

# FIREHOUSE<sup>®</sup>

## Weekly Drill

### DRILL #89: STRIP MALLS

#### Introduction

Does your fire district have a strip mall located within it? Strip malls are becoming more common today and present the fire service with some concerns that pose safety issues to firefighters. A strip mall, for those who may not know, is a series of several individual stores or buildings that are interconnected with one another and can extend several hundred feet.

One of the concerns that firefighters should be aware of is that of the roof structure, which covers the strip mall from one end to the other. In many of these strip malls, this roofing structure presents a common cockloft that extends the whole length of the mall. Should a fire develop in one of the stores and extend into this cockloft area, the fire could rapidly spread over other stores. Depending on the building codes at the time of its construction, there could be a good chance that fire stopping at the time was not required.

#### Contain the fire

To help eliminate the spread of any fire in the cockloft area, ventilation needs to begin directly over the fire, relieving the built up pressure of smoke and fire gases. Keep in mind that these roofs are generally made with lightweight construction and presents a very dangerous situation for firefighters assigned this task.

Depending on the amount of time the fire has been burning, firefighters may want to consider performing this ventilation from a bucket or platform device. Depending on the magnitude of the fire, a trench cut might be needed to stop the fire from spreading, however, this tactic will be very manpower intensive. If a trench cut is going to be attempted, have a charged hoseline on the roof for added safety.

Another danger to the firefighter is a strip mall that has a canopy attached to the front of the building. A significant fire load involving the canopy can cause it to collapse. There have been several firefighter seriously injured and even killed by this type of collapse.

If you encounter a fast-moving fire, consideration should be given to writing off that store and moving quickly to the stores on either side to begin the fire attack there. In some situations, a blitz attack may be the option of



choice and could be the difference of being successful or not. In any event, hose streams with significant amounts of water are going to be required. Leave the 1¾-inch hose on the truck and stretch the 2½-inch from the get go.

#### Plan of attack

As mentioned, resources are going to be needed early in the operations, so call for them. Perform your size-up and begin the fire attack on the store that is burning. This attack should be conducted from the front of the store. At the same time the initial attack is being performed, hoselines have to be advancing into the stores on both sides of the fire store, pulling ceilings and observing conditions. Remember, command needs feedback on these conditions to make the necessary strategic plans that will bring about a successful operation.

Firefighters and officers need to monitor their environment and report any changes. It is not uncommon to change our operations from offensive to one of defensive. No store is worth the life of a firefighter!

*—Prepared by Russell Merrick*