

# FIREHOUSE®

## Weekly Drill

### DRILL #143: WHAT WENT WRONG

#### Introduction

How often have you heard it said that the decisions of the first-arriving officer will determine the entire course of the fire? Let's look at why this is.

In many cases, this officer might be the youngest and most inexperienced officer. The actions he takes during that short period of time while in charge can and will determine whether a quick knockdown of the fire will occur or an all out conflagration will ensue, making the size-up so vitally important.

As a new firefighter, we often experience something called “tunnel vision.” As the nozzle man you quickly jumped off the rig and advance the hoseline to the entrance of the building, never taking the time to do any size-up as to what was happening on the fireground. Many newly promoted officers do the same thing; they forget to take the time and size-up what is taking place. Where the fire is located, are there any life hazards, exposures, or obstacles that are going to have to be addressed?

During the size-up, the officer has to really dissect the incident. The building is like a box with many different size boxes within it called rooms, hallways and stairways. Each of these different spaces has to be looked at as having six different individual exposures, known as interior exposures. These being: the ceiling, the floor, and each one of the walls. In addition, the build also has six exposures that need to be considered and are known as exterior exposures.

Each of the above mentioned boxes have to be taken into consideration during the officer's size-up as these will have an influence on the path that the fire will travel within the building. Partitions are void spaces between rooms and exterior walls and once fire gets in behind one of the interior exposures and in this space it can travel very quickly throughout the building.

As the first officer on location it is your job to decipher where the fire is located and how involved it is. Next, you need to examine each of the aforementioned boxes and try and figure out if the fire can be contained to the point of origin or if it is advancing beyond this point. If it is determined that the fire has gone beyond this point,



then it will be the officer's job to determine where the fire is traveling.

Keeping in mind that life hazards are our first concern. We may need to place our first hoseline to protect the escape path for any of the occupants before advancing to the fire location. Once this is addressed other areas that are going to need attention will be the area in the immediate vicinity of the fire. However, keep in mind that fire wants to travel upward, so the next area we will want to have firefighters advance to with a hoseline will be the area immediately above the fire.

In older, ordinary constructed buildings, having a cockloft often presents concern. The walls leading to this area will be the third area our attention should be drawn to in addition to getting to the cockloft and making a visual for any fire in this interior box.

If you are an officer and you are not taking these boxes into consideration, you might be the next one asking “What went wrong?”

*—Prepared by Russell Merrick*