

Pay attention to more than just apparatus gauges and components

Frank R. Myers

Friday, January 26, 2018



With the inherent nature of firefighting, there are always changing events. It is a dynamic and ever-changing profession.

During live fire emergencies and operations, drivers need to remain diligent about the activities occurring around them. They cannot remain focused on the pump panel or aerial operations only; they need to be vigilant about their surrounding area and radio communications.

Spotting the apparatus and somewhat predicting if the fire scene will develop is a driver's consideration. Experience and communication with their officer can help select the best place.

Parking too close to the fire structure can result in radiant heat and the damage. The driver should not have to do pump operations or aerial operations at the turntable with their SCBA donned and operating because of radiant heat.

My former department once had interior cab seats melt due to the fire becoming larger in scale and the apparatus being too close, along with the driver leaving the doors open.

Keeping the doors closed while at the scene of an emergency is another good practice. This is not only to protect the interior and reduce exposure to heat and toxic smoke, but also to

provide a cool/warm place for the crew to take a break, hydrate and doff their gear (basically, a rehab area).

A driver needs to be aware that the water supply hose line and the fire hydrant are always charged and working. A backup plan always needs to be considered in case the water supply line bursts or a car inadvertently hits a fire hydrant, which would cause water supply loss.

Drivers need to keep their water tank always full in case their supply is lost and immediately notify their crew about what has occurred via air horn, opening and closing the gate in rapid succession three times on the respective hose line(s) or radio communication. Keep incident command apprised until the situation gets corrected.

As for aerial operations, a car hitting a power pole can cause it to collapse and create an electrical hazard if the ladder device is in its proximity. We always must be thinking about the "what if" and be prepared to take immediate evasive or alternate action.

When I was at the training center, an active firefighter came in to our classroom to lecture us and give a visual presentation about an incident he had experienced. He had been badly burned while fighting an automotive paint store fire.

The paint store had flashed over while he was inside. After the flashover, he became disoriented with barely any visibility, and no one was around. At that point, he had remembered an old rule that was told to him during his training: Find a hose line, feel it and follow it. At the end, you will either find a nozzle and/or a firefighter(s) or it will lead you to the outside where it connects to the fire truck.

It ended up leading him to the outside where the fire truck was. But he was so saturated with the fumes and flammable gases, he ignited outside because of a fresh oxygen supply.

The driver saved his life. Because he was being diligent, the driver immediately soaked him down with water via a hose line next to the truck. Another firefighter found refuge in the bathroom and breathed down his SCBA until the low air alarm began to sound. By that time, the fire had been extinguished. He had burned his hands because he was not wearing his gloves, but later recovered.

The firefighter who had ignited was transported to the burn center for the injuries he had sustained. He had to have skin grafts and months of therapy. Subsequently, because of the pain medication, he also had to rehab to become unaddicted to the pain meds (not due to abusing them).

Being a driver is not just being a "sidewalk" firefighter while the others are actively fighting the fire on the interior. They need to be inherently aware of the operations and keep their antennas and feelers on always.

About the Author



Frank R. Myers is a retired lieutenant with the City of Miami (Florida) Fire Rescue, where he served for 32 years. He works as a consultant for PSTrax.com, a technology service that helps fire departments across the country automate their apparatus, equipment and inventory checks.
