

ORANGE PEEL

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Engine Co # 3

THE FIRST DUE ENGINEER

Much has been written about the many tasks or positions associated with being First Due. The Fire Due Engine Co., The First Handline, The First Due Officer, the list goes on and on. Unfortunately, I have seen little written about the Fire Due Engineer. Engineer, Operator, Chauffer, whatever you may call the guy that drives the Engine has a lot to do with how the fire goes. There is a saying "However the first line goes, so goes the fire". I am here to tell you that no matter how well the Nozzlemen stretches that line, if the Engineer can't get that line charged in a timely manner, the fire is not going to go well!

The following is a short list of the many duties and responsibilities that the Engineer has.

1. Morning Engine Checks

The rig needs to be thoroughly checked every morning. Just because the off going shift told you everything is A-OK doesn't mean it is. It is your job (not the probies) to climb all over, under, in, and out of that rig to make sure it is ready to go. Check all your fluids look for leaks run the pump up to pressure and check your relief valve. If you have an old school sight gauge on your panel, check to make sure that someone didn't close the bottom valve making it appear that your booster tank is full when it's not! Check your lights (code 3 and driving), tires, wiper blades, everything.

2. Know Your District

Yeah the Captain has a map book, but that doesn't mean you don't have to know where you are going! It is just as important, if not more so, to know how to get to the job. You should know (or at least have an idea) hydrant locations, neighborhood types, commercial vs. residential, traffic flows vs. time of day, etc. I recommend driving your district at least once a tour (shift rotation). It is a great way to get out and pre-plan, and train the probies in the back seat too.

3. Get The Crew There SAFE!

This probably should have been #1. This is extremely important. The Captain has an obligation to make sure his entire crew goes home safe at the end of the shift. SO DO YOU! Apparatus accidents to and from incidents is one of the leading causes of death in the fire service today. Pay attention to your speed, road conditions, and traffic. Watch for other emergency vehicles. I know every second counts, but if you don't get there at all, who are you helping?

4. Make Sure Everyone is On

When I teach at the academy I joke about leaving anyone not dressed in under a minute at the station. Now while we all have our pride and want to bust the probies chops, you can't pull out of the house while someone is trying to jump on. Also make sure that everyone has completely shut the door and is buckled in. The last thing anyone wants is to run over a brother.

Now that we have reviewed the day to day operations of an Engineer, let's look at the Fireground responsibilities.

5. Slow Down on the Fire Block

Slow down a bit when you get to the fire block. Let the captain get an idea of what you have. This will give him and you a chance to size-up the building and conditions before giving assignments.

6. Watch for Hazards

Power lines are the big one here. I remember one day while doing a pre-employment ride-along with my current department, there were a couple of engineers "talking" about the placement of the first due engine at a fire a couple of hours prior. Apparently the service drop for the house had burnt through and landed on the cab of the pumping engine while still energized. I took that lesson to heart. Thankfully no one was hurt. Another hazard that is often overlooked is radiant heat. Be sure to spot your engine far enough away that if things go to hell, you won't ruin your engine. It is a pain to try and move rigs after lines have been stretched.

7. Get a Three Sided Look.

Pull past the fire building slightly so you and the Officer can get a look at three sides of the building. Doing this also leaves the front of the building for the Truck if you should happen to have one responding.

8. Make Sure the Pump is in Gear

This one is for the newer engineer. When you first get promoted, you will probably forget to do this on your first fire. A lot of us have. Slow down and follow your steps. If you forget to do it, IT'S OK! Climb back up into the rig and put it in gear. This is where a lot of Engineers start to lose it. Don't get flustered. Take a breath and start over. Remember if you lock up, you can't help anyone. A trick here is to spot your rig and engage your pump on every call. Smells and Bells, First aids, all of them. If you get into this habit, you won't forget on the big one. Just make sure the tank fill or re-circulation valve is cracked enough to not overheat the pump

9. Make Sure the Line Pulled is the Line Charged!

Yeah we could blame the new guy for not pulling the line that the Officer called for, but wouldn't it be more conducive to look up and see BEFORE you charge the line. Nothing is more embarrassing than having the second due company roll in and sees a big pile of spaghetti on top of your engine. More importantly though, that big pile could be a line that is needed for back-up or Firefighter Rescue. Everyone knows how hard it is to pull a line that has been charged in the bed.

10. Set Pressures and Relief Valves

With most lines being pre-connected these days, it is pretty easy to have preset pressures for your lines. The danger to this practice is getting a stretch that is not preset. When this happens, you will have to revert to some form of field hydraulics to get your pressures. Don't rely on every line being a pre-connect. Relief valves seem to be going by the wayside. Computers and pressure governors are taking away a lot of the thinking associated with running a pump. But not all engines have these, so to prevent the brothers from taking a beating on the end of the line, remember to set your relief valve to the appropriate pressure. Along with this be sure to gate down any line operating at a lower pressure than the relief valve is set at.

11. Water Supply

Every department is different. Some lay in on every call, some only on working fires. Some have the second due lay in or out. What ever your department does, secure that supply. Also look at your department policy regarding supply line size. A 3 inch supply line will work for most room and content fires, and is much easier to take up.

12. Watch Your Gauges

What gauges am I talking about? Intake, Pressure, #1 Pre-connect? Sure. But also your engines Oil psi, Water Temp, and Tach. These all tell you how your engine is doing. It is important to know these things to predict any problems that may happen while on the fireground. Oh and fuel too! Long "block party" type fires have been known to drain a fuel tank or two. You definitely do not want your engine dying while the brothers are inside fighting a good fight.

13. Anticipate Needs

I am not telling you to break department SOP's here, and this is not free lancing. What tools get used at almost every fire? Hooks, Ladders (attic and 24's), salvage covers right? So why not anticipate this and take them off of your engine and place them in a tool staging area somewhere in the front of the building. You don't have to walk 100 feet from your engine to do this. I do not recommend that you leave your panel for a long time, or get so far away that you can't solve any problems with the pump in a timely manner. I do however believe that once the lines are pulled and you have secured a water supply, that you can walk around your engine and collect a few items that will almost always be needed at the fire building. Also think about scene lighting. Those fires in the late afternoon, early evening may start while the sun is up, but may end long after. Don't wait until someone trips over a line to fire up the lights.

14. Check the Rig Before Leaving the Scene

Although we all hate it, people will take stuff off of your engine with out asking or even telling you. Make sure you got all of your stuff back on before you leave. Also make sure there is nothing on the tailboard or running boards before leaving. A good thorough walk-around will save you a lot of grief, and the Captain a lot of paper.

15. Re-service the Engine

Do as much of this before you leave the scene as possible. Anything you can't do at scene should be done as soon as you get back to the house. Don't go back and eat dinner first. Get that rig response ready ASAP. Check the all you tools, SCBA's, booster tank, fill the water can.

Much of what an Engineer has to do happens in the first 5 minutes of a fire, followed by 1-2 hours of sitting around watching everyone else play. Just remember that your job is every bit as important as anyone else on that fireground. Train, train, train. Practice spotting. Practice field hydraulics. Talk with your company about the things they expect of you, and what you expect of them. Train as if THEIR lives depend on it. Because they DO!!!