Search & Rescue

Section III - Truck Company Operations



Fire Fighting Priorities
Search Size-Up
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Search Tactics
Rescue Tactics



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Introduction

Search and rescue is probably the most hazardous duty firefighters will encounter. Even though it is potentially the most dangerous aspect of fire fighting, search and rescue is a primary responsibility of every firefighter and one of the highest priorities to be performed on the fire ground. Each firefighter must be able to conduct a safe, effective, and thorough search, and, if victims are found, firefighters must be able to remove them to a safe location.

The term search means, "to look through in order to find something" and the term rescue means "to free or save from danger." These two operations are usually thought of as one, but they are in fact two different and distinct operations. Almost every rescue situation calls for a different combination of movement, equipment and other operations. This section will primarily deal with search and rescue operations during structure fires.



Fire Fighting Priorities

When operating at a structure fire it is imperative that the officer and crew prioritize their strategies and tactics in a quick, decisive fashion.

Firefighter Safety

The first priority at EVERY incident should always be firefighter safety. All actions should be made with the goal of getting all personnel home safely and not creating an additional problem at the incident by putting a firefighter's safety in jeopardy.

Forcible Entry & Ventilation

Based on operations that are frequently conducted at structure fires, forcible entry and ventilation should be the next priority because these two activities are designed to improve firefighter safety. While this may be a change in the thought process for most people that typically default to search as the first priority, consider the order of operations for a truck company. Before a search is ever conducted and water is put on the fire, forcible entry is a common requirement. Along with forcible entry comes forcible exit, or the creation of exit points for fire personnel should they become necessary. This is traditionally accomplished with the initial opening created upon entry and can be expanded as the incident progresses. This theory is based on the principle that if it is important to get into a building, it should be equally, if not more important to be able to exit the building.

NFPA statistics indicate flashover is one of the top three problems encountered on the fire ground, so ventilation should be (based on conditions) required before the implementation of interior personnel. Therefore, in the interest of firefighter safety, ventilation should be given equal priority with forcible entry/ exit.

Fire Attack and/or Search

After firefighter safety has been maximized by ensuring firefighters can enter/exit a structure, and ventilation is under way improving visibility and minimizing flashover possibilities, then search, fire attack and other interior operations are the next priorities.

To summarize creating priorities based on firefighter safety, the following fire ground priority list is recommended as a supplement for rescues, exposures, confinement, extinguishment and overhaul (RECEO):

- Firefighter Safety
- Forcible Entry / Forcible Exit
- Ventilation
- Fire Attack and/or Search
- Other necessary priorities

*Note- the order of these priorities is incident driven but centered upon firefighter safety. This list should serve as a guideline and be implemented according to situational urgency.





Firefighter Safety

Having clearly established firefighter safety as the number one priority, consider the acronym RECEO. This defines the R as Rescue and implies that search is the most important fire ground activity. First and foremost an ongoing analysis of risk versus gain must be conducted. What is the likelihood of jeopardizing the firefighter's life by extending into an IDLH in front of a hose line, versus the likelihood of making a viable rescue? Would it be more advantageous to extinguish the fire first, thus minimizing the need for a search? It should be noted that statistics indicate that suppression resources responding to residential fires will most likely (70-90%) encounter a vacant structure because the occupants are either not home or they have vacated the house before fire crews arrive.

Determine your level of search commitment by asking the following question:

Do you know, assume, or think persons are trapped and is a search necessary? Remember that most firefighters are killed when searching for persons that were reportedly trapped, but were not even there.

Two In/Two Out

By now the fire service is well acquainted with the Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administrations two in/two-out rule (OSHA 29 CFR 1910.134). It states:

- Members operating inside a structure shall operate under the buddy system and shall at all times remain in direct visual or voice contact with one another.
- Interior structure fire fighting operations shall not commence until four trained and properly equipped members are present on the scene.
- An interior search can be conducted with less than four trained and properly equipped members on scene if there is sufficient cause to believe there are trapped/viable occupants inside.

This standard relates directly to search in that it mandates the two people searching remain in visual or voice contact while inside, and the ONLY exception to the two in/two out rule is when there is sufficient information to believe there is a known rescue.

