

# FIREHOUSE®

## Weekly Drill

### DRILL #129: SEARCH AND RESCUE

#### Introduction

One of the most dangerous tasks performed at a fire is that of search and rescue. Several factors that make this a dangerous operation are:

- Heart rates increase when firefighters hear the dispatch for reported persons trapped
- Firefighters place themselves in greater harm
- Many times firefighters are above the fire without a hoseline for protection
- Short cuts are imposed by some firefighters

These are just a few factors and the list would grow if firefighters were asked what they feel leads to the dangers.

In any event, the task of search and rescue is a systematic operation that consists of performing a left-hand search or a right-hand search. Additionally, there are two searches that will take place; a primary search and a secondary search.

Firefighters, upon entering a structure to search, should utilize the walls of the structure as a reference point to orient themselves and then stay with the search pattern chosen, left or right hand. A safety note for firefighters using thermal imaging cameras (TIC) during searches; these devices have been known to fail. If you're not maintaining a reference, you should!

The primary search is the first search that will be conducted. Search teams, depending on the structure, will begin their search as close to the fire as possible and work their way back away to less hazardous areas. However, more times than not firefighters will begin their search in areas where victims are likely to be. At night, this area will be the bedrooms.

Keep in mind that during the primary search visibility is hindered by the smoke conditions. The best way to conduct the search is crawling on your hand and knees, as visibility is somewhat better near the floor. Never conduct the search walking unless smoke conditions are light.

Upon arrival some firefighters are conducting window searches that fall into the category of a primary search. Basically, they are looking for victims hanging out the windows. Once the primary search is complete, crews



need to report their findings to the Incident Commander.

Depending on the nature of the fire, more and more firefighters are performing a technique that allows them to ventilate an area, enter, isolate, and search (VEIS). This task is used on second-floor windows where the firefighters clear a window of all the window glass and other obstructions. Next, the firefighter enters the room to be searched and locates the door. By closing this door, it gives them some isolation and time to then search the entire room.

The secondary search is generally performed after the fire has been brought under control. Unlike the primary search, which is performed quickly, the secondary search is a more meticulous search looking under all debris. In some instances this search will locate fire that is still burning in hidden voids.

A good thing to keep in mind is the fact that young children will try to hide from the fire making it difficult to locate them. Check under all beds, in closets, bath tubs and showers.

*—Prepared by Russell Merrick*