Truck company operations have been performed on the fireground since the day firefighters started responding (way before you and I became involved). One of the things that’s happened in the last 10 or so years is that the emphasis on truck company operations, and the skills it takes to actually perform them, has really exploded—more awareness, more knowledge, more training. During all of this time a couple things have remained constant...the importance placed on the knowledge and skills it takes to get the job done varies with every individual firefighter—and solid truck company skills, performed at the right time, makes things easier on the fireground!

Successful truck company operations involve applying the right version of the skill that’s needed, at the right time, for the fireground that you’re faced with.

Prioritizing the Fireground

First-Due Truck Company Operations

There’s an old acronym that’s used to remember the basic truck company skills that need to be considered on the fireground. The acronym—LOVERS_U—has been around for quite a while and has weathered the test of time. As a quick review the letters stand for: Ladders, Overhaul, Ventilation, Entry, Rescue (and Search), Salvage, and Utilities. It really is a great acronym for remembering the basics. What the acronym doesn’t address is the timing of the skills as it relates to the fireground.

Whether you respond with a single truck, multiple trucks, or no trucks, the timing of truck company operations is determined more by the fireground than it is by your response. Looking at truck company work in a two-tiered fashion (first-due and second-due truck operations

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
or initial and additional truck operations) helps to prioritize what needs to be done, by who, and in what order.

A basic timeline of truck work would be:

- Size-up the situation from a truck’s perspective
- Force entry for search and engine operations
- Perform any immediate rescues (simultaneous with the interior operations if possible)
- Search
- Ventilate for the engine company and for the search
- Ladder for access, egress, and ventilation
- Open up and overhaul for the engine company (including salvage work)
- Cover the utilities based on need

As you can see there’s a lot of things that need to be done. What’s even more obvious is that many of the things need to be done simultaneously! Factor in the number of people you have, the other jobs (engine work) they need to perform, and the actual fireground that you’re faced with and you can see that having a plan before you start is the best approach.

First-Due Truck Work

Don’t be fooled by the title! You may not have a dedicated truck company but there’s certain first-due truck company skills that must be performed on every fireground. The top skills that come to mind are truck company size-up, forcible entry, search and rescue, initial ventilation, and laddering. Sure, there may be other things that need to be done based on the size-up but this list could be considered the initial truck company responsibilities that need to take place near the beginning of every fireground operation.

Size-Up from a Truck Company Perspective

While the overall fireground size-up, what you have and what’s happening right now, is important so that everyone has an idea of what to expect when they get there—it’s the individual company size-ups that really determine what needs to be done right now. The first-due truck company size-up needs to determine, right away, if forcible entry is needed and if there are obvious rescues. Those two key issues will determine the immediate actions of a couple members of the crew. In addition to those issues, the truck company must size-up the search operation so that the primary search can be conducted as quickly as possible. Initial ventilation concerns should be considered also. If the fire has self-vented then additional ventilation issues can be handled as second-due actions.

As you can see, it’s tough to divide the truck company skills that need to be performed into first- and second-due skill sets—but it really has to be done in order to accomplish them. In a future article we’ll focus in on second-due truck company operations. Second-due doesn’t always mean they happen later it simply means they are not at the top of the priority list right away (and that’s only determined by sizing up what you have).

What’s important to note here is that if you’re an engine-based truck department (performing truck work off the engine) then this size-up must be done simultaneous with the engine company size-up, the hose stretch, the attack plan, and actually putting the fire out.

Forcible Entry

First-due forcible entry operations can be really simple or really complicated, depending a lot on the type of structure and the area that it’s in. Obviously the truck company that has buildings lined with scissor-gates, roll-up doors, fences, padlocks, window gates and bars and every other imaginable increased security measure must be well versed at difficult forcible entry operations-from the outset. The rest of us need to be just as proficient with the skills and even more proficient at not becoming complacent to the point that we assume we won’t be challenged by a tough entry situation. But let’s not lose focus, remember the basics! No matter where you are, or what the challenge may be, the basic forcible entry tools are still the Irons (including the hydraulic forcible entry tool), the K-tool (or a variation), and the Power Saw. You may also need a sledge-hammer, bolt cutters, a ground ladder,
and even hose line support but don’t over-think the problem. If you know the tools it takes and you know how to use the tools in as many variations as possible then you should be able to use the tools and apply your crew’s collective knowledge to handle the situation. Proficiency at the skills (the tools and the techniques) is really what determines the level of difficulty at this point!

