



# Safety Brief

JCFPD Training Division

2012-February

2012-2



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## Search and Rescue Hazards

Entering buildings which are on fire and full of smoke can present numerous hazards. Some of these hazards are expected and we train to polish our skills. We anticipate running out of air, so we practice managing our air supply. We anticipate hidden fire, so we take our thermal imaging camera (TIC) with us. We anticipate having to force doors, so we grab the married pair of irons (a flathead axe and halligan) before conducting our search.

But what about hazards we don't expect? Here are some close calls reported by firefighters at the website [FirefighterCloseCalls.com](http://FirefighterCloseCalls.com). Are you ready for these?

### Hazards for Firefighters

- After finding a man overcome by smoke on an upper floor, the two-firefighter crew split up. One firefighter continued to search for a second reported victim while the second firefighter began to remove the man. On the way down the stairs, the victim collapsed on the stairway, pinning the solo firefighter under the victim's body. The second firefighter found the second victim, and then discovered his partner and the first victim on the stairway. A Mayday was called, and additional firefighters entered the structure to remove both victims and retrieve the pinned firefighter.
- Firefighters responded to a flue fire at 17:30 on a weekday and discovered a locked house with no vehicles visible. The house appeared to be empty. Flames and smoke were visible coming from the attic near the chimney. Some firefighters went to the roof while a second crew forced the front door to enter the structure. As the search crew went down the hallway, they vocally announced themselves by shouting "Fire Department" repeatedly. As the crew entered the master bedroom, they discovered the homeowner on the floor aiming a handgun at the doorway. The homeowner reported that he and his wife had taken medication for a cold and gone to bed, then heard noises on the

roof and the sound of the front door being broken in. Because of the medication and illness, the homeowner interpreted the noise as a home intrusion and was prepared to defend his wife.

- At a recent structure fire, firefighters entered the living room after flashover had occurred. The fire was suppressed and firefighters then found an LP gas cylinder in the living room. The tank was empty and the valve was found in the open position. Apparently the fuel contributed to the flashover in the living room.

### Avoiding Injury

Firefighters need to train for search and rescue situations, using the same skills in training which will be used during fire suppression activities. In the previous cases, here are some lessons learned that we should practice during training.

- Search crews should **NOT** split up. If additional victims are suspected, another crew should be sent to search. Separated crew members can run into trouble.
- Be prepared to call a Mayday if you become trapped, lost, or run out of air.
- Be prepared to rapidly enter a structure to assist firefighters who call a Mayday
- Victims can be found in a house at any time of day. Shift workers, ill people, or elderly confined to bed can be found during day and evening hours. Conduct a search to verify there are no occupants.
- Always announce yourself during interior search and rescue operations. Adult occupants may not realize that firefighters are on the scene. Children may become scared of firefighters and try to hide. Shout "Fire Department!" repeatedly during interior searches.
- Expect to find unusual things in buildings on fire. Pressurized gas containers, ammunition, and heavy fuel loads may not be common, but should not be surprising.

### Protect Yourself

Firefighters must train realistically to be ready for unusual situations. Expect the unexpected during search and rescue situations!