

FIRE



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FIREGROUND OPERATIONS

COMMON SENSE VENTILATION

Jim McCormack, Lieutenant — Indianapolis Fire Department

Ventilation on the fireground has been going on since firefighters fought their first fire. Over the course of time the reason for ventilation has remained the same but we seem to have lost our focus on why it's done. One term that's fallen out of our fireground vocabulary is "coordinated attack," and that's a great place to start talking about ventilation.

Ventilation on the fireground is done for two main reasons; to let firefighters work (venting for fire) or to help civilians hang on a bit longer (venting for life). The priority or urgency for ventilation is tied directly to one of those reasons. In simple terms, if firefighters can make their push into the structure they'll most likely be able to extinguish — and if they can't then the fire will grow and consume more of the structure. If civilians are trapped inside, or firefighters are searching for civilians, then lifting the environment—even a couple of inches—may mean the difference between reaching (or not reaching) the civilian.

A critical factor in either of the above examples is fireground ventilation.

When you think about fires of the past, when we didn't have full bunker gear and we were using 1½-inch (or smaller) attack lines, the only way firefighters could make the push into the structure was if somebody created a vent opposite of the firefighters' push. This vent allowed the interior environment to escape on the opposite side of the advancing firefighters. As they pushed



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TRAINING SAVES LIVES



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say, but implies, is that you have the resources in place to attack the fire.

in and operated the line the fire and other products exited (for the most part) on the opposite side. Because the firefighters weren't fully encapsulated in gear they could only push in as far as conditions would allow. Basically, the conditions stopped the attack until the needed ventilation was performed. If no ventilation was performed then chances are the team had to back out.

With increases in technology, both in bunker gear and lightweight hose and nozzle combinations, the current fireground has become a place where firefighters can penetrate deeper into the structure without *coordinating* the vent—simply because the gear and equipment *masks* the environment. Nothing has changed, as it relates to coordinated attack or the success it had, it's just that we've fallen victim to technology. The end result is that we often-times cause more damage to the property or ourselves because we haven't stuck to the basics of *coordinating attack and ventilation* and created the easiest environment to extinguish the fire. We've allowed technology to determine the tactics we use—unfortunately at the expense of sound fireground operations.

VENTING FOR FIRE

When it comes to *venting for fire* here's what common sense tells you: ventilation is a priority on the fireground and must be coordinated with the attack team if the conditions will not allow the attack team to advance into the structure and extinguish the fire. What this tactic doesn't

For example: When you arrive on scene and see fire venting from a second-floor window, with little or no smoke meeting you at the front door, then the fire has self-vented (the vent has been coordinated already). If you arrive on that same fire with heavy smoke pushing from that second-floor window—but no fire, then venting hasn't occurred yet and coordinating the vent is a priority. The push up the stairs will be much easier for both the search team and the attack team if the window is vented. If the window can't be vented from the outside, due to manpower or some other reason, then venting it becomes a priority of the attack team as soon as they can get it done. Depending on the size and magnitude of the fire the push up the stairs may be stalled until the vent is accomplished. Let's face it, most departments don't have the manpower to fill all the positions on the fireground but that doesn't change the basics of *coordinated fire attack*.

Let's look at a couple more instances where venting for fire is a priority tactic on the fireground. The telltale sign of failure to coordinate ventilation with fire attack is a



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...the bottom line is that if you read and understand the actual fire conditions then you'll understand the importance of fireground ventilation, and the importance of prioritizing when it takes place on the fireground.

draw the fire or environment away from the trapped civilian (or lift the smoke off the ground) is considered *venting for life*. This type of ventilation is usually done from the inside as the search team advances within the structure. It's not *random* ventilation, per se, it's coordinated by the inside team in order to allow them to possibly reach the victim.

Failure to perform the ventilation may stall or completely stop the search due to conditions on the inside.

