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Ladders:

by Charles Bailey

The words are mine but the ideas are like little presents that have been passed down to me over the years. I can take the by-line because I own the website but I cannot take the credit because I still owe the bank of fire knowledge a lot of time, energy and effort.

When I first became a truck driver I threw as many ladders as I could with available staffing, in other words I left anything over 35' on the truck. I struggled with 35' ladders and some of the heavier 24' ladders but I continued to throw them until either the fire was out or I ran out of ladders.

Then I got transferred to a wagon driver spot. But after I was done charging the first line, especially if the ladder truck was not on the scene yet, I threw the two ladders from my engine to the building.

Admittedly, when I was first taught to throw ladders I was not really thinking about the purpose of those ladders. I just kept throwing them because that is what I was supposed to do.

...and then I saw a picture of a window that had an air conditioner in it on one-side and a firefighter trying to get out onto a ladder through the left-over space.

This article aims to shed a little light on the ladder throwing rationale using the standard question asking format. As always you are welcome to add to or argue any point I make. charlesbailey@verizon.net

Who?

Certainly not just one person. It borders on impossible for one person to adequately ladder a burning structure adequately. **The truck driver operating alone is just not enough.** The entire truck crew is responsible for ensuring that the

One truck company I know requires that each of its crew members come off the truck with one ladder initially. Once those three ladders are placed the officer and the driver go back for more and the entry guy/gal attaches to the engine company to provide interior support.

Another company uses the officer and driver to ensure laddering and horizontal ventilation, while the entry guy/gal provides the interior support. However, the first extra personnel above the three person minimum work with the officer and driver on the exterior.

If you do not assign this function before the fire happens you are behind the eight ball.!

What?

Ladders is what! Throw them!

When?

Starting when you arrive, throw ladders and continue throwing them until either the building is covered adequately, you run out of ladders, or the fire is out.

How?

Rescue:

Life safety comes first! Throw the ladders to where the victims might be. Set the first few ladders for rescue. But think about this, there will be interior crews headed for the same spot where you think the victims might be, so you are killing two birds with one ladder.

Of course, persons in obvious danger are the priority.

Egress:

If the structure is greater than one-story tall and something is burning inside of it throw ladders.

Throw them so that the people inside can get out if they need to. The reason you are throwing these ladders is so that the people inside, your friends, can get out if they need to.

- Place the ladders where the people are working first. If the crews are doing all their work on side C then get the ladders near side C first. When your friends start catching on fire they should not have to cross the length of the house to find a ladder.
- If you are throwing the ladder so that your friends can escape in case of

emergency then **CLEAR THE WINDOW COMPLETELY** do not leave glass, sash, or air conditioners in the window. *[One company attaches a 6' hook to the more commonly used ladders so that you can throw the ladder, get the hook, clear the window, and move on...hmmmm]*

- If you see bars on the window you just threw a ladder to, you have not created egress until the bars are gone. **CLEAR THE BARS**. In my book leaving bars on a structure while your friends are working inside is setting yourself up to watch your friend die at the window.
- **IF WHEN YOU ARE THROWING LADDERS YOU NOTICE SECURITY BARS/BOARDED WINDOW/CASEMENT WINDOWS/ OR OTHER SUCH HAZARDS THAT INFORMATION MUST BE COMMUNICATED TO THE INCIDENT COMMANDER VIA THE APPROPRIATE ICS SUPERVISOR.**
- One ladder is not doing the job....you have to cover all the bases. I don't care if the first truck covers two sides and the second truck covers the other two. I don't care if the EMS unit on the scene has to help. Whatever it takes to get the job done!
- When dealing with multi-family dwellings with cantilevered balconies, one 24' or 35' ladder does the trick for all three floors. Place the ladder adjacent to the balconies.
- Remember if it is too hard to place a ground ladder on a steep slope in the rear, and so you don't, that is probably the window people will need to exit from.
- If you run your line up the ladder and expect it to be there when you need it run your line through the top rung...making it awful hard for someone to move it.

Other stuff:

When placing ladders make note of building construction features. If someone gets into trouble you may have to take the building apart, enlarge openings, etc. Think about this as you move around. Talk about it after the fire. Talk about your approach to bars.

Over the past few days I have talked to a bunch of people who deal with bars on a regular basis and the consensus seems to be that while there are numerous methods to use to remove bars or casement windows the best option is the cut-off

saw with a metal blade. It is reliable, fast, and takes the least amount of physical exertion. Other methods will be examined in future articles.

Life Safety/ Incident Stabilization / Property Conservation