FIREHOUSE®

Weekly Drill

Drill #149: Apparatus Placement

Introduction

Let me make one very important notation right from the start; speed kills! There are still far too many firefighters today who think they have to drive as fast as they can get the truck to go. In an urban setting, pushing 50 mph or more is going to jam you up when you least expect it. The time you think you are making is only a few seconds. We are tasked with getting the apparatus and fire personnel to the incident scene safely, not getting them there the fastest. The faster the apparatus is traveling, the longer it is going to take to stop it. And if you get into an accident while en route, you will never get to the original incident, but you will be first to arrive at the incident you just created.

We all want to have a smoothly run fireground operation. As the old saying suggests, if we are not getting the proper placement out of our apparatus, then we are missing the mark. The important thing to keep in mind is our apparatus needs to be positioned where it can be utilized most effectively. This starts by having an understanding of the capabilities of the apparatus and then utilizing it to the maximum. How often do you arrive on the fireground and find your apparatus all jammed up together as close to the fire building as they can get?

One method for addressing this is to have the first unit drive into the incident scene and broadcast a thorough size-up. Once this has taken place, all additional units should hold back from committing themselves. The first unit can determine what additional apparatus should proceed into the scene and where to position them. Often though, departments have established a Standard Operational Procedure (SOP) in place that calls out what each first-alarm assignment apparatus will do. Generally, the first-in engine will position itself in such a manner to leave the front of the building open for the truck. The truck will find the best spot for maximum utilization of the aerial. The second engine is tasked with lying out from the first engine to a second water source.

There are two levels of staging used in the fire service. The first one, Level I, is used when units arrive and the first-in apparatus reports that they have nothing showing and will be on an investigation. Once this initial

transmission has been made, all additional units should take a staging position about a block from the incident. I have been on a number of calls where all arriving apparatus nose up in front of the address dispatched to after the first-in engine reported nothing showing. Once it has been determined that the fire is on the next street over, what a cluster it is trying to get the apparatus turned around so they can respond to the correct address.

Level II staging is used during larger and more complex incidents. With Level II staging, the Incident Commander will appoint a Staging Officer to oversee staging. This Staging Officer is responsible for maintaining a set number of apparatus in the staging area. Generally, the staging area will be remote from the incident. As resources are needed at the incident, the Incident Commander will notify the Staging Officer of his request and the Staging Officer will deploy the resources. Once this is done, the Staging Officer will back fill staging, bringing it back up to the same number of apparatus it started with.

–Prepared by Russell Merrick