

ORANGE PEEL

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HAVE A SAFE NEW YEAR!

Every year we say to each other “Have a Happy and Safe New Year”. Let’s see if this year we can back that statement up so everyone goes home safe. With 2005’s arrival it seems that the emphasis in training is on “Back to the Basics” and “Firefighter Survival”. This is appropriate considering that in 2004, we lost 107 Firefighters. These 107 are; fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters and someone’s child or friend. The topics and ideas in this article are not new; this is a “refresher” of items sometimes we forget to do or over look. The purpose of Back to Basic and Firefighter Survival is to help insure that everyone goes home safely. Hopefully, this article will help to insure the same.

Let’s start with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) since we all have it and it is something that is, usually, ours alone. Let’s wear the correct costume (ensemble) for the task at hand.

On EMS, wear your gloves and eye protection on every call. Those two items will do more to insure your safety, than any vaccination or shot out there. Be aware that sometimes both you and the patient need a mask. Remember to fill out your exposure forms when the situation warrants the need, and wash your hands.

For Wild land fires if you have the option of wearing wildland PPE, wear it. Turn outs are just too heavy and cause you to over heat when on an extended wildland operation. Remember to stay hydrated, cool down and open up when rehabbing, stay informed of the local weather forecast, fire conditions and the areas fire history.

For Structural firefighting, the key is being intimately familiar with your gear. We teach Recruits to don there turnouts the same way every time, so they don’t forget any steps or equipment. We also teach them to store their turnouts in anticipation of a fire not for the convenience of riding on the rig. When was the last time you checked your turnout pockets to inventory you personal tools. When was the last time you tried to access your tools with a gloved hand without looking. Maybe some tool changes or tool location changes need to take place in order for you to be prepared to go to work. Remember to wear the appropriate PPE on every call, every time because the next smells and bells, or frequent flyer could be the real deal, and will you be prepared?

Attitudes we all have them, have you checked yours lately? The thing about attitudes is they are contagious. They can be positive, negative, I just don't care, or every other Friday (payday). What ever your attitude is, most of your peers know it and deal with you according to their perception of your attitude. Are you someone people have to work with or someone people want to work with? Remember your oral board, "why do you want to be a Firefighter?" most of us want to help people and save them from the "ravishes of fire". With that in mind take every advantage to prepare for your next fire. Spot the rig as you would for a fire on those frequent EMS calls. While inside on the EMS call look at the layout of the residence, is it common for that area? Are you beginning to see patterns in floor plans, room locations?

Before taking up from an EMS call do a size up or two, talk tactics, line placement, life safety concerns, and any hazards you might notice. This will help keep the firefighting morale up and help crews to stay focused, especially between those all too random fires. Another way to stay focused on your local fire problem is to critique other's fires. If possible go to the scene talk about what they did and what you might do differently. Its easy to start bashing others at this point, don't let that happen, remember you're there to improve your operation for future fires. Consider getting a copy of the dispatch tapes including the command and tactical channels. This will help to paint a picture as to how the incident evolved, especially the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the operation.

Lastly, stay abreast with the current trends and training happening within the fire service. This can be accomplished within your own department or outside. On the outside there are various Hands On Training (HOT), lectures, community colleges, magazines and internet sites. All helping to keep you abreast of the current trends in your fire service.

Hopefully this refresher is a good starting point for all of us to reflect our own personal operation and think of ways to prepare for our next incident. Remember the basics are what everything else is built upon, and the basics will help to insure that we all go home safe. Hopefully this year will be as safe as possible. Until next time, be prepared, be professional, and be safe.