

# Aggressive Search and Rescue Operations Part I

Properly performing an aggressive search operation is based on the following concepts.

## How prepared you are

- ◆ Prior experience and training
- ◆ Proper attitude
- ◆ Proper PPE
- ◆ Physical condition

## Current fire ground conditions

- ◆ Fires severity
- ◆ Fires location
- ◆ Where is the fire moving to

## Search size-up

- ◆ Time of day
- ◆ Type of occupancy and construction
- ◆ Access and Egress
- ◆ Are victims reported or confirmed to be trapped
- ◆ Target areas, high probability of people being trapped in need of immediate removal
- ◆ Determine where to start the search

Your search size-up should include any available information from bystanders, occupants and the dispatcher. All of this information should be used in determining the best place to begin the search.

**Fire ground searches are broken into 2 categories, primary and secondary.**

**Since we are talking about aggressive searches we will focus on primary searches.**

## Primary search

- ◆ Quick/ fast
- ◆ Thorough
- ◆ Systematic

## The balance between fast and thorough will be determined by:

- ◆ The severity of the fire conditions
- ◆ Confirmed entrapment
- ◆ Victims proximity to the fire
- ◆ Status of a charged hose line

When searching under extreme conditions you may not have time to cover every square inch of a room. You need to prioritize your search i.e. under the window, behind the door, on under and around the bed. If conditions improve you can go back and conduct a more thorough search. Hit your target areas first in case you need to retreat for your own safety

**Standard operating procedures address who is responsible for the search and where to start but depending on conditions found during your size-up they may have to be altered.**

## Search priorities

- ◆ Starting on the fire floor
- ◆ Get as close to the fire as possible and search out from that point
- ◆ Next is the floor above the fire and so on

## Communication during the search

- ◆ Your current location and the conditions found
- ◆ The status of the search and the fire
- ◆ Where you are moving to next

When moving between floors or from interior to exterior communicate with your company officer, partner and or command, make them aware of your changing location and status. When searching above the fire let the crew on the attack line know so they can protect your primary means of egress.



In order to have the best chance to save someone's life firefighters must be prepared to conduct aggressive search and rescue at the scene of a fire. In order for a search to have any real value it must be performed early in the incident. Any delay will reduce the chances of trapped occupants surviving.

What is an aggressive search? A search conducted before the fire is brought under control. It will happen simultaneously with other key fire control efforts such as the primary attack line being stretched, ventilation being performed and ladders being thrown.

Under some extreme cases the aggressive search will be conducted by members of a truck company 1st to arrive on scene. This type of search should be performed by experienced firefighters under the direct supervision of the officer in charge!

It goes without saying that the chance to save a life will always be accompanied by greater risk to the firefighter. But this should not deter you, it should motivate you to ensure you are prepared to safely perform an aggressive search.

Bryan T. Smith

# Aggressive Search and Rescue Operations Part II



There is a fine line between reckless and aggressive even though we will be subjected to increased risk during an aggressive search we must still be concerned for our own safety. Contrary to popular belief you can be SAFE & AGGRESSIVE

We must constantly evaluate our surroundings and be aware that every other fire ground operation taking place will have an affect on the search.

Safe and aggressive search operations don't happen by chance they happen when properly trained and equipped firefighters are prepared for the challenges of the modern fire ground.

You should be conducting regular drills and training on search and rescue to improve your chances of saving someone's life and guarantee that you can do so safely.

Bryan T. Smith

**Be fully aware of the risk involved and take the following steps to ensure your safety**  
Monitor the radio for information affecting the search and your safety

- ◆ Status of the fire
- ◆ Status of the hose line
- ◆ Status of the vent
- ◆ Status of the search

Monitor and evaluate your surroundings

- ◆ Heat levels (Establish a heat ceiling when you enter)
- ◆ Smoke conditions (Volume, Velocity, Density, Color)
- ◆ Air movement (Beware of Sudden or Rapid air movement)
- ◆ Are conditions getting better or worse and how fast is it changing!

The modern fire ground is known for rapidly changing conditions and sudden extreme fire behavior. We have to do a better job of anticipating and reading the changing conditions in order to reduce serious injury and death to civilians and firefighters.

**Orientation during the search is a critical component of conducting a safe search.**

Orientation during the search

- ◆ Searching off the wall, left on left, right on right
- ◆ Searching off the hose line
- ◆ Searching off a rope

Conducting a oriented search allows you to establish your location, direction of travel and your exit in the room your searching. Your ability to conduct a quick and oriented search will be enhanced by your knowledge of the occupancies in your response district.

**Venting as you search can enhance the search and the conditions for those trapped.**

Venting during your search (Vent for Life)

- ◆ Improves visibility
- ◆ Speeds up the search
- ◆ Increases survivability chances for trapped occupants
- ◆ Improves firefighter orientation during the search

Remember every opening you make in a structure is allowing fresh air into the Structure which could affect the fires flow path and growth. **See; (Tactical Ventilation by Michael R. Rehfeld)**

**Performing proper search skills and techniques will enhance your safety**

Safety considerations during the search

- ◆ Close the door to the room you are searching
- ◆ Get low and crawl if you cant see your feet you shouldn't be on them!
- ◆ Count the corners in the room, this will tell you how far around the room you are
- ◆ Search for windows for ventilation and a secondary means of egress
- ◆ Always be thinking 2 moves ahead so you don't get caught unprepared.

Whenever possible search and rescue should happen under the protection of a hose line and should be conducted with a partner. Firefighters conducting the search should don all PPE and be equipped with a portable radio. They should have a Thermal Imaging Camera and a hand tool to enhance the search and their safety.