

FIREHOUSE®

Weekly Drill

DRILL #74: BASEMENT FIRES

Introduction

One of the most dangerous fires a firefighter will ever face is that of a basement fire. One can easily imagine these types of fires as being like one at the bottom of a chimney; simply because the firefighter will have to descend down the stairs to get to the fire while the heat and smoke from the fire uses the stairway as a point of ventilation. In addition to the firefighter's descent, fresh air also is being drawn to the fire. This fresh air allows the fire to intensify.

First units on the scene must conduct an initial size-up to determine the tactics needed to put the fire out. One tactic would be a direct attack, as illustrated above, descending down the interior staircase. Considerations would be:

- The size hoseline to attack the fire, as it has to be able to control the fire.
- The amount of hose required to reach the fire
- Having a back-up line placed at the top of the stairs to protect the interior of the structure

Aggressive Attack

Once firefighters reach the basement an aggressive attack needs to begin. To assist the firefighters on the nozzle advance the hoseline, position a firefighter at the top of the stairs and another one at the bottom. As is the case in any fire, the safety of the firefighters is critical and for that reason all members must maintain close contact with one another.

If entry cannot be made from the interior stairs, perhaps there are a set of exterior stairs that can be used. In any case, a line will still be needed to protect the interior stairs, stopping any unwanted fire spread.

Should the fire inhibit an aggressive interior attack, an alternate method or tactic would be the use of cellar pipes or distributor nozzles.

The Hot Spot

Again, this is a very dangerous operation because firefighters are being placed directly above the fire as they search for the hottest spot on the first floor to place the hole to drop the cellar pipe down. Before implementing this tactic, an exposure line needs to be advanced



along with the hoseline being used for the appliance. This back-up or exposure line is for the protection of the firefighters. Additionally, it can be used to keep any fire from extending to the first floor.

Once the hot spot is located, firefighters should try and cut a hole between the floor joists and drop the cellar pipe or distributor nozzle in the hole and begin applying water. These devices act like a large sprinkler head to extinguish the fire. Once the fire has been knocked down, another team of firefighters can advance another hoseline to the basement to finish the job.

Using Foam

Yet another tactic is that of high-expansion foam. For this tactic to have success ventilation will be required ahead of the foam. Additionally, the foam will not fill any spaces blocked to it, such as closed doors and the like. Keep in mind, any other source of water being used on the attack will need to be turned off; reducing the chances of the foam being diluted.

—Prepared by Russell Merrick