

Strategy and Tactics Structural Firefighting With Limited Staffing



Strategy and Tactics Structural firefighting with limited staffing

By Chief John M. Buckman III

This paper is written for fire departments with limited staffing who encounter a working fire situation in a residential structure less than 2400 square feet.

What are your strategic priorities when arriving on the scene of a structure fire with 2 or 3 persons? Offensive or Defensive? When will your next company arrive? What is the risk to the firefighter? What is the gain if we try to go offensive? What is the outcome going to be if we try to go offensive but can't sustain the attack and the fire continues to grow? How much fire could be extinguished with defensive operations? How much water is required and available?

The answers to these questions must be developed and a response formulated in about 15 seconds when arriving at the scene of the fire.

Tactical Deliberation

Arrive on scene determine type of structure with possible materials used to construct, how much is involved in fire and color of smoke? Consider possibility of people home or trapped, occupants accounted for? Exposures to neighboring buildings? Downed power lines? Fire appears to be spreading? What is the capability of your staffing to implement the tactical choices? There is nothing wrong with choosing a defensive strategy because the staff on scene does not have the capability to actively engage in interior structural fire operations.

Defensive operations can save contents and valuables inside the structure if it is aggressive and flowing lots of water in the right places. There is nothing wrong with a defensive choice when the risk to our firefighters is too great or the ability to mount an aggressive interior fire attack is not possible due to limited staffing.

Scene Sizeup

Complete a 360 degree assessment before choosing a strategy. This is a critical step in fire suppression. Before the IC makes a choice and begins to implement the tactics as much information as possible to make an intelligent decision. This decision will impact your life and the life of the firefighters with you on this incident.

Option #1 - first due engine action items person possibly inside residence:

- o Park close enough for cross lay to reach throughout home to fire area but distant enough from home for structural collapse and heat damage
 - o possibility of adding more hose to line will be difficult if additional staffing does not arrive
 - o Place into pump gear before exiting cab.
 - Set wheel chocks
 - o Driver complete 360 degree survey before choosing strategy and implementing tactical operations.
 - Communicate action plan via communications system.
 - Request second alarm
 - o If offensive strategy is selected:
 - Pull 1 ¾" preconnect and stretch to the appropriate location.
 - Charge hand line and set proper pressure.
 - Engage automatic pump governor (you have 2300 gallons of water)
 - Prepare for entry by donning SCBA
 - The driver will check for any immediate exposures both internal and external.
 - Assessment of personnel should also consider the "quality" of the personnel.
 - Whether the crews should even go interior should take into consideration the training, experience, and fitness levels of the crews... SPECIALLY when there are only 2 or 3 on the scene.

Option #1 First due tanker parks on scene within hose line distance to engine (50').

- o Do not forget Engines have ladders that come out rear.
- o Put pump into pump gear
- o Driver don appropriate PPE depending on strategy chosen and meet driver of engine.

Option #1 interior operation

- o Perform primary search for victim
 - o Locate victim and remove
 - o The tactical considerations for a rescue include what action best meets the rescue objective (i.e. attack the fire... vent the building... or go for the victim. Go through the front door... or up a ladder?). Sometimes, as Vincent Dunn says... putting the fire out takes care of 90% of the problem. Some truth to that... but it's not ALWAYS going to be the first objective. So THINK about what action performed FIRST best meets the rescue objective.
- o Control fire if within 15' of exterior door
- o Retreat to defensive operations if access to fire requires penetration more than 15' into building.

Option #1 Third arriving person utilizing offensive strategy

- o Advise interior crew of exterior smoke/ fire conditions.
 - o Sound evacuation signal if necessary
- o Request second alarm if not already requested
- o Check pump panel of Engine for proper pressure
- o Increase pressure from tanker in supply line to Engine
- o Open intake valve
 - o Monitor residual pressure on gauge
 - o Refill water tank on Engine as water supply allows
- o Don PPE including SCBA for emergency rescue of firefighters
- o Control utilities
- o Setup positive pressure ventilation

Option #2 - first due engine action items when defensive operations are the strategy selected. No life hazard or vacant home, set up for exterior attack. Through front door or window, check structural integrity and be cautious of any power lines connecting to home. **Some additional considerations for defensive firefighting operations might be:**

- o No savable life... in other words... if there's someone inside... they're dead because the smoke/fire conditions are not compatible with life (skin begins to melt at 160 degrees... not very hot).
- o Fire involvement that is compromising structural components (rafters, joists, studs, beams, etc.) should lead to a defensive attack.
- o When the speed of the fire growth exceeds the resources available (personnel and/or water).
- o Park close enough for cross lay to reach throughout home to fire area but distant enough from home for structural collapse and heat damage
 - o possibility of adding more hose to line will be difficult if additional staffing does not arrive
 - o Place into pump gear before exiting cab.
 - Set wheel chocks
 - o Driver complete 360 degree survey before choosing strategy and implementing tactical operations.
 - Communicate action plan via communications system.
 - Request second alarm
 - o If defensive strategy is selected (**selection A**):
 - Pull 1 ¾" preconnect and stretch to the appropriate location.
 - Protect exposures first or
 - Utilizing a window for application of streams
 - Charge hand line and set proper pressure.
 - Engage automatic pump governor (you have 2300 gallons of water)
 - o If defensive strategy is selected (**selection B**):
 - Deploy blitz fire nozzle from passenger side pump panel
 - Return to pump and charge line to blitz fire
 - Set pressure to 130 PSI for preconnect line
 - Protect exposures or
 - Deliver water to the interior via window/door

Defensive Operations with Offensive Outcomes - the DC Live Fire Training Video is a great way to illustrate this. We don't need to enter every room on fire or building on fire to make a difference. Our nozzles have a lot of reach. And smooth bore/straight stream doesn't push fire throughout a house. **HIT THE FIRE FROM THE OUTSIDE.** Division Chief Brian Kazmierzak

Option #2 first due tanker parks on scene within hose line distance to engine (50').

- o Do not forget Engines have ladders that come out rear.
- o Driver stretch and connect hose from engine to tanker providing water supply to support defensive attack.
 - o Charge line from tanker to Engine
- o Don appropriate PPE and move toward 1 ¾" hand line to assist with water application or
 - o Pull second 1 ¾" handline for exterior operations utilizing window or door
 - o Driver of tanker may assist in removing exterior components of structure such as siding or windows to facilitate extinguishment from exterior.
- o If the Engine selected the blitz fire option make sure all water supply connections are good.

Option #2 Third arriving person utilizing defensive strategy

- o Complete a scene assessment by doing a 360 walk around the entire structure
- o Request second alarm if not already requested
- o Control utilities