Rapid Intervention Crew (RIC)

Rapid Intervention Crews are to be considered a secondary search team whose main focus is to be available during fire ground operations to conduct a search and rescue of downed or trapped firefighters. These crews will assemble a tool cache, soften the structure to aid in forcible exit as directed, and be able to perform the following minimum operations:

- Be thoroughly familiar with basic and advanced search techniques.
- Understand forcible entry/exit principles.
- Determine strategic placement of ladders to aid exit of interior crews and place additional ladders as needed.
- Understand how to remove a downed firefighter from an upper floor window.
- Know how to remove a trapped firefighter from the interior of a structure in a timely manner.
- Be able to lower/hoist a downed firefighter.
- Be able to breach walls.

Additionally, the RIC team should monitor all appropriate radio channels, conduct an ongoing size-up of conditions and notify interior crews/command staff of pertinent changes.



Size Up

Preparation for the rescue begins well before the alarm is received. Target hazards should be identified and pre-fire plans developed. Completing a pre-fire plan can identify the type of occupancy, number of people on the premises, special hazards and potential problems that could occur during a fire. The pre-fire plan can also help locate the most advantageous position for truck placement if ladder rescue becomes a factor.

Once the alarm is received information relayed by the FCC may give some indication as to whether rescue problems exist. Phrases like "across from," "behind," "next door to," "near the intersection of," may indicate that the occupants of the building did not turn in the alarm. Someone outside the structure may have seen smoke or fire and, not knowing the address, gave a general description of the area. At the same time, occupants inside may be totally unaware of the fire, or possibly be unable to escape.

By the time the first company arrives at the scene, the officer should have initiated a size-up. The following questions will aid the officer in determining the extent to which rescue operations will be needed:

Developing your Size-Up

- What time of day is it?
 - This question will aid in determining the likelihood of occupants being inside the building.
- What type of occupancy is it?
 - Residential, commercial, institutional, public assembly or high-rise.
 - Understanding the make-up and layout of the building will give the
 officer an idea how complex of an operation the search will be, how
 much time it will take and what additional resources, if any, will be
 needed to accomplish the task.
- What is the status of the building?
 - Occupied- These buildings have a high probability of occupants inside based on initial reports or visual cues.
 - Unoccupied- These are buildings that would normally have people in them, but not likely at the moment. A good example would be a restaurant after business hours.
 - Vacant- The primary difference between a vacant and an abandoned building is that vacant buildings are likely to be in acceptable conditions for entry in terms of structural integrity. These buildings are typically marked "For Rent/Lease" and are unlikely to have occupants inside.

Size-Up: Building Status



Occupied



Unoccupied



Vacant



Vacant



Abandoned House



Abandoned Apartment Bldg

- O Abandoned- If a building is abandoned this is a sign that it has outlived its usefulness and is likely in great disrepair. The structural integrity of an abandoned building is likely compromised, the exterior of the building is probably secured, and the presence of trapped occupants is generally not a concern, however, squatters may be living inside and a search may still be indicated.
- Is there fire showing? If so, from what areas of the structure (bedroom, kitchen, office)?
- Is the building closed up with heavy smoke showing? This may indicate that smoke has filled the structure, eliminating the availability of oxygen for potential victims. It is also indicative of a potential back draft condition that must be eliminated through vertical ventilation.
- Are there cars in the driveway or parking lot? It may be an indication that the individuals are inside the structure.
- Can people be seen from the windows, balconies, or other egresses in the structure?
- Can calls for help be heard from inside the building?
- If the fire can be seen, what is its potential direction of travel and what types of rooms will it affect?



Other considerations include the construction materials, age, size, and height of the building. Size-up may determine the size and intensity of the fire, the number of individuals normally occupying the structure and how many may still be in the building. Firefighters should remember that there is always a possibility that people are trapped inside a burning structure. Do not assume that there are no individuals within a building if you do not see any of them, hear any voices, or are working in an uninhabited structure.

Because there are fewer trucks than engines, normal truck company operations may be assigned to

an engine company if necessary. Forcible entry/exit and ventilation may be necessary before extinguishment or search and rescue can begin. This, too, should be considered during the size-up when arriving at the scene.

Search Equipment

The following is a list of equipment that should be brought to a search and rescue operation, Figure 18-1:

- Full PPE
- SCBA
- 800 MHZ Radio
- Thermal Imaging Camera
- · Hand-light and backup flashlight
- Forcible entry tool
- Nylon webbing
- Yellow lumber crayon
- Door stops
- Rope or drop bag
- Knife
- Wire Cutters



Figure 18-1 Basic equipment used for a primary search

Tag Lines

A simple rope can be used to ensure contact between two or more firefighters while searching or it can be attached to the exterior of the structure to provide a continuous line from the point of entry to the search crew. Tag/search lines are not primarily used to find victims, but to provide accountability for search team members and assist in systematically searching complex buildings. Knots can be tied in the rope to signify hazards, aid orientation or designate where the search was discontinued. The crew accountability tag should be clipped on the search tag line at the anchor point for ID.





