

**County of Henrico  
Division of Fire**

By order of:

  
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**Chief, Division of Fire**



**Title: EO-24**

**Lost/Trapped Firefighter Actions**

**Effective Date: January 15, 2008**

**June 1, 2003**

**Rescinds:**

**PURPOSE:** Establish guidelines for firefighters who become lost or trapped.

**PREVENTATIVE STEPS:** It is imperative that fire personnel take preventative steps to keep from becoming lost or trapped. Risk assessment factors must be considered for firefighter safety vs. savable victims and property. Preplan buildings in your district to learn the construction, layout, and means of getting out. When performing the on scene size-up determine: the type of construction, type of windows and doors and the locations of same, and the location and extent of the fire. Other steps to take are: carry forcible entry tools which can be utilized to exit if trapped; ventilate; ladder windows; pick a search pattern that will work for the situation, you may need to utilize search ropes; stay together as a crew, do not freelance.

**LOST / TRAPPED FIREFIGHTER ACTIONS:** The following is a modified list of actions taken from the IAFC Executive Summary and Implementation Guide for OSHA Respiratory Protection Standard, 29 CFR 1910.134

**1. Emergency "Mayday" / Activate Emergency Distress Button**

The lost or trapped firefighter should immediately initiate a "Mayday" request to notify the incident commander of his/her situation. The firefighter should activate the emergency distress button on his/her portable radio, thus notifying dispatch of a firefighter in distress. This ensures that someone is immediately aware of a problem on the fire ground if the IC does not immediately hear the initial radio traffic from the trapped or disoriented member.

**2. Stay Calm, Preserve Your Air Supply**

A conscious effort must be made by the lost or trapped firefighter to control his/her breathing (Skip breathing techniques or other means of air conservation should be immediately initiated by the trapped or disoriented member). Unnecessary talking or physical activity must be ceased, unless absolutely needed. Firefighters must control and pace their physical exertion activities in order to extend their air supply. Trapped or disoriented members must understand that this is their most critical limitation absent of direct trauma or flame impingement.

**3. Activate P.A.S.S.**

As soon as a firefighter recognizes he/she is lost or trapped, the PASS device must be manually activated to sound the audible tone. The device should remain "ON" until rescued. The lost or trapped firefighter should attempt to silence the PASS when communicating on the radio. Once radio transmissions are completed, the PASS device should be reactivated.

#### 4. Situation/Problem Reporting

Firefighters lost or trapped should attempt to communicate their exact location, if unknown; members should attempt to describe their surroundings (i.e. "Engine 2A to Command, I'm trapped on the second floor, in a bedroom near the rear of the structure."). Following each transmission on the radio (if possible) the firefighter should reactivate his/her PASS alarm and place his/her portable radio near his/her ear to ensure additional communications are not missed.

#### 5. Stay Together - If lost or trapped as a crew

As a general rule, it is much easier to find a group rather than individuals. Members that separate from each other make it difficult for rescuers to find. Crew members that stay intact as a crew enhance their chances of being rescued and allows for an easier, more efficient rescue operation.

#### 6. Search for an Exit

A lost firefighter should always attempt to get out of the building by whatever means possible. Where doors, windows, or other means of egress are not available, firefighters should next attempt to reach an exterior wall. Once at the wall, he/she will be able to search for doorways, windows, and hallways, which generally lead to the outside. Rescuers should first search hallways, around walls, and around windows and doors, before sweeping large interior areas due to prior training and standardized firefighter actions. For this reason, firefighters should avoid large open spaces. Getting to one of these areas (exterior wall by windows or doors) increases the chances of being rescued early. These actions also provide predictable activities that will aid rescuers.

#### 7. Attempt to Follow a Hose Line / Life Line to Safety

Crew members should stay with a hose line (or lifeline) and follow it out whenever possible. All firefighters must remember and be continually trained in the self-survival technique of coupling identification (female side of the couplings point toward the pump - EXIT, the male side of the couplings point toward the nozzle - FIRE). The hose line should be treated as a safety line to the outside. Where a lifeline and/or ropes are in use, follow the lifeline/rope to the exterior.

#### 8. Retreat to an Area of Safety

Where the firefighter cannot find a way out, but there is a safe refuge (protective room or floor) away from the fire that the firefighter can retreat to, he/she should take advantage of this location. Lost or trapped firefighters should consider breaching interior walls, closing doors to isolate themselves from potentially being overrun by fire.

**CAUTION:** Lost/trapped firefighters **MUST** make every effort to advise rescuers of their actions to assist in locating them - situation reporting, sounding, etc.

#### 9. Horizontal Positioning

If a firefighter cannot get out, he/she should assume a position on the floor that maximizes the audible affects of the PASS device. The firefighter should attempt to take this position at an

exterior wall, doorway, or hallway that maximizes quick discovery by rescue crews. Proper positioning is dependent on the surrounding conditions.

## **10. Flashlights / Tapping**

If assuming a position to await rescuers, the firefighter should attempt to position his/her flashlight toward the ceiling and/or continue rotating the beam side to side (acting as a beacon) to signal potential rescuers. This effort will enhance the rescuer's ability to see the light and locate the downed firefighter. If able, the firefighter should also attempt to create tapping noises to assist rescuers in locating him/her (i.e., hitting a tool against a metal roll-up door, floor or hard surface within the immediate area).