



Fire Training Toolbox "Free Training for Firefighters"

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"The Swamp Person"

By Dale Saucier

Anyone who has been involved in an active role at an extrication scene knows it is hard to see everything going on around you at a motor vehicle accident. With parts of automobiles, extrication tools and hydraulic lines around the area it is very easy to get yourself into trouble. That is where a "Swamp Person" comes into play at an extrication. No, I am not talking about someone from the show "Swamp People", what I am referring to is a second set of eyes for the person operating the extrication tool just as in a backup person on an attack line advancing in to a burning structure. This person should have technical knowledge of the task at hand and should be alert to hazards in the area.

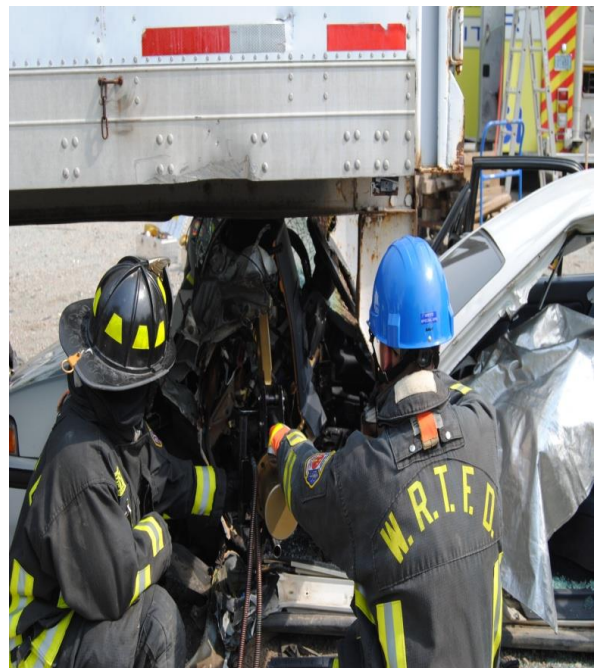
Personnel assigned to the Swamp Person role will have many things to look at. They will be a tender for the hydraulic lines and will make sure the lines do not get entangled in the operator's feet, do not become a trip hazard and does not get placed underneath items being spreader or cut, such as doors (Figure 1).



Figure 1

The Swamp Person will also make sure that the whole work area is clean and no parts of the vehicle are in the work area. When operating a reciprocating saw the Swamp Person would want to have extra saw blades located in their pocket (I would suggest the radio pocket if so equipped). At our organization we are equipped with a Hurst 40" Spreader and this beast weighs in at 85 lbs. While a very effective hydraulic tool it is very cumbersome for one typical firefighter so the Swamp person would be a second person on the tool especially working above the waist line. (Figure 2)

Figure 2



Also when working in a confined area such as a semi-trailer under ride, the Swamp Person can help out with tool placement since the operator would only be able to use upper body strength to manipulate the equipment. (Figure 3)



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Placement of the hand on the underside of the arms of the tool will allow for better balance for the operator. A couple of safety tidbits for this operation, the hand must be in the "open" palm position because you do not want to get your fingers into the inner side of the spreading arms while it is closing. Also, you should not perform this operation the first time at an extrication incident; you must try this out first in training and gain the trust of your fellow operators.

In closing, this is a position to be filled at the extrication event and is not a position to be taken lightly. A good set of eyes and a strong knowledge of extrication techniques will allow the incident to be managed effectively and allow firefighters not to be exhausted after an extrication.

Figure 3

The Swamp Person can also be a set of eyes for the tool operator by watching how the spreading action is moving the vehicle components into the passenger area and encroaching the entrapped victim. The final task of the Swamp Person (but by far not the last) is assisting the hydraulic tool operator with tip placement. (Figure 4)

Figure 4