Figure 18-3 Utility rope can be used as a tag line when anchored outside (L). Knots can also be tied in a tag line as reference points for other firefighters (R).



Figure 18-2 A FF's drop bag can be used as a tag line to extend out their search.



Figure 18-4 Thermal Imaging Camera, TIC

Thermal Imaging Camera - TIC

Although it is a relatively new piece of equipment to the fire service, the thermal imager has drastically improved firefighter effectiveness and safety, Figure 18-4. The thermal imager operates by converting heat waves into a visual image. This allows firefighters to see through smoke, darkness, and to detect hidden fires in walls, floors, and ceilings.

The thermal imager should be a standard piece of equipment used on all search operations. During a two person search, the lead firefighter should operate the TIC and lead the search along the wall while their partner extends out from the wall and follows the direction of the lead firefighter. The firefighter using the TIC should scan side to side then bottom to top slowly along their search path.

Firefighters must realize that the thermal imager is only a tool to help with making decisions. Firefighters must not solely rely on this piece of equipment, rather they must use all the other tools and techniques combined in this chapter to make good decisions. Just because you can see through a TIC does not exclude you from following our standard search SOP's.





Figure 18-5 View of a fire through a TIC (L). View of smoke through normal vision (Top R), same view using a TIC (Bottom R).

Search Tactics

As is the case with most tactics used in the fire service, there are many different methods used for search. Below you will find some of the different strategies commonly practiced in the SDFD.

Human Life Threshold

To help make your decision for victim survivability in an IDLH atmosphere, consider that a human life will not survive after a 1 minute exposure to the following conditions:

- If airway is exposed to a tempereature of 195 degrees or higher
- If skin is exposed to a temperature of 300 degrees or higher

Additionally, six minutes without oxygen will result in death. You should also consider the time it takes to dispatch and respond to the incident when evaluating victim survivability.

Search Priorities

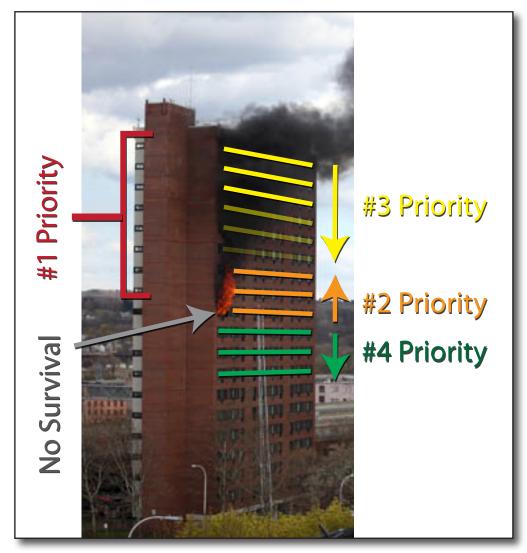
A common sense approach must be used to quickly determine areas of victim survivability. A room that has already reached the point of flash over has an extremely low to zero chance for survivability. Firefighters should not place the added risk upon themselves if there is no chance for survivability in the first place. Search efforts would more appropriately be spent on IDLH areas where there is a potential to make a successful rescue and where the human life threshold has not been surpassed.

Depending on the type of occupancy and the fire conditions present, the following areas should be prioritzed for search.



Single Story Buildings

- 1. IDLH / Area where victims may be most severely threatened
- 2. Area with the largest number of victims (groups of people)
- 3. Remaining area of structure working from most severe to least severe
- 4. Exposures



Multi-Story Buildings / High-Rise

- 1. Stairwells
 - #1 Attack stairwell above fire floor
 - #2 Evacuation stairwells above the fire floor
- 2. Fire floor and the 3 floors above the fire floor
- 3. Top 3 floors working downward to remaining floors between fire floor
- 4. 3 floors below the fire floor
- 5. Stuck elevators
- 6. Continual roaming of stairwells

Statistics indicate that occupants above a fire are in the greatest danger. When circumstances indicate that victims are located above a fire in a multistory building, search operations should begin above the seat of the fire. Smoke will rise to highest floor and will begin to bank down gradually to lower floors via shafts and stairwells.

