

# FIREHOUSE<sup>®</sup>

## Weekly Drill

### DRILL #118: FIREGROUND ORIENTATION

#### Introduction

When we look closely and investigate firefighter fatalities, we often find the reasons generally are from burns, being trapped in a collapse, or they simply ran out of air. But when we further investigate these fatalities, the reasons almost always indicate that the firefighter was lost or disoriented with the structure!

This makes it so vitally important to know where you are at all times within the structure and along with that, know how you got there. Tunnel vision is more common than we think, and oftentimes, firefighters are not taking notice of their surroundings. If you remember these two important points – know where you are and how you got there – then you should have a very good understanding as to how to get yourself out when things start to go wrong inside the burning building.

Orientation becomes a key factor in your survival. Once on the fireground, determine what type of building you will be operating in. If possible, try and estimate the size of the building, how many rooms there are and what size these rooms might be. As you enter the building, start monitoring your air supply. This information becomes easier when you know the type of occupancy (residential, commercial or industrial).

Let's focus on residential occupancies as these are the ones we operate in most frequently. Rooms one can find in a residential occupancy would be: living room, bedrooms, hallways, bathrooms, kitchen, and in some larger residential dwellings there could be a dining room.

As you enter, you will be gathering data that will assist you in orienting your location within the structure. This is a must, especially when using a thermal imaging camera (TIC) as mechanical

failures do occur with these instruments. Don't rely on the TIC screen to get around inside the structure because you may lose your orientation that way.

Select the direction you wish to take (left hand or right hand) within the room. Begin feeling for objects as you start moving in that direction and try to identify what they are – furniture, tables, lamps, doors and windows. Pay special attention to the windows as these may be your means of escape.

In addition to feeling the furnishings, try and identify what type flooring you are crawling on – carpet, tile, hardwood or concrete – which can help you determine what room you might be in. While advancing, keep going back over in your mind what objects you have felt and where the nearest exit is.

Another vital operation is that of communicating with yourself and your partner. Some firefighters find they can concentrate on their orientation by talking to themselves; but you have to always communicate what objects you feel to your partner so he/she can also identify it once they encounter it.

Stay safe and practice these techniques often.

*–Prepared by Russell Merrick*

