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LESSON LEARNED

High Rise Fire Operations: Hooking Up to the Standpipe on the Floor Below

SUMMARY

When operating at fires in high-rise buildings, firefighters should ensure that they connect their attack lines to the standpipe outlet on the floor below the fire. Connecting to the standpipe outlet on the fire floor may unnecessarily subject firefighters to intense heat and smoke conditions, thus compromising the safety of personnel and resulting in a delay of securing a water source for fire suppression.

DESCRIPTION

On the morning of December 18, 1998, the New York City Fire Department dispatched units to a reported fire on the tenth floor of a 10-story apartment building in Brooklyn. First arriving units observed fire evident from the rear of the 10th floor. The apartment building was a fire proof structure with enclosed stairwells, elevators, standpipe, and sprinkler systems. Truck company personnel immediately proceeded to the fire floor in order to search for fire and life. Members of the first arriving engine took the elevator to the ninth floor and then walked up to the 10th floor.

On the 10th floor, members of the first due engine attempted to connect their 2.5 inch hose line to the standpipe outlet in an enclosed stairwell. Personnel opened the hallway door in order to access the fire floor, allowing intense heat and smoke to enter the stairwell. The heat and smoke forced the members to abandon the standpipe outlet on the fire floor and retreat to the standpipe outlet on the 9th floor. During this period, three members of the first due truck company continued to operate on the fire floor in the absence of a hose line. As the fire condition intensified, the firefighters were caught in a flashover and killed. Several factors contributed to the deaths of these firefighters, particularly the difficulty in securing a water source which delayed fire suppression efforts.

Fire departments should ensure that standard operating procedures mandate that engine company personnel connect to standpipe outlets on the floor below when operating at high-rise fires. Connecting to the standpipe outlet on the floor below the fire allows members to safely and expediently secure a water source for fire suppression.

CITATION

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Firefighter Fatality Investigation Report F99-01: Three Fire Fighters Die in a 10-Story High-Rise Apartment Building.

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