Phases of Search

Search operations have two distinct phases, the primary search and the secondary search. The primary search is typically followed by the secondary search, however, these two searches may be accomplished at the same time if necessary.

Primary Phase

This is a "quick and dirty" type of search. This phase is intended to quickly search the general area looking for obvious rescues. Primary search is either done by the fire attack team on the initial hose line or by a designated search team. The emphasis is on a rapid advance into the area to be searched while calling out and probing for victims. Upon completion of the primary search the IC should be notified of any pertinent findings or given an "all clear."

Secondary Phase

The secondary search is a thorough and complete examination of the structure that may include the exterior perimeter of the building. This phase is typically conducted after the fire is under control. The objective of the secondary search is to guarantee there are no victims inside the structure or anywhere else at the incident that may have been missed on the primary search. This more detailed, careful, secondary search should be carried out by someone other than the primary search team to provide a different perspective. The findings of this search must also be reported to the Incident Commander.

Basic Two-Person Search

The following is a description of a basic search according to our Standard Operating Guide:

- Wear full protective clothing.
- Secure necessary equipment.
- Search in pairs and remain in communication with each other.
 - You may utilize 1 inch nylon webbing, rope or a hose line as means to keep in contact with one another.
- Have charged hose line if available (i.e. truck/rescue).
- Prior to entering any IDLH environment, secure accountability tag with accountability officer.
- Position yourself away from swing of door.
- Check door for heat (back draft condition), by feeling door with back of ungloved hand from bottom of door up.
- Check to see if door is unlocked then type of door (inward vs. outward left or right hand swing)
- Place SCBA into operation.

- Make sure area outside of door area is clear, and shout "stand clear" prior to opening.
- On the count of 3, open door as you turn away from the opening, stay low, and wait for a 5 count in the event of a back draft before entering.
- Sound the floor prior to entering and announce "San Diego Fire Department, anyone in here?"
- Announce direction of travel (right or left-handed search) based on size-up of potential victim location.
- Move into room with hand light and forcible entry tool and TIC, staying crouched low.
- Scan room with the TIC for any victims
- Search behind the door then chock the door open.
- Search immediate area of entry by performing a 180 degree sweep, starting in the direction opposite that you will be searching.
- Aggressively proceed in direction of announced search, keeping low, and in constant contact with wall. You may leave wall to search a point straight out from your location and then return immediately to wall.
- Aggressively feel under, behind, and on top of furniture for victims.
- If you encounter closed interior doors, follow same procedures for back draft at entry door, then search immediate area of entry.
- If you encounter a doorway without a door, leave a tool or an object (such as a chair) as a reference.
- Search must follow original direction searching all rooms and closets.
- After room is searched, close and mark each door on lower 1/3 under doorknob with a lumber crayon or grease pen:
 - P E7 (Primary Engine 7) so that incoming crews know the room has had a primary search completed, Figure 18-6.
 - S T11 (Secondary Truck 11) so that incoming crews know the room has had a secondary search completed Figure 18-7.

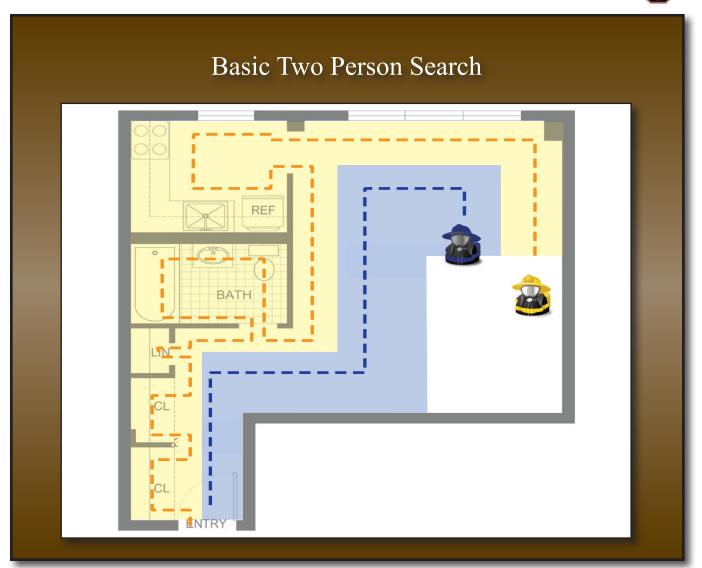
The searcher must remain in constant contact with the wall, reaching out into the middle of the room as far as possible in search of victims. The searcher may briefly extend off the wall to check a point straight out from their location as long they use a tool as a point of reference to prevent getting lost. For example, a firefighter may place an axe head against the wall then extend out from the wall, but keeping their foot in contact with the axe handle. If you need to exit the IDLH due to low air or any other consideration, leave a tool or a light with the beam towards the ceiling to indicate to incoming crews where the search was left off.



