



PUBLIC SAFETY POLICY

In effect:

Authorized by:

PS-3 Search and Rescue

I. Purpose

Search and rescue of trapped or threatened individuals is a priority at all fire and emergency scene operations. This policy serves to provide guidelines for search and rescue on the fireground.

II. Policy

Rescue of trapped or threatened individuals is a primary strategy for satisfying the number one fire service incident Priority: Life Safety.

After firefighter Life Safety, fireground operations will focus on occupant/victim Life Safety. If a search is initiated, a primary search shall be conducted to quickly survey the interior for readily accessible occupants. A thorough detailed secondary search shall be conducted when practical to ensure no trapped or threatened individuals were missed.

State Law now stipulates that unless there is an immediate need for rescue, no interior operations will begin until there are two members available outside the structure who can effect rescue of firefighters, if necessary. The following guidelines should be followed at all fire scene operations, except where deviation can be justified by Fire Officers. Any significant deviation should be communicated to responding/on-scene units as soon as possible.

III. Guidelines

- A. All Companies should be prepared to undertake immediate rescue, if needed, in order to assure the life safety of trapped and threatened individuals.
- B. Search and rescue operations at fire and emergency incidents are inherently risky and shall be undertaken only after deliberate risk/benefit analysis of the situation.



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- C. State Law now stipulates that interior firefighting operations should not be initiated without adhering to the “two in/two out” principle. “two in/two out” means the initial fire attack hand line crew or search and rescue team must be comprised of a minimum of two personnel. Additionally, two personnel should be staged outside of the structure to undertake immediate rescue of the firefighting personnel should the interior team get in trouble. The only industry accepted deviation to this principle is the immediate need for rescue of trapped or threatened occupants.
- D. Often the presence of trapped or threatened individuals is uncertain and search operations are necessary to ascertain whether or not persons are present. Experience, judgment and training assist in determining the likelihood of trapped or threatened individuals. Generally, residential structure fires at night with evidence of occupancy but no additional information have a greater need for aggressive search operations than do other reported fires. Any structure fire with a first hand report of unaccounted-for-occupants also generally necessitates a search and rescue operation.
- E. Ideally, a separate hand line crew should accompany search and rescue teams. This crew can provide protection to the search team.
- F. At a minimum, search and rescue team members should be equipped with a portable radio, hand lights and forcible entry tools. The utilization of a search line should be strongly considered. The search line provides a means to quickly locate the entry point should search team members have to exit the structure. In addition to these basic tools, a thermal imaging camera (TIC) should be utilized when available to help expedite this process when applicable.
- G. Searches of the large open spaces often found in showrooms, warehouses and other commercial structures, in low visibility or potentially deteriorating conditions, should be conducted utilizing personal search lines tethered to hose lines or main search lines. In addition, it is important to utilize the TICs when they are available and applicable for timely search efforts.
- H. Searches should be patterned in a deliberate, logical fashion. The optimal approach to a search pattern is to start in the area immediately adjacent to the fire area (the area where persons may be most at risk). In very low visibility, it may be necessary to initiate a right or left-hand search pattern immediately upon entry.
- I. Search team members should remain constantly aware of their location and surroundings. Keeping contact with the wall when conducting searches allows for some dead reckoning as the search proceeds. While searching, search



team members should recognize and be aware of familiar landmarks and possible points of escape, such as windows, doors and exterior walls.

- J. Areas or rooms already searched should be conspicuously marked so that redundancy while conducting the initial search can be avoided. Marking doors or walls with chalk or tying surveyor's tape in a prominent place are effective means of marking searched areas or rooms. Room doors should be closed and marked after the area is searched to help prevent fire extension.
- K. Positive pressure ventilation may improve visibility, allowing the search to be conducted in a quick and efficient manner. Search team members may ventilate by opening windows and exterior doors as they search, if this will not adversely affect fire conditions.
- L. Thorough searches must be conducted, as occupants may become disoriented and may be found almost anywhere, such as under beds, in closets, in cabinets, or in bathtubs. A common search tactic is for one search team member to remain at the door to a room while the other search team member conducts the room search. Sweeping with tools, arms or legs to feel around and under objects ensures that as much area is covered as is practical.
- M. A secondary means of egress for search team members should always be considered. Exterior doors and windows should be opened when practical. Ladders should be placed at windows and access points above grade if possible. Search team members should carefully observe the exterior of a structure prior to entry to identify possible secondary egress points.
- N. Search and rescue teams should communicate to the Incident Command when the primary search is complete, and the time should be noted. Communications with interior search and rescue teams is a critical safety component, and Incident Command should ensure that radio contact is maintained and monitored.