



## Elgin Fire Department

Operations

Safety – Lost/Trapped  
Firefighters

Policy# 2023.04

Issued: 10/21/05

**Subject:** Lost or Trapped Firefighters

**Purpose:** This policy identifies the required actions for the search and rescue of lost or trapped firefighter(s).

**Scope:** This policy applies to all uniformed personnel of the Elgin Fire Department

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### Lost or trapped firefighters

The rescue of lost or trapped firefighters in a burning building is especially time sensitive. There is a very narrow "window of survivability" for a firefighter who is out of SCBA air supply or trapped by approaching fire. **Individual firefighters shall immediately radio Command if they become lost, trapped or in need of assistance.** Company officers shall also not delay the reporting of lost firefighters or inability to account for crewmembers. Command and sector officers shall always assume that a missing firefighter is lost in the building until the firefighter can be located. Command shall initiate an action plan to incorporate a high priority rescue effort.

### "MAY-DAY" radio message

**The radio message "May-Day" shall be used by lost or trapped firefighters to report their status as being in trouble and needing rescue. Any member shall use "May-Day" to report a lost firefighter. Any report of "May-Day" shall receive priority radio traffic, meaning all non-essential radio traffic shall cease. The term "May-Day" shall be reserved ONLY to report lost or trapped firefighters. The term "Emergency Traffic" shall be used to report other emergencies or high risk hazards.**

The term "May-Day" typically shall be used in the following situations:

- By personnel who are lost, trapped, or in trouble.
- By the company officer, sector officer, or other member who cannot account for an assigned firefighter who is operating in a hazard zone.
- By a member who witnesses or has confirmed that a firefighter is lost or in trouble.

**Once a "May-Day" has been declared, all fireground companies except the affected companies and the RIT team(s) shall be moved to another radio channel. This shall be initiated by the IC.**

### **Command response to a missing firefighter**

The Incident Commander **SHALL ALWAYS** assume that a missing firefighter is lost or trapped in the building until the firefighter is located. Rapid, concise, decisions and actions shall be taken to increase survivability. The following is a list of actions to be taken by Command for a reported missing or trapped firefighter. These are guidelines and need not be accomplished in the order listed. They must however, be accomplished rapidly.

#### 1. Change the plan to a high priority rescue effort

The Incident Commander must restructure the Incident Action Plan to include a high priority firefighter rescue effort. A rescue plan must be developed and the Command organization expanded. The plan and objectives shall be communicated to other Command staff and sector officers for implementation.

#### 2. Immediately request additional alarms

**At least one (1) additional level of both a fire and EMS alarm shall be immediately requested.** Upgraded alarms may be requested based on circumstances and potential. Early consideration must be given to heavy equipment resources and TRT assistance in structural collapses.

#### 3. Fireground accountability

A Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) shall be immediately requested from all companies operating on the fireground. This is especially important in situations of structural collapse. Command cannot develop an effective rescue plan until accurate information is available on the number of missing firefighters, their identities, their last reported work area, and which companies are affected.

In some situations, such as collapse, crewmembers may be separated. The only practical method to obtain an accurate PAR may be to withdraw crews to the exterior. Withdrawal is a judgment call based on circumstances at the time, information available, and resources. It may not be practical or possible to do. However, the absolute need for an accurate PAR and information on missing firefighters remains a critical priority.

#### 4. Commit the Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) and assign a RIT Officer and Safety Officer

The RIT shall be deployed to begin the rescue effort typically beginning at the last reported work area. A RIT Sector Officer (RITO) should be assigned to direct the overall RIT effort and to coordinate with the Incident Commander.

If not already in place a Safety Sector/Officer shall be assigned to monitor activity and evaluate the safety of the operation. Other Safety Sector responsibilities will be to conduct an assessment of the hazards, thus, allowing the RIT sector officer to concentrate on the rescue effort. Sector officers must coordinate efforts to ensure that a safe and effective rescue operation is conducted.

#### 5. Confirm with Communications that all radio channels are being monitored

Command shall ensure that Communications monitors all radio channels. If a lost firefighter declares emergency on a channel other than the fireground operations channel, Command must be immediately directed to the lost firefighters channel for direct communications. Command shall monitor radio bank C as it is portable-to-portable only.

Upon receiving a portable radio emergency traffic activation (emergency button), Communications shall immediately contact the IC and announce the identification of the individual assigned that radio. Contact shall be immediately attempted to determine if an emergency exists.

### **Additional strategic and tactical considerations**

#### Reinforce firefighting positions

Firefighting operations shall not be discontinued during the rescue operation. Command and fire crews shall take aggressive measures to protect trapped or missing firefighters from the effects of the fire. Efforts shall be concentrated on reinforcing existing positions, keeping the fire out of the rescue area, and providing appropriate ventilation and lighting. In some situations it may be appropriate to cease operations in some areas of the building in order to relocate companies to better protect the rescue effort.

#### Open/unlock all doors (if appropriate)

All doors in the immediate area of the search shall be unlocked or forced open, and the immediate interior area quickly searched. Where practical, doors shall be left open to provide an emergency escape route, unless doing so will have negative effects on the fire. In all cases doors shall remain unlocked.

#### Establish treatment and transportation sectors

The Incident Commander should assign treatment personnel to immediately treat any rescued firefighters. A transportation sector should also be in place and coordinating activities with the treatment sector officer.

#### Media control

Command will need to control the media early and throughout the incident. Information on the identities and conditions of lost firefighters shall be restricted until after families are notified. Media film crews shall be restricted to areas which are at a safe distance and that will prevent visual/facial identification of any victims. A Public Information Officer (PIO) should be assigned to assist Command.

Family needs

A family sector shall be established early. This will aid in notification of families and allow Command to stay ahead of the media's release of information. A staff officer should be assigned to direct this sector.

By the order of: Michael W. Falone  
Fire Chief

Date: 10/21/05



<b>MAYDAY</b> <b>LOST/TRAPPED</b> <b>FIREFIGHTER</b>	Command Actions For MAYDAY
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- ❑ Clear radio channel for MAYDAY message
  - Identify who is calling & location
  - Switch all other companies *except RIT* to another channel
- ❑ Define situation and develop RESCUE PLAN
- ❑ Upgrade alarm at least 1 level – FIRE AND EMS
- ❑ Have SECTORS and COMPANIES conduct PAR
- ❑ Activate RIT to last known location - assign RITO and SO
- ❑ Confirm that Communications is monitoring all channels
  - Assign specific person to monitor MAY-DAY channel
  - Command Post to monitor “Bank C”
- ❑ Additional considerations
  - Reinforce firefighting positions
  - Open/unlock doors
  - Expand Command organization
  - Establish treatment and transportation sectors
  - Evaluate need for TRT or other special resources
  - Establish media control
  - Evaluate and provide for family needs