Figure 18-6 Door markings for a completed primary search



Figure 18-7 Door markings for a completed secondary search



Door Checks



Leave your accountability tag with the accountability officer.



Secure a charged hose line if available.



Check the door with the back of an ungloved hand for heat, working from low on the door to high.



Check the door to see if it is unlocked. Identify it as inward/outward and left/right swinging. Prepare for forcible entry if necessary.



On the count of 3, swing open the door while using the wall for protection. Place your tool into the doorway to prevent the door from closing again.



Wait 5 seconds with the door propped open before entering in the event of a back draft.

Making Entry



Sound the floor with your tool before entering the doorway.



Do a quick scan of the room with the TIC prior to entry for any potential victims.



Check behind the door for victims.



Chock the door open.



Complete a 180 degree sweep of the entry way, using your tool to extend your reach. Begin sweep from opposite direction of your search pattern.



Keep your feet anchored to the doorway during your 180 degree sweep.

Two Person Search



Determine whether you will be doing a Right or Left handed search pattern. FF1 must maintain contact with a perimeter wall.



FF1 must build a mental map of the structure by staying on the wall as FF2 searches out into the room.



FF2 can extend off of FF1 as long as they maintain contact with each other.



FF2 can also use webbing to extend their search further into the middle of a room.

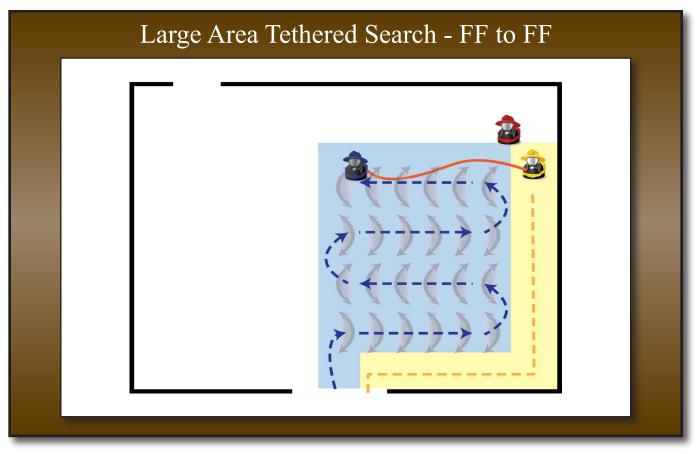


The firefighters must search on top of furniture and beds for victims. When checking beds always reach up for a top bunk.



Firefighters must also search under beds, closets, and in other tight spaces as children will often hide when they are scared.





Large Area/Tethered Searches

In large area searches modifications must be made. First and foremost a tag line should be established at the point of entry to avoid becoming disoriented inside the building. This may be a rope bag carried by the search team that is tied off to an exterior object at the point of entry. Additionally, consider tethering the search members together with rope or webbing. This will allow one searcher to extend further into open space while the other crew member remains in contact with the wall to prevent getting lost. Crew members may also stay tethered together by simply staying attached to the hose line and using it as a point of reference. Large area and tethered searches will take longer given the nature of the occupancy. Factors such as time of day, type of occupancy, and likelihood of victims must be considered. If the search is terminated due to low air or if you encounter a victim, tie a knot in the rope and leave the tag line in place for incoming crews to continue the search where is was left off.

A team search is when all members of the crew remain together and use a tag line attached to the outside as their point of reference for egress. A team search works well in large occupancies because it adds extra hands for moving furniture and navigating difficult floor plans. The lead rescuer chooses the direction of travel while the rescuer to the rear keeps the tag line taut and ties it off as necessary.

