

Enemy at the Gates

By Charles Bailey for Tinhelmet
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I went to another fire. The time the messages were clear:

- A) Lines with gates on them are bad
- B) More than two lines through the front door is bad too

The main argument for running what we call a leader line* is as follows: If the first engine has to pull a long line to get to the fire then the second engine will be delayed in placing the back-up line. I now officially state that any line with a gate in it anywhere is a bad thing and must be forbidden. The logic of worrying about how the second engine will place their line is warped.

Why do I hate gates? I hate gates because while we were trying to hold the fire in check the gate, which was outside, got bumped and partially closed. This of course had a negative impact on stream quality. The fire won. Would we have had enough fire flow if the gate never got closed? Who knows?

What makes the gate idea weak is the fact that the buildings are not of variable distance from the street. They don't move everyday. The builder builds the building and then the fire department should go and see how much hose they need to get in and around the building. I have not seen too many multi-family dwellings 500' off of the road. I think the leader line, which is not an intrinsically bad idea, has become a crutch for those who do not drill, who do not take the time to know how to get to their buildings or who do not practice with their long lines. I know that for a time I was an advocate of the leader line, and even posted information on this site about how to run it. I have changed my mind.

Engine crews must learn how to put a 350' or 400' line in service. This will unfortunately require a modicum of training. I have worked or volunteered in many places with garden apartments and large setbacks. There have been precious few times when 400' was not enough. In one instance I remember we were third due, and thusly due to the rear of a garden apartment row. We were forced to park on the end of a three-building row. We ran our 400' line around a corner, past two buildings, up a ladder to the floor above (third floor) and were short of the back bedroom by a few feet. We could have extended that line with a 50' hose pack and accomplished the mission. My point is that this was an extreme situation and still barely out of reach. 400' goes a long way.

Wait, I hear the chorus of pump pressure critics who say that 400' of 1.5" or 1.75" hose creates pump pressures that are too high. I say bah humbug to that but to silence the critics simply make the first 100' or 200' of the line 2" hose. Enough crying about pump pressure.

As far as the second due engine, their line should be coming off of their own piece and they should be well versed in creating lines on the move. I recently screwed up on a fire by running the back-up line off of the first engine. Well wouldn't you know they had problems. Had I run the line off of my own engine I would have had all the fire to myself.

I would not be upset if we ran sections of 2.5 or 3" hose to the front door, we just have to get rid of the gates. Replace them with 2.5" to 1.5" reducers if you must, but **get rid of the gates.**

Now this thing about running all the attack lines through the same hole has got to stop. It is hard enough to stretch lines in multi-family dwellings, especially garden apartments, without trying to pull hose through the inevitable wads of hose spaghetti in the stairwell. Enough is enough. It is time to start training on running lines over ladders and using rope bags. A rope bag for hoisting hose does not have to be either expensive or heavy. You can buy the whole thing for few dollars.

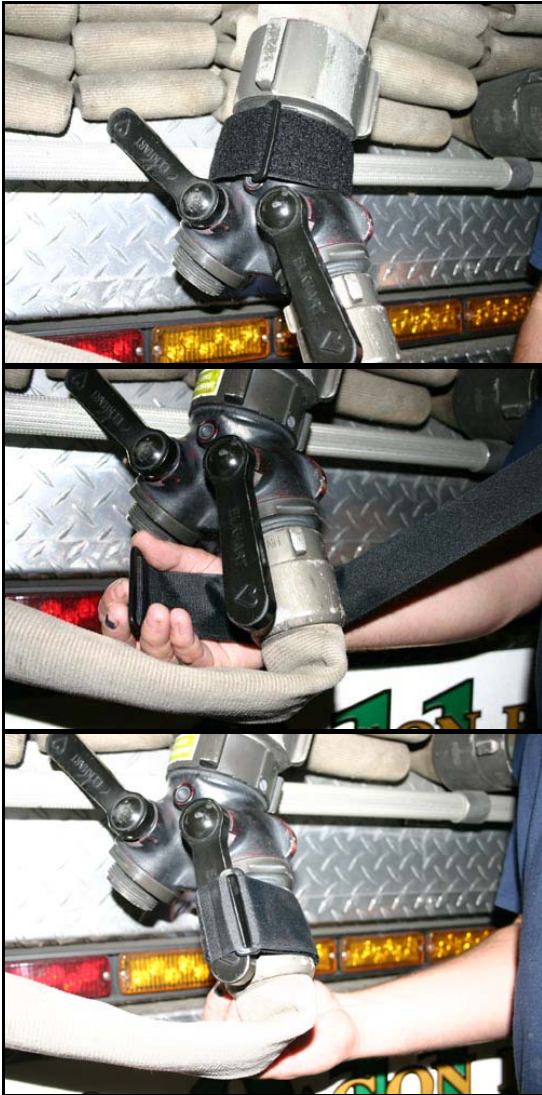
As far as practicing with it...time will tell. The point here is that over and over we "discover" that hose management was such a problem here and such a problem there. When does it end? I realize that truck and squad crews should reach down and support the engine operation by pushing hose on their way in, but then the engine should not need the help on basic stretches.

Maybe next time we will be more lucky...But then as Denzel Washington said in the movie Man on Fire, "...**there is no such thing as luck, there's trained and there's untrained.**"

**Quick definition: When I say leader line I am speaking of a 200' pre-connected line of 2.5" or 3" diameter terminating with a gated wye. You then attach a high rise hose pack to that and are able to supply, in theory, 2- 1.5 or 1.75" lines. Some places do not pre-connect the larger diameter line, preferring to lay it in the hose bed accordion style.*

I will admit that I threw the baby out with the bathwater in the preceding discussion. However, if a gate is used it must be tied off so that it cannot be closed unintentionally. For an example of how this can be done with a simple Velcro strap see the next page.

Securing a Gate



This is a shot of the Velcro strap in the stored position around the 2.5" coupling of the gated-wye

When the gate is to be used, the driver unties the strap and positions it over the coupling of the 1.5 or 1.75" hose and the gate. The gate is obviously tied in the open position.

Tying the gate takes a matter of seconds with a super cheap (disposable) strap. But the huge benefit is in the fact that it becomes much harder to have the gate get kicked shut. This is especially vital when the gate is inside a dark smoky stairwell or corridor.

Similar techniques can be used to secure gates when a break-away nozzle is used to extend a hand line.

Take the extra few seconds.