One important point to make about venting for life is that it may intensify the fire conditions because it's not coordinated directly with the attack line advance. The inside team performing the vent should be aware of the other crews on the fireground, and their progress. They should also be aware of the impact the ventilation will have on the fire conditions.

Keep in mind that for those departments that do not have dedicated truck companies who perform search operations ahead of, or away from, the attack team—*venting for life* may not become a factor on the fireground. It's not that life safety is placed any lower on the priority list it's just that extinguishing the fire may be the quickest and safest way to rescue the civilians.

Successful fireground operations involve *coordinated fire attack* and that involves ventilation. Depending on the size, magnitude, and location of the fire the ventilation component may be the most important factor in controlling and extinguishing the fire. To put fireground ventilation into perspective ask yourself this question: Could you perform the search or advance on the fire without fully encapsulated bunker gear? While this may seem like a crazy question the bottom line is that if you read and understand the actual fire conditions then you'll understand the importance of fireground ventilation, and the importance of prioritizing when it takes place on the fireground.



stalled attack. A couple of places that this may happen are fires in single-story commercial buildings, top-floor fires in apartment or office buildings, and fires that have gained control of the attic space—after leaving the occupied space. In basic fire terms, when fires are *mushrooming* down ventilation needs to take place to allow the attack team to continue.

VENTING FOR LIFE

Let's take a look at ventilation from the life-safety side of things, *venting for life*. Basically, venting for life is done for trapped civilians by the firefighters searching for them. It's ventilation that's performed to buy time for a trapped civilian. When there's a known life hazard, that firefighters are trying to reach, performing ventilation to

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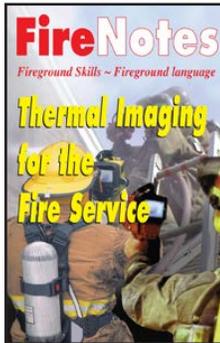
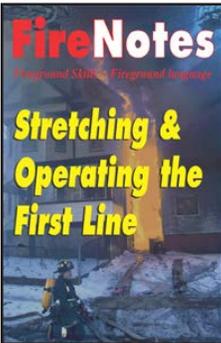
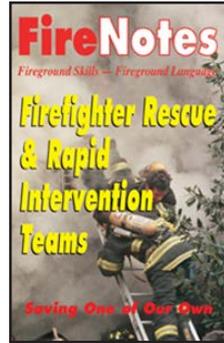
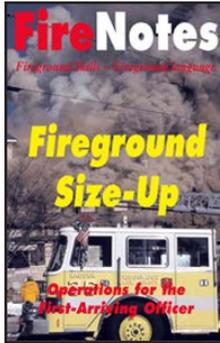
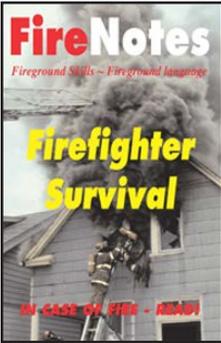
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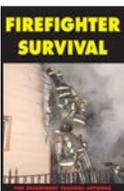
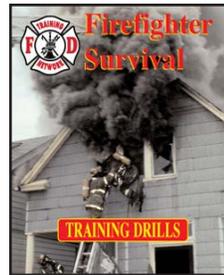
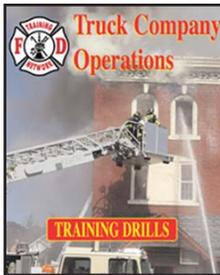
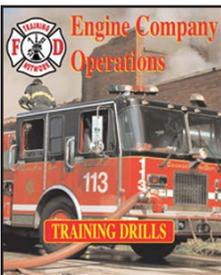
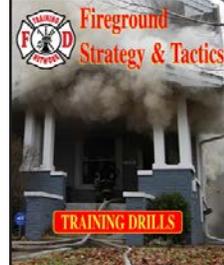
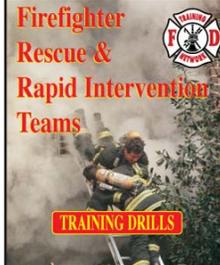


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