

The good... the bad... and the ugly.

Dangerous Mistakes  
&  
Best Practices

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# Mistakes

# Mistakes

1. Performing high-risk activities without proper staffing and equipment.

- When firefighters die... it often happens in the first 12 minutes and there are less than eight members on the scene.

# Mistakes

2. The person in-charge performing hands-on activities.

- When firefighters die... the person who is supposed to be in charge is performing firefighting duties instead.

# Mistakes

## 3. No one was in-charge.

- When firefighters die... oftentimes there is no one person in-charge coordinating all of the activities.

# Mistakes

## 4. Failing to conduct a 360-degree size-up.

- When firefighters die... the first-arriving crew often fails to completely walk around the structure and they miss seeing important things.

# Mistakes

## 5. Failing to know when to be defensive.

- When firefighters die... firefighters are often engaging in offensive (interior fire attack) when the strategy should be defensive (exterior fire attack).

# Mistakes

6. Trying to fight a large fire without enough water.

- When firefighters die... they often do not have an adequate supply of water or the size of their hose lines are too small to overwhelm the fire.

# Mistakes

## 7. Missed communications or misunderstood communications.

- When firefighters die... often times their updates and maydays are not heard the first time communicated or their communications are misunderstood.

# Mistakes

## 8. No Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs).

- When firefighters die... many times the department does not have a common set of procedures to guide operations. They have no play book. They are flying by the seats of their pants.

# Mistakes

## 9. Short cuts in training

- When firefighters die... it was often attributed to inadequate training or the department officers taking shortcuts when leading training sessions.

# Mistakes

10. Failing to learn from near-misses and injury events (error creep).

- When firefighters die... the catastrophe is linked to persistent mistakes the department has been making for a long period of time (and are getting away with it).

# Best Practices

# Best Practice

1. Ensure you have the proper amount of help responding immediately to the call.

- Implement an automatic aid program – ensuring you have 15-20 firefighters responding to structure fires (immediately), 24-hours-a-day.

# Best Practice

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 Practice

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.

# Best Practice

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. Don't fight commercial fires like residential fires.

# Best Practice

5. Train firefighters to conduct a risk-benefit assessment.

- Not every fire is an offensive (interior attack) fire. Sometimes victims are not savable.
- Discuss and practice (in advance) what a “No Go!” situation is.

# Best Practice

## 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 Practice

7. Develop and use common radio terminology and radio discipline.

- Communications must be clear, concise, commonly understood, controlled... and practiced!

# Best Practice

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 Practice

9. Conduct training that is realistic and repetitive.

- Training should be as real as safely possible and repetitive to build brain and muscle memory.

# Best Practice

10. Perform pre-incident and post-incident evaluations.

- Correcting flaws before they turn into catastrophes.
- Even when things go well (no injuries), there are opportunities to learn from minor mistakes.

# Center for the Advancement of Situational Awareness & Decision Making

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