**Search (and Rescue)**

Whether we forced the door, the engine forced the door, or the door was open it’s time to search the structure. Search is done for one of two reasons...to locate the fire and to locate (and remove) any occupants. The fire’s location may be obvious if it’s visible from the outside. If it’s not then determining the location of the fire should be a priority of the search team and of the engine company (taking a hit-or-miss approach to stretching the line is a lot of extra work).

When it comes to searching for occupants a quick search size-up will increase both the speed and efficiency of the operation. Where’s the fire? Where are the occupants likely to be (high-profile areas include bedrooms, living areas, exit routes). Where are the conditions the worst on the inside?

As a general rule, occupants that are closer to the fire area need to be accessed quicker in order to give them a better chance to survive. There are two locations that should be targeted as quickly as possible—the area directly around the fire and the area directly above the fire. In an ideal situation both areas would be reached and searched simultaneously. Here’s where the department approach to truck company operations really starts to impact the operation. If you’re an engine-based truck department and the first crew in is stretching the attack line then the area around the fire will likely be the first area searched. As many have said before, putting the fire out has saved more lives than any other fireground tactic! Once the fire is knocked down you may be able to get crews to the area above the fire (if there is one) and then to all of the other areas in the structure.

If you’re lucky enough to be part of a department with a dedicated truck company then both areas may be searched simultaneously—the engine searches the fire area and the truck company searches the higher-profile areas away from the fire. Once the main target areas are searched then the crews can move to the other areas.

Obviously, the more people (crews) you have on the fireground at this point—the more tasks you can accomplish simultaneously—the better the overall operation will go.

Remember, if you simply don’t have enough people to perform all of the functions then the functions have to be prioritized based on the final outcome desired. Those are just the facts!

**Initial Ventilation**

When it comes to ventilation there’s all kinds of opinions, debates, theories, and even techniques...but ventilation is still done for two main reasons—for fire and for life. The type of ventilation (fire or life) depends on your position, your function, and the fireground.
**Venting for Fire.** Through the eyes of the first-due truck company a self-vented fire means that the engine may be able to make their push without committing a truck guy to vent opposite the attack crew (but not always). That’s great because the truck crew can check off one thing to do and can move onto something else. If the fire isn’t self-vented then initial horizontal ventilation is something that needs to be accomplished so the engine crew can more easily make their way to the fire (and extinguish it). They may be able to make it without the vent but it will be a lot more punishing on them (and everyone else on the inside) during the process.

**Venting for Life.** Venting to assist the search operation (and interior operations) is also a big part of the first-due truck company’s job. Venting additional windows during the search helps lift more of the smoke environment, which may buy any trapped civilians a little more time to breathe. It will also lift the environment so that searching firefighters can continue the search. Without venting the conditions will continue to build and the likelihood of finishing the search will decrease.

Additional ventilation can be dealt with as part of the second-due truck company’s responsibility. There may be a few times that ventilation is the highest priority of the first-due truck but we’ll leave that for another day.

**Laddering**

Laddering the fireground is one of those areas that seems like there just aren’t enough people to get it done. It’s not so much that there aren’t enough people it’s really a matter of learning to multi-task when you arrive. Ladders save firefighters lives! Maybe not on every fireground but there’s always that potential—especially when dealing with multi-story structures where ground ladders (or aerial devices) will reach the upper floors.

Throwing ladders is a basic skill. Carrying a ladder (with tools) is a basic skill. Carrying a ladder to the fireground, with tools, and throwing the ladder before moving on to the next task is something that can easily be done. A few more seconds at the beginning of the operation may mean the difference between making a rescue, providing additional access, or even allowing another firefighter to get out of a tough situation.

Know your ladders. Know what you carry on your apparatus and what is available on the other apparatus on the scene. Know your limits...what size ladder can you carry by yourself? What size ladder can you throw by yourself? Can you really afford to take multiple trips back and forth to the apparatus when faced with a difficult fireground (and multiple rescues)?

**Putting it all together**

While we didn’t really spend any time on the performance of the actual skills that the first-due truck company may have to perform (we’ll review those down the road) we did talk a lot about what and when they have to be performed. Sometimes we spend so much time learning the actual hands-on skill that we forget to learn about how and where the skill fits into the big (fireground) picture. Achieving success on the fireground is a combination of knowing how to perform, why to perform and when to perform. Whether you’re an officer or a firefighter it’s your ability to apply the skills that are needed to the actual fireground you’re working on that will make you, your crew, and the actual fireground safer and more successful.
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