

## Air Management By Trevor Bertram

There are countless audio and video feeds online of near misses and LODDS of firefighters calling “Maydays” because they are running low on air. As you know there are many different factors that contribute to every mayday situation. However there are things that you should be doing to help yourself manage your air supply when things do go bad. All across the country there are classes taught on skip breathing, turning your cylinder off, using the purge valve, or running an air consumption course. However, not everyone has the opportunity to set up an air consumption course every week or has a mentor in their fire house to instruct them through all the “advanced” techniques. With that being a common issue there is still something everyone can do once a month, at least, to improve their air consumption.

Most all fire houses have some kind of treadmill or stair stepper, one of these combined with your



gear is all you need. If your department doesn't have any treadmills this exercise can still be done outside anytime of the year.

Start with a fresh air cylinder and your mask; after the timer starts, turn your cylinder on and clip in your regulator. Start with a decent paced walk. Nothing too fast or too strenuous. Walk until your low alarm bell goes off.

This is where air management becomes crucial. Your initial reaction will be to speed up your

respirator rate out of anxiety; however with a few mind tricks you can combat this reaction. When your low alarm bell activates, do not slow down or speed up your walking pace. Try your best to maintain and take a deep breath. This deep breath will help you calm down and fully realize what is going on. After your initial deep breath, attempt to breath normally again. With your first breath start counting. Count every breath you take. This will take your mind off of you running out of air.

**However, this does NOT mean it wouldn't meet a mayday parameter if you were in an IDLH atmosphere.**

While counting your breaths there will come a point when your low alarm bell stops ringing. When this happens keep walking and restart your counting sequence. This is another stressful period where your breathing will speed up and contribute to you running out of air. Within moments you will notice your mask starting to “suck” to your face. If you have never experienced this, the first time you do will throw you for a loop. However, it is better to first experience this in a training exercise than in a blacked out, super-heated hallway during a mayday situation.

Once, your cylinder is completely out of air, disconnect your regulator and stop your time. Take note of your overall time, how many breaths you took while the low alarm bell was going off, and how many breaths you took after it stopped. Whether you practice this every week or once a month, push yourself harder each time. Add in gear, start a brisk walk, mix in some jogging. But, always try improving how much time you can get out of one cylinder and how many breaths you can take when your life would be on the line.