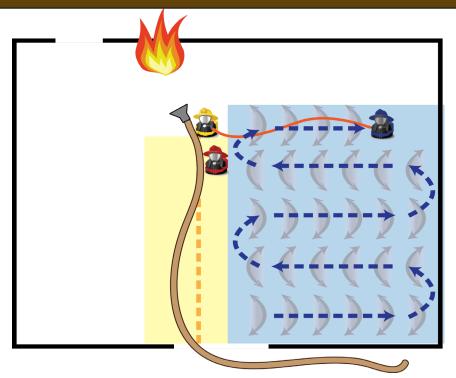
Use 180 degree sweeping motion from anchor person short medium then long

Use good air management during large area searches

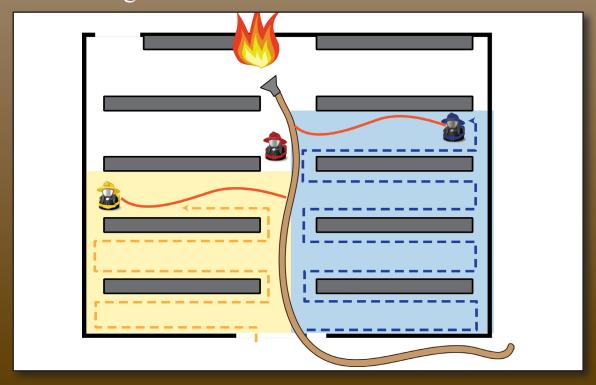
Tie off tag line where you find the victim and leave rope bag



Large Area Tethered Search - FF to Hose Line



Large Area Tethered Search with Aisles



Large Area Tethered Search



Anchor the tag line outside with an appropriate knot or hitch and leave the crew accountability tag attached.



As the firefighters make entry, the tag line should be kept taught by wrapping the rope around objects.



The lead FF should have the TIC. The rear FF must tend the tag line.



Firefighters may also use their drop bags as a secondary tag line to extend off of the main tag line in large open floor plan buildings.



Drop bags can also be used as a tag line tied off from a charged hose line.



If the lead firefighters are conducting a perimeter search, a tag line can be anchored off them as long as they remain on a wall.

Oriented Search - Center Hallway Construction Room 217 Room 218 Room 219 Room 219 Room 210 R



Figure 18-8 Oriented search works well for center hall-way construction with small repetitive rooms such as a hotel or dormitory.

Oriented Search

In this strategy one person (usually the officer) does not do any of the actual searching. Instead this person becomes the orientation point for the search team and coordinates the efforts of the other crew members, Figure 18-8. The Captain should hold the TIC during the oriented search to direct and maintain visual contact with FF's

An example for using the oriented search would be a center hallway constructed apartment complex where the officer would remain in the hallway and send individuals into separate units simultaneously. The crew members would complete a portion of the search, report back to the orientation officer, then continue along in an organized fashion. This style of search works well in large occupancies with repetitive construction. The challenging part is for the team to remain in contact with each other and stay organized.

Other Search Considerations

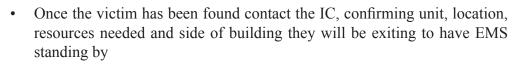
- When performing a search, choose the largest entrance available since it will provide the most light and easiest point of egress.
- Unless you have been given specific information concerning a victims location ahead of time, search the hottest point with the greatest likelihood of victim survivability first to limit the amount of time in the most dangerous conditions.
- Search teams must always remain in contact with their partner via touch or voice.
- When declaring a primary or secondary search has been completed and is "all clear," be sure to communicate with other members of the search team and the officer to confim they do not have any findings that may be on the contrary.

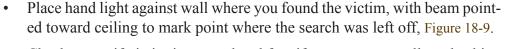


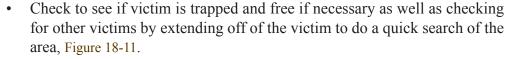
Rescue Tactics

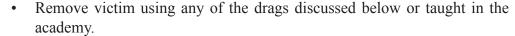
Basic Rescue

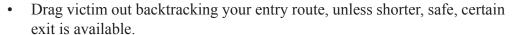
If you find a victim during the course of your search perform the following tasks:

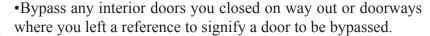












- •Drag victim completely out of building (at least 10 feet) and away from fire fighting operations.
- •Remove helmet, face piece, and gloves.
- •Report where victim was found, and that your light is at that location.
- •Check victim's ABC's, Figure 18-10.
- •Request medical equipment and perform first aid.
- •Secure your accountability tag from accountability officer.
- •If your Vibralert should go off during your search, notify your partner, IC, and remove yourself immediately from the building, using the backtrack method.



