of homes. Dogs, fences, piled up junk, cars and locked rear doors all add to the problem of a rear stretch. Not to mention the extra hose and time it takes to stretch that extra distance. Why not just stretch thru the front door? It is closest to the rig and there are no mysteries awaiting you. (At least not while you stretch) Plus, if any one was on their way out, they were probably headed to the front door. This makes the potential rescue easier. The habit of stretching to the front will benefit you on multiple story structures too. The stairs are usually, not always, but usually near the front door. And we all know how vital protecting the stairs is to any possible rescues. You just can't go wrong stretching thru the front door. Until next time...

Stay Safe and Be Smooth. Smoothbore that is.