



The "Paxton" Drill

Presented by Chris Sterricker

History

The Paxton Hotel fire occurred in Chicago, Illinois on March 16, 1993. The Paxton Hotel was a four story single room occupancy hotel in which most residents made their homes on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. When the Still Alarm was dispatched for light smoke inside the structure it took initial arriving companies less than one minute after arrival to begin screaming for a Still and Box Alarm and an EMS Plan 1 for a heavy fire with numerous people trapped. The late Chief Ray Hoff was then Captain of Truck 10 and was the first-arriving Truck officer. He and his crew immediately began throwing ladders to as many windows as possible rescuing the people trapped by smoke and the advancing fire. Once those rescues were made they would roll the ladders into new positions or strip the other on scene apparatus of their ladders to initiate other rescues. Most firefighters on scene that night operated on their own, at least initially. The "Paxton Drill" times a crew to see how fast every ladder on the rig, or rigs, can be deployed to designated windows on a building or training tower.



Chicago firefighter operating at the Paxton Hotel fire.



Materials Needed

Multi-story structure

Fire apparatus with mounted ground ladders

Cones or other marking devices

Stop-watch

Full structural PPE

Preparation

The Paxton Drill can be accomplished by as few as two or as many as an entire Battalion or Shift. It is only dependent upon local staffing levels.

Once a structure has been secured walk the perimeter of the structure looking for hazards in the operation area. Overhead power lines, holes in the turf, underground tanks, pools or un-level terrain are just a few examples. Mark these areas and before the drill begins make sure everyone who will take part in the drill is aware of them.

Examine the structure to be used for training and decide which windows will be designated as “ladder windows.” These are the windows that the crew(s) must throw ground ladders to in order to successfully complete the drill. Mark these windows by placing orange traffic cones or some other marking device, in them. It is a good idea to use windows on multiple sides of the structure and at different levels i.e. Not all on the “A” side, not all on the 3rd floor.

An honest evaluation of departmental skill should be undertaken prior to the drill. The time element of this drill does not need to be part of the drill if ladder skills are lacking. Simply handling and working with the ladders is sufficient. Do not over-stride the capabilities of your department or members.



Execution

A crew of a given number is assembled at the fire apparatus to be used. All members should be in full structural PPE, SCBA is an option left up to the local department but is highly encouraged as this would be how most departments would be standardly operating on a reported structure fire.

The objectives for the drill are explained to the crew, emphasizing that while this is intended to simulate a life-endangering scenario and the need for speedy operations, safety should be above all else. **It is up to the local department and the Chief(s), officers and training officer(s)/instructor(s) to know the level of their members training and capability.** If one-person ladder throws can safely be accomplished then they may be chosen to be allowed. If your department has never trained on them, then the minimum number of personnel to ladder the building should perhaps be two members, regardless of the intent for speed.

Once all members understand the objectives of the drill they assume their positions on the apparatus i.e. Driver, Officer, Jump-seat etc. The local department can choose to have the apparatus actually “respond in” to the training area or simply begin from a staged position.

Once the apparatus has “arrived” the lead instructor begins the stop-watch when the first member exits the apparatus. The members then begin the drill by removing the ladders mounted on their apparatus and placing them to the training building.

Each window with a cone or other marking device must be laddered once and a member must climb up the ladder, touch the cone and climb back down before the ladder can be re-positioned or another ladder placed. If multiple firefighters are working at once or a crew has been split then multiple ladders may be thrown at once, obviously, but each cone must still be touched before that window is considered “clear” and can be passed to the next one.

The local department can choose how many ladders and apparatus each crew(s) has to work with. It can be only the initial arriving apparatus or multiple apparatus and all of their compliments of ladders. Crew size, however, should be limited to the same or similar number for each evolution.

The drill is successfully completed when all marked windows have had their cones touched once and the time is stopped.



Objectives

Remove all ladders from apparatus

Place all ladders to marked windows on structure

Heel and climb ladders to touch marking device in window

Return to ground

Re-position ladder to another window or acquire another ground ladder and place it to the building

Continue until all windows and marking devices have been “cleared”