

**Operational Report: 4700 Cherryhill Rd. (Home Depot)
7 May 2006
Company 11's Area
Chief 11A-Bailey with the "Cherryhill Command"**



Background:

At 1842 hours Communications struck the box for a reported building fire near the intersection of Baltimore Ave. and Cherryhill Rd. in College Park. This information was quickly updated to provide the Home Depot as the T/A. At some point during response the information was further updated, reporting that the fire was in the garden center of the store. There was no further information on the dispatch as to the nature or location of the fire that I

can recall. This store is typical of the home improvement stores integrated associated with strip malls in that the construction featured masonry walls being held up by a lightweight steel bar joist roof system.

The garden area is physically attached to the store but only partially under cover. In this area there is a wide variety of merchandise storage, including fertilizers, oxidizers, and other chemicals. Another, more pressing danger was that of high rack storage. This storage proved to be a safety issue and that concern is dealt with in another section of this report.

Fire Protection:

Fire protection for the store is provided by a sprinkler system throughout the store. While, I don't know what the technical term is, there appear to be sprinkler heads with higher flows associated with them covering the garden area. Also throughout the store are numerous standpipe risers, however after the fire we found that the riser closest to the fire area was out of service and taped off. This occurrence supports our aversion to using interior risers in buildings of this sort. Both the sprinkler and the standpipe systems are support by an external fire department connection on the exterior of side alpha. It appears as if the fire was held in check by the activation of a single sprinkler head.

Objectives:

The primary objectives of the incident commander were as follows:

- To account for life safety in the form of a coordinated search and a coordinated attack
- To prevent fire and smoke extension to the main body of the store.
- To reduce the amount of property damage incurred.
- Ensure that there were no rekindles.

Strategies:

In order to meet the established objective command took the following actions:

- Ordered a hand line stretched from the main building into the garden area
- Ordered PPV fans set up at the doorways leading from the main building into the garden area blowing out towards the garden area.
- Established a search group tasked with the primary search first of the garden center and secondarily of the main building.

**Tactics:**

The tactics used to support the established strategy included the following:

- E113 stretched a 400' 1.75" attack line with a automatic nozzle to the fire area from the main building and began the attack.
- Command established a fire attack group headed by C 11B with E113 and E312 assigned to this group.
- Command established a search group with RS14's officer being the group supervisor.
- Command established a vent group with T12's officer heading that group.
- Safety was assigned to Chief 35 B
- A task force was called for and the first engine and truck from that task force alarm were used as the RIT.
- The second engine from the task force was held in staging.
- Units assigned to the Charlie Division under the supervision of C 31 were advised to take a position and hold, so as to be ready to support the attack but not create opposing hand lines. The units assigned to the Charlie division were E411, E353, and TW 7.

Problems Encountered/Suggested Remedies

Problem #1

Command was forced to call units numerous times via radio because the initial call was not answered.

Remedy #1

Unit officers are reminded to pay close attention to all radio transmissions.

Problem #2

Unit officers, when assigned to be group or division supervisors were not answering command when he called them by their new designator.

Remedy #2

Unit officers are reminded that when you are assigned to a group or division supervisor role your radio designation changes, you must remain cognizant of this change. All members are reminded that their communications must go through the supervisor of their group or division and they should not communicate directly with command.

Problem #3

The roof of the structure was made of corrugated metal. It is the belief of the incident commander that the construction features of the structure led to radio communications of less than desirable quality. This problem with Channel 10 and its inability to penetrate solid structures has been noted before.

Remedy #3

Command must remain cognizant of all operational parameters and should consider requesting a switch to a channel with simplex capabilities as early into the incident as possible.

Problem #4

The fire department connections were never charged.

Remedy #4

This is a training issue and has been addressed.

Problem #5

Some apparatus placement did not anticipate future incident needs; essentially blocking access to the structure for later arriving units.

Remedy #5

This is a training issue and has been addressed.

Problem #6

Nearly every HT1000 radio exposed to sprinkler flow stopped operating, leaving forward crews without adequate communications.

Remedy #6

I am not sure how to deal with this issue except to caution crews to do more to protect the radios from water. I know that many of us are accustomed to wearing our radio in holsters outside our gear. However, using them in this way causes two possible problems namely the radio holder is an entanglement hazard and is exposed to harsh environments.

Safety Concerns: High Rack Storage and Toxic Combustion By-Products.



This fire was in the garden center of a Home Depot. The storage racks were extremely high. Also most of the merchandise was wrapped either in plastic wrap or in cardboard boxes, both of which suffered immediate degradation when exposed to the high levels of heat that were present.

It is absolutely critical for all members to be cognizant of high rack storage hazards. This can be found in many

types of storage, particularly in the rear of department stores. Command considered falling debris or rack collapse as the primary safety concern. Unit leaders and group/division supervisors must continuously re-evaluate the risk-benefit analysis when dealing with these hazards.

The second, but equally as deadly, concern was the type of material that was burning. Tonight luck was on the side of the fire department and only plastics and Class A materiel was on fire. However, fertilizers, oxidizers, and other hazardous storage were only one rack away. Again, the SCBA is the best tool we have and there is every indication that all members used their SCBA for the duration of the incident. It is likely that many know carcinogens were present in that smoke.

Summary:

In summary this incident went rather well, with the exception of snags in communications. I think that with the heightened awareness that this incident provided those problems will be reduced in the future. Each of the issues/problems discussed in this document were also discussed on the fire ground during an informal after action review.

There was some question as to whether units from the Charlie division created opposing hand lines but further investigation leaves me with the assumption that the rack storage boxes were failing and falling on their own because they were saturated and not as a result of direct hand line impingement from units in the Charlie division.

It would be beneficial for all to review their objective and strategic outlook on fires that occur in these types of structures precisely because the multitude of asymmetric dangers that accompany them. Furthermore this fire highlights the limitations of the General Orders, in that they are not necessarily applicable in all situations. Companies and

commanders alike should be prepared to accept changes in the General Orders as the situation dictates.

That is all. Thank you for your time.

Questions/comments/concerns can be directed to charlesbailey@verizon.net
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