Figure 18-9 A flash light or tool is left at the site where a victim was found



Figure 18-10 Upon locating a victim, check their ABC's and notify IC



Figure 18-11 Search the immediate area around the victim for other victims

Victim Carries and Drags

Dragging a victim from a working structure fire presents a significant challenge. The rescuer must pay special attention to control breathing, move at his/her own pace, and remember that the safety of fire personnel remains the top priority. Each situation may call for a different type of drag. Be familiar with the different types of drags available to use and find the ones that suit you best. Focus, form and technique will help prevent injuries during this most arduous task.

Cross Arm Method

The rescuer crosses their arms around the forward facing victim and walks/crawls backwards. This can be done from an upright or a crawling position (on one knee) depending on the weight of the patient and the fire/heat conditions in the building.

For larger victims a second FF can place the victims legs over their shoulders and push forward as they crawl to assist their partner. This is an effective method for civilians but becomes complicated when the victim is a firefighter in full PPE because of the SCBA, Figure 18-12.

Debris Carrier

A debris carrier can be used with two rescuers by sliding it underneath the patient and utilizing it like a heavy patient lifter found on the ambulances, Figure 18-13. Since a debris carrier is not a piece of equipment that is initially brought in on a primary search, a bed sheet or blanket may also be used if readily available from inside the structure.







Figure 18-12 Cross arm method for victim rescue (above 3 images)

Over The Shoulder

This is the stereotypical firefighter carry where the victim faces the rescuer and the firefighter kneels down, grabs the victim behind the knees and slings him/her over the shoulder then walks out.



Figure 18-13 A debris carrier, sheet, or blanket can be used to carry out a victim



Firefighter Carries and Drags

The following are some carries that can be utilized if the victim is a firefighter in full PPE. These drags may be used for civilian victims as well.

Orange Webbing

A length of webbing can be slung around the downed firefighter in various fashions. One way is to loop the webbing underneath the victim's shoulders and drag the victim backwards with either one or two rescuers depending on the weight of the victim and their gear.





SCBA Drag

Another way to extricate a downed firefighter is by dragging them by their SCBA harness. To prevent the SCBA from being pulled off, unfasten the waist strap and pass it through their legs, then re-fasten to create a modified harness. Pull the top of the SCBA harness/shoulder straps in line with the victims body and drag him/her head first out of the building.





Drag Rescue Device

All of the newer style turnouts currently being issued by the SDFD come equipped with a DRD (Drag Rescue Device). This is a length of webbing prewoven into the turnout coat that has a tab on the rear of the coat at the collar for access. Once this tab is pulled and extended the webbing inside the coat cinches up around the victim's arms/shoulders and provides a useful tool for dragging. All firefighters must become familiar with the DRD and ensure your own is properly installed after washing your gear.











Exiting Building With Victim

- Move victim to a safe location clear of fire operations (10-15' from traffic flow), Figure 18-14.
- In High-Rise fires safe refuge is considered three or more floors above the fire, or two or more floors below the fire.



Figure 18-14 Pull the victim 10 to 15 feet clear of the doorway to a safe location

Information Exchange/Turnover

Now that the victim is outside, provide the following information to the necessary people:

- Which direction did you search (right or left hand)?
- Where did the search end?
- What are the conditions like inside the structure?
- Where did you find the victim?
- Are there more victims inside?
- Are there any immediate hazards incoming crews should know about?

Summary

Search is a dynamic, dangerous and integral function that the fire service performs. It is a skill that must be clearly understood, often practiced and constantly reviewed to ensure success. When entering homes and business on every day routine responses, pay attention to the layout of the buildings as patterns often repeat themselves in surrounding areas. While search and rescue can place the firefighter's life in immediate danger, it is also the most direct way to save a life on the fire ground and must be taken seriously.



Media & Link Index



Search & Rescue Video - Large Area Search

Search & Rescue Video - Victim Removal/Rescue Technique

Search & Rescue Video - Alternate Victim Removal/Rescue Technique

SDFD Academy Truck Company SOG - Search & Rescue

SDFD Academy Drill Sheet - Search & Rescue

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NOTE: If you have any additional information or content that you feel would be appropriate to contribute to this Chapter or would like to report any errors or misrepresentations, please contact the SDFD Training Division or email the Drill Manual Revision Staff at

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Revisions/Updates

Date	Revision/Update Description