

FIREHOUSE®

Weekly Drill

DRILL #65: FORCIBLE ENTRY PART I

Introduction

Over the years, the fire service has been challenged with gaining entry into commercial and residential buildings during emergencies. There once was a time when many homeowners didn't lock their doors unless they were going out of town and businesses used simple locking devices to secure their establishments when they were not open. Today, things have drastically changed. Homeowners are now using not one, but in many instances two and even three locks on their doors and businesses are being locked up as tight as Fort Knox.

All these security devices are causing the fire service to re-evaluate the methods being used to gain access. In many cases, the flathead axe and Halligan are being replaced by hydraulic tools and power saws to force entry. This is not to say that these older methods are no longer practical, but they are limited in some instances.

As firefighters, we must always remember that our basic training is the key to a successful operation. Therefore, a good size-up of the condition confronting us will help in the decision as to which method of forcible entry is needed. Keep in mind that property conservation is part of our job, so the amount of damage undertaken in forcing entry should be part of the consideration in the method used.

Other items of concern include: the pace to which entry is needed; the type of door confronting us; and the type of lock or locks being used to secure the door. However, life safety will always take priority over the damage being done to gain entry. Likewise, totally destroying an expensive door to gain entry for a minor water problem would be ludicrous. However, if there is a fire raging that is doing more damage than we would if we were to take the door, then we must take the door.

Getting back to the basic, there are a few good rules to keep in mind when considering forcible entry. One is that of "Try before you pry." I keep reminding firefighters that if we are going to be successful, we have to be thinking all the time and remember the basics we were taught back in rookie school.

Another good rule, use the same doors that the occupants use. In most cases, this door will not be as heavily



fortified as those doors that are not used as much. Also, don't ignore the obvious. Have you ever seen firefighters struggling using their Halligan bar and axes on a door trying to force it, only to have another firefighter walk up and take out the light pane next to the door then reach in and unlock the door? Again, think, remember the basics and complete a size-up; tunnel vision seems to have the upper hand at these types of tasks.

Lastly, when possible keep the door intact and control it. Just forcing the door open or destroying it in the process may cause more problems for us than good. In many instances, the door can be used to control the fire from spreading to other areas of the structure. Additionally, controlling the door will allow us some protection from the fire until the hoseline can be brought in to apply water.

Looking at the size-up process, in general, we can follow some of the same items used in the basic fire size-up, those being the time of day, occupancy and location of the fire. Additionally, the type of doors being confronted and what style lock or locks are being used and what tools we have available for our use on these devices.

—Prepared by Russell Merrick