

No. 19: Fireground Orientation

Introduction

Size-up is everyone's job on the fireground. From the moment we arrive until the time we leave the scene fire fighters need to be evaluating their surroundings. This is most important once the firefighters enter the structure; knowing your location, how you got there, and knowing how to get out are vital to your survival.

When we look at the statistics on firefighter fatalities we find that the causes of the fatality are:

- Stress/overexertion
- Vehicle collision
- Struck by
- Caught/trapped
- Others
- Unknown
- Contact with
- Falls

Let's focus on those fatalities that occurred as a result of being caught and trapped. Firefighters that get lost or disoriented on the fireground fit into this category as well. This is why it is so vitally important to know what type of structure is involved and then knowing where you are going to be operating within that structure.

The three most common structures we are going to be operating in are:

1. Residential occupancy
 - Single family
 - Multiple family
2. Commercial occupancy
 - Strip malls
 - Box stores
3. Industrial occupancy
 - Small job shop
 - Large manufacturing facility

When we examine these occupancies closer we gather more information to assist us in understanding some of the objectives we could face. In residential occupancies we will find the following rooms:

- Living rooms
- Bedrooms
- Dining rooms
- Bathrooms
- Kitchens
- Hallways



In commercial occupancies we find:

- General merchandise area or salesroom
- Office areas
- Bathrooms
- Hallways
- Storage areas

In an industrial occupancy we can encounter:

- Manufacturing floor area
- Office areas
- Bathrooms
- Hallways
- Storage areas

Now that we have a better understanding of where we are we need to figure out what to look for. Upon entering the structure we will select a direction to begin our movement, feeling objects as we go. These objects will need to be identified to help us stay oriented. Each object, door, window, and piece of furniture will help us identify which room we are in as well as assisting us in determining how to get out in a hurry.

Additionally, firefighters can help themselves in the orientation of a structure by trying to identify what room they might be entering when going from one room to another. Items that give them clues are the floor's texture:

- Carpeted
- Tiled
- Concrete

Some firefighters find it handle to talk to themselves while performing this orientation; in doing so they are more apt to remember key feature of the structure.

-Prepared by Russell Merrick/Firehouse.com