TOLEDO FIRE & RESCUE DEPARTMENT

C-89 Hoarder Conditions

Emergency Manual

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Purpose

To enhance the safety and awareness of TFRD personnel who are responding to high content occupancies for medical emergencies and fire operations. Hoarder conditions can create dangerous and complex work conditions which require proactive planning. The purpose of this procedure is to differentiate these types of incidents from routine structure fires and EMS responses. Incident commanders need to manage these incidents differently and deploy alternative tactics when necessary.

Definition Hoarder conditions are defined as occupancies where excessive accumulation of belongings, debris, or materials would impede firefighting operations, and would pose a risk to occupants and responders. Characteristics include limited mobility, blocked exits, heightened fire load, entanglement potential, and inherent structural collapse. Hoarder conditions require distinct tactics, heightened awareness, and rigorous safety protocols.

Incident management and tactics*:*

- **Scene size up**:

While performing a scene size up, look for cues of hoarder conditions. It can be evident from the front yard, or observing stacked contents in windows, but this is not always the case. It is essential that attack crews relay this to command if it is missed during 360. Once noted it shall be declared on fireground channel that hoarder conditions are present, and the IC should ensure all crews on scene acknowledge.

- **Risk assessment**:

Prioritize life safety of occupants and TFRD personnel while evaluating the extent of the fire and potential for structural collapse. High content occupancies are subject to structural collapse and rapid-fire progression, this should be anticipated, and tactics adjusted accordingly.

- **Resource management**:

Hoarder conditions present an increased fire load to contend with, and extended overhaul effort once the fire is extinguished. Depending on the extent of the fire, consider requesting additional resources early in the incident. The strenuous nature of firefighting coupled with increased workload of high content fires puts our personnel at greater risk for injury. Anticipate this, rotate personnel out, and set up formal rehab early in the incident.

- **Attack sector:**

Three of the biggest adjustments that personnel must consider in comparison with traditional tactics are a greater potential for collapse, firefighter disorientation, and the inability to hit the seat of the fire with hose streams. Using an indirect attack by bouncing hose streams off ceilings and walls may be more effective when traditional direct attack methods fail. Dense piles of contents may only have top layers burning, which do not require deep penetration. Personnel should keep in contact with the attack line and each other as narrow corridors created by high stacked materials contribute to disorientation. Understand that every gallon of water released by the attack line adds to the weight of the contents and can contribute to and accelerate structural collapse. Use caution during initial attack and while entering the structure, checking for alternate egresses and floor stability. Evaluations of conditions and stability should be continuous throughout the incident, including the overhaul phase.

- **Search sector:**

Searching in hoarder conditions places our personnel at greater risk; considerably more than a typical structure fire. Depending on the extent of the fire, consider searching with an attack line. This allows the search team to remain orientated to egress and provides protection of search team if conditions change. Search should be conducted using the oriented person method, always maintaining contact with crew members. Confirmed occupants and last known location could allow search to retrieve victims to the closest egress, such as windows rather than traditional search methods, yet high stacked contents may not provide ability to isolate room.

- **RIT/Safety Sector:**

Consider augmenting RIT early in the incident which would allow RIT to perform required tasks more effectively, provide additional personnel to monitor traffic/location of crew, and monitor exterior conditions. RIT and Safety sector should maintain a high situational awareness for structural collapse and rapid fire spread throughout the incident. RIT should consider creating multiple means of egress on all sides of the structure. In addition, once flow path is controlled and the main body of fire knocked down, RIT should consider converting division 1 windows into doors, dependent upon the amount of structural damage. The risk of collapse remains throughout the incident, additional means of egress will benefit us if this occurs and will assist us in overhaul operations. Coordinating this with attack and command is imperative.

Additional considerations:

1. Hoarder conditions present unique challenges for EMS incidents and can pose the same risk of structural collapse. Evaluate conditions, call for additional resources when necessary, and take the time to properly plan patient removal to decrease injury potential.

2. Preplanning these types of occupancies and/or ensuring this information is entered into premise history after an incident allows responding crews to adjust their tactics early in the incident.

3. High stacked contents reduce the available air space for combustion, which may result in ventilation limited fires by condensing the heat absorption. This same characteristic reduces overall space, which may cause contents to reach flashpoint faster. Proper coordination with ventilation and controlling flow paths are critical to prevent rapid fire spread.

4. The ability to read smoke can be hindered by high content fires. Smoke conditions may present differently, emitting from eaves and attic space when it could be a ventilation limited fire in the living space, rather than an attic fire.

5. Create drains, when possible, to prevent standing water on the flooring system, using a pick head axe to create a hole is one method to drain water into the basement.

6. Modern construction with lightweight materials accelerates collapse potential, observe foundation and construction clues to identify early in the incident.

7. A final reminder; contents such as rugs, carpet, upholstered furniture, clothes, paper products will all absorb and hold water potentially creating a tremendous static load that the structure eventually will not support. Be cognizant that the circumstances of hoarder conditions plus the application of large volumes of water must always become a defensive attack.

See Also:

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