

Fireground Safety:
10 Dangerous Mistakes
&
10 Best Practices

Fire Chief (ret.) Richard B. Gasaway
Gasaway Consulting Group, LLC

Mistakes

1. Performing high-risk activities without proper staffing and equipment.
 - When firefighters died... it often happened in the first 12 minutes and there were less than eight members on the scene.
2. The person in-charge is performing hands-on activities.
 - When firefighters died... the person who was supposed to be in charge was performing firefighting instead.

Mistakes

3. Failing to conduct a 360-degree size-up.
 - When firefighters died... the first-arriving crew often failed to completely walk around the structure and they missed seeing important things.
4. No one was in-charge.
 - When firefighters died... oftentimes there was no one person designated to be in-charge and to coordinate all the activities.

Mistakes

5. Failing to know when to be defensive.
 - When firefighters died... they were often engaging in offensive (interior fire attack) when the strategy should have been defensive (exterior fire attack).
6. Trying to fight a large fire without enough water.
 - When firefighters died... they often did not have an adequate supply of water or the size of their hose lines were too small to overwhelm the fire.

Mistakes

7. Missed communications or misunderstood communications.
 - When firefighters died... often times their updates and maydays were not heard or their communications were misunderstood.
8. No Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs).
 - When firefighters died... many times the department did not have a common set of procedures to guide operations. They had no play book. They were flying by the seats of their pants.

Mistakes

9. Short cuts in training
 - When firefighters died... it was often attributed to inadequate training or the department officers took shortcuts when leading training sessions.
10. Failing to learn from near-misses and injury events (error creep).
 - When firefighters died... the catastrophe was linked to persistent mistakes the department had been making for a long period of time (and got away with it).

Best Practices

1. Ensure you have the proper amount of help responding immediately to the call.
 - Implement an automatic aid program that ensures you have 15-20 firefighters responding to structure fires (immediately), 24-hours-a-day.
2. The person in-charge should remain far enough back from the action to maintain a big-picture view of the incident.
 - Command from a vehicle or from a location remote enough to see the big picture scene.

Best Practices

3. Conduct a complete size-up to ensure an understanding of what is happening.
 - Walk all the way around the building and look for cues and clues that tell you what is happening.
4. Match the strategy and tactics based on the size of the enemy. Overwhelm the fire.
 - Big fires require large hose lines and lots of water.

Best Practices

5. Conduct a risk-benefit assessment.
 - Not every fire is an offensive (interior attack) fire. Sometimes victims are not savable. Discuss (in advance) when a situation is a “No Go!”
6. Have a clearly defined commander.
 - The person in-charge must have command presence, set the strategy, make decisions, and coordinate the fireground activities.

Best Practices

7. Develop and use common radio terminology and radio discipline.
 - Communications must be clear, concise, commonly understood and controlled.
8. Conduct your training based on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and your Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs).
 - Training is learning and practice based on a game plan.
 - Train with your mutual aid partners.

Best Practices

9. Conduct training that is realistic and repetitive.
 - Training should be as real as safely possible and repetitive to build brain and muscle memory.
10. Perform post-incident evaluations.
 - Even when things go well (no injuries), there are opportunities to learn from minor mistakes.

Questions

Fire Chief (ret.) Richard B. Gasaway

www.RichGasaway.com

RBG3100@aol.com