

Facilitated Learning Analysis

Crusher Auto Salvage

Overview

On May 20, 2012 DFD companies responded to a reported structure fire at 4980 N Brighton Blvd. The occupancy was Crusher Auto Salvage, a facility made up of an auto salvage yard and a few steel warehouse style buildings. Companies reported dark black smoke coming from one of the buildings on the property. The IC declared a working fire and companies “went to work”. The IC assigned several of the on scene companies jobs, including Tower4 the roof. TR4 was sent to the roof and the officer made Roof Division Supervisor (DIVS).

After forcible entry challenges, the on scene companies made entry into the building and discovered the smoke was coming from a commercial sized waste oil heater. The unit was not operating properly (putting out too much smoke) but was not the source of any structure fire. Companies reported their findings to the IC and were instructed to shut down the heater. About this time the IC asked the Roof DIVS to verify that all the exhaust was exiting the vent pipe properly and there were no signs of any type of extension out of the vent stack.

Roof DIVS radioed receipt of the request and nearly immediately stepped onto a fiberglass skylight panel on the roof. The non-structural panel gave way instantly and sent the DIVS through the roof. He was able to catch himself on the edge and with the assistance of firefighters from his crew, prevent a fall of approximately 25 feet.

The report of a “firefighter through the roof” came over the radio almost immediately. The IC activated the RIT company to the roof division to affect a rescue. The firefighters from the Roof DIVS crew were able to assist him with self-extrication from the hole and he was able to walk down the aerial ladder under his own power.

Roof DIVS was uninjured and examined by on scene paramedics.

My Point of View

I was the District 2 roving officer and assigned that day to TR4. Myself and crew responded to a reported structure fire at 4980 Brighton Blvd. During the response we observed heavy black smoke rising over the roofline and heard the reports of the first-in companies of a “working fire”. Upon arrival TR4 was assigned the roof and I was made Roof Division supervisor.

As we pulled up to the building, I noted to the crew the building type (a commercial steel building) and said “we're going up on the aerial and we'll operate from the stick. We're not getting on this roof”. As the crew went to work putting the aerial in play, I threw a ground ladder to the Alpha side. TR4 crew was finishing aerial ops as I climbed the ground ladder to view the roof. I reached the eave and viewed the roof; the balance of the TR4 crew was gathering equipment as the engineer raised the aerial into position.

Once I had reached the eave of the roof I decided I could access the roof and walk on the trusses

indicated by screw lines on the steel panels. I walked from the eave to the ridge, along the truss, sounding the roof and checking for stability along the way. During this time I could see that the crew of TR4 had placed the Aerial ladder into position and was ascending stick to the ridge, I was moving to join them. Upon reaching the ridge of the roof, and joining with TR4 crew, I could see that the smoke was entirely originating from a vent pipe and not from the roof in general. I radioed this information to command and awaited further instructions/information. While waiting I discussed the roof stability with the crew emphasizing the limited areas of structural support under the steel panels and pointing out the existence of the fiberglass “skylight” panels and the need to absolutely avoid stepping on them. The crew concurred with my assessment of the roof and voiced their understanding of the situation.

At this time we were hearing from the interior companies that the smoke was from a commercial waste oil heater and not from any type of structural fire. We started to prepare to come down from the roof via aerial ladder. I received a radio message from command asking me to verify the penetration area of the vent pipe was still in good shape and not showing any signs off issue due to heat etc. I responded “wilco”.

I was standing on the ridge of the roof, facing the IC (Alpha side of the building) and the vent pipe was to my 7 o'clock, the C/D quadrant. Up until this moment I had maintained consistent focus and had probed before every step along the roof. After the quick radio exchange with the IC I turned around and stepped out with my left foot, no probing. I heard a crunching crack and pitched forward to my hands and right knee. My left foot and leg was through the roof.

It is worth noting that at this moment I didn't have a grasp of what had happened, in my mind I had stepped into some kind of hole. Because of this I tried to stand up on my right foot while pushing myself up with my hands. Once I started to step onto my right foot I heard another crack and felt myself fall. I think because I was already pushing with my hands my body shifted back and my SCBA caught on the back lip of the hole and stopped my fall momentarily. It was at this time I realized I was falling through the hole and stretched out my arms to try to hold on to the roof. At same moment I felt something grab me and heard the 2 crew members from TR4 say they had me. My SCBA bottle released from the back lip of the hole and I felt myself hanging from my arms on the edge of the roof and the hands of TR4 crew-members.

I was able to, with a lot of assistance from the TR4 crew-members, get myself up and out of the hole in the roof and radio to the IC that all roof division members were fine and exiting the roof. I descended the aerial and was checked out by DHMC paramedics on scene.

Lessons Learned

- ✓ Roof operations are dangerous and require complete focus and continual updating of your Situational Awareness (SA). A moment of distraction can interrupt your SA and have immediate consequences.
- ✓ Consider other options to gain intelligence from the roof level. Staying on the aerial apparatus could have likely provided us with the same information.
- ✓ Stop and think when you change your tactical plan. I said clearly “...we'll operate from the stick. We're not getting on this roof” and yet I did, without any conscious consideration of the hazards or why they were no longer an issue for me.