FIREHOUSE® Weekly Drill

Drill #88: Lumberyard Fires

Introduction

Lumberyard fires don't happen often, but when they do, they will absolutely make the local news. With the vast amounts of combustible materials located in lumberyards, along with the different methods used to store the lumber, sawmills and in some instances drying kilns, the problems just compound on one another.

Depending on the type of community, most lumberyards are located near a rail line with a spur coming off it to the yard to bring lumber in or to ship it out on. Knowing this information will help with the pre-planning of an event. Keep in mind when pre-planning that, in some situations, dead-end water mains may be present at railroad tracks.

Shutting Down the Rails

In general, the rail lines will have to be notified and shut down during a fire; this is for the safety of the firefighters. In some locations, the main railroad tracks are far enough away from the incident that they can remain operational. However, should hoselines have to be placed over the tracks the railroad company will have to shut down the tracks. I have seen the stone removed and the hoses placed under the tracks allowing the trains to still run, but this is rare.

The storage and stacking of lumber makes for a large fire load. Depending on the way the lumber is piled, with furring strips between the boards or with the boards piled one on top of the other, will have a direct impact on the fire spread. Windy conditions are not going to help the situation. Don't be fooled, just because the piles are stacked evenly facing the driveway or road, the back sides can be uneven.

Some of the storage areas will have items other than wood stored in them. These materials can be just about anything (adhesives, pool supplies, plastic piping, etc.); the list can go on forever.

Incident Action Plans

To help put together an Incident Action Plan (IAP), it is imperative to have a list of strategies from which to work. First, life safety will be the number one concern, and checking with the manager upon arrive will assist in determining what if any rescues will have to be performed. Second, if there is any significant fire seen, don't wait,

call for more resources as you will need them! Keep in mind, any big fire it is going to require big water.

For fires involving piled wood outside, commence operations with master stream devices and blitz the fire as best you can. If the fire should be inside a building, support any sprinkler systems, if so equipped. Keep in mind that newer constructed buildings may be lightweight construction. Ventilation will assist crews as they push in to contain and extinguish the fire.

It is important that the initial fire attack begin on the windward side, however, sometimes this cannot be accomplished. In these situations, flank the fire using master stream appliances. Where the fire has gained hold of a structure, establish a collapse zone and keep firefighting personnel out of this area. Monitor the incident and ensure that Personnel Accountability Reports (PARs) are taken at regular intervals. You will also need to establish fire watches for embers that may fly downwind of the incident. One last thing, plan on being there for a long time, as overhauling the incident will be just as labor intense as fighting the fire.

–Prepared by Russell Merrick