

ORANGE PEEL

February 10, 2005

BY: JASON BARKER

Dixon Fire

Engine 81

WHAT'S THE HANG-UP? The "Ins and Outs" Storing Your Tools

*It was only a drill, but I found myself hung-up, trapped by one of the tools that were supposed to keep me safe. We were performing a low profile exercise as part of a SCBA confidence course when either the glove strap and/or the radio antenna caught on something. I could not go forward or backward, my mask was pulled off and if it were **REAL...** I was dead. I had trapped myself....*

The contents of my bunker gear pockets always seem to change. There was always some new and improved tool to make the job easier. But my pockets soon were full of tools that never saw the light of day. The more frequently used the day-to-day stuff was pushed out of my pockets and into some form of loop or strap or Velcro holder hung on the outside of my turnout jacket.

Yeah, it is cool to be able to grab your gloves without having to dig them out of your pockets. But it seems that we have taken things too far. At the recent *Fire House Expo* hands-on training, I witnessed all sorts of tools hanging from turnouts. There were gloves, door wedges, rope, accountability system tags and one guy even had a spanner wrench attached to his gear. The next thing you know the only things our pockets will be holding are mismatched rubber gloves, crumpled coffee cups, and candy wrappers from the last BIG ONE we were on.

I personally organize my bunker gear pockets and tools by function. Anything used primarily to fight to save my skin; I put in the right side—Right-To-Fight. I am right handed so I use my right hand to use these tools. I try to keep my left hand free in the event of an emergency. I may need to change the position of my SCBA, and I do not want to lose control of the regulator. My left hand controls the regulator. My life line is in my left hand – Left-For-Life.

The tools that you take to work with you should be the best quality and well cared for. When you select a tool for your bunker gear you should make sure it could do multiple jobs. For instance, a pair of locking pliers (vise-grips) can be used to hold open doors, pull locks away for cutting, open stand pipe valves and if you get the right type (with cutters in the blades) cut wire. A multi-bit screwdriver can be used to remove electrical outlet covers, assist a citizen with installing a smoke detector or be used to operate the mechanism of a lock.

I could list tools that you should carry, but like I said my list changes all the time. But at a minimum I always carry a sharp knife, a flashlight, a short rope and some form of wire cutters.

Other tools that I have used in the past include door wedges, a hose strap and a pocket spanner. The less used tools I store in a small tool roll, but the tools I may need to save myself are free in my right pockets.

Should you choose to carry tools and equipment strapped to your coat beware that you could find yourself in danger. Should you ever need to get yourself and your SCBA through a wall or under fallen debris, the last thing that you need is to get one of those can't-live-without-it gadgets that you attached to your coat hung up, slowing you down or even trapping you.

Look at your gear. Will that flashlight flow with as you squirm to safety? Will the radio antenna sticking out of the pocket get caught as you crawl through wires and pipes? Can that glove loop get caught on the tip of the ladder or a nail sticking up in the window frame keeping you from rolling out under the flashover? Is that life saving equipment going to get you killed?

You need to consider what tools you truly need and rethink strapping them to your chest. Make your profile slim and aerodynamic. Move your tools back into the pockets. Not only are you less likely to lose the equipment, but you may also better your chances to keep from getting hung up and trapped and losing your life.