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# **RAPID INTERVENTION: What Should We Be Seeing and Doing?**

## **Past, Present and Future**

Well it has been a good 10 years since Rapid Intervention began its foothold in the fire service and my involvement with it has been an ever eye opening experience with unbelievable progress and innovations as well as setbacks and controversy.

What should we be seeing and doing in rapid intervention as it pertains to the firefighters, line officers and chief officers at fireground incidents? The following article will probably surprise some while others have known or have been aware of what true rapid intervention proactive and reactive behaviors are so “That Brothers May Live”. I do mean truly LIVE!

The most experienced firefighter can have difficulty in applying realistic approaches to rapid intervention methods, techniques and maneuvers especially if they haven't even pursued the training. Worse yet is the department that didn't provide the means to get the training that not only saves lives but ensures an enhanced measure of safety on each and every fireground. Even worse then that is the firefighter that waits for the department to provide the means of what from the very start is his responsibility to attain for himself, his co workers, his department and his family. Enough said!

## **Realistic and Appropriate**

Let's really take a look at applying realistic and appropriate behaviors in rapid intervention in the training environment and on the fireground. Many individuals and departments talk a big game but are not truly a student of the game when it comes to rapid intervention. Rapid intervention has been interpreted, toyed with, chewed up and regurgitated into several approaches, methods, maneuvers and techniques by many individuals in the fire service, some of them to be what some would say as pretty prominent figures in the teaching and lecture world. Many of these respected and appreciated individuals though are starting to loose site of what are truly rapid interventions capabilities and its life saving expectations. Rapid intervention may very well becoming over theorized with inappropriate applications resulting in less than adequate results for the line firefighter all the way on up to the chief in training and on the fireground.

Here's what we need to know as the bottom line when it comes to rapid intervention.

- Training that is consistent but innovative in both Rapid Intervention and Self Survival skills.
- Provide training and understanding in Air Management skills.
- Training that installs and teaches proactive and reactive behaviors during fireground incidents.
- Innovative methodologies in techniques and maneuvers that are clear, simple and stupid in order to be performed under extreme duress.
- From the firefighter on up to the chief know the purpose in basic Rapid Intervention tactics and strategies.
- Develop simplicity but urgency in operating guidelines
- Realize the simple and appropriate equipment required.
- Understand the tactical positioning and deployment of Rapid Intervention.
- Give Rapid Intervention the freedom to function effectively on the fireground.

These are some of the top priority items and philosophies in establishing and developing a continuous sound Rapid Intervention program and operating guidelines for just about any size department. Through the years of instructing career, combination and volunteer departments I have found the needs and priorities of Rapid Intervention for each of these types of departments to be well intentioned but for some to be very difficult to achieve. In many cases it is extremely difficult for some departments to muster even a 2 man dedicated RIT let alone the more blessed departments that can provide a 4 or even 5 man dedicated RIT. What can one department do and accomplish for Rapid Intervention that another department can't do in addressing the needs of Rapid Intervention? The answer is that each departments capabilities needs to train, train, train according to each of their levels of realities.

### **Improving the Odds**

It is more important that each firefighter and officer be trained as thoroughly as possible in self survival skills and rapid intervention techniques and maneuvers so as to ensure and enhance the safety and possible needed rescue of a distressed firefighter on any fireground no matter what the response size or manpower presence. If members are adequately trained we can provide better outcomes for the fallen firefighter as well as for the rescuers. Many times when a Mayday incident occurs firefighters rush in to help their fallen brother before a RIT response, even with the presence of a dedicated RIT. This is not a lack of discipline but the reality of human nature for the need to save others that has been imbedded in our make up as firefighters. It's simple we react through commitment and training to the emergencies and we really react to emergencies when its one of are own. Without self survival or rapid intervention skills are reactions would for sure turn into additional losses especially when were right there when it occurs. So you see Rapid Intervention is truly a rapid response in the hands of any amount of well trained individuals who know what to do. When the RIT arrives whether its seconds or minutes into a Mayday it just provides those reacting in the immediate area a guaranteed improved chance with a plan of action and additional resources where there may be none.

Regarding Maydays, if there's one thing that will defeat or decrease are probabilities of success its chaos.

The idea behind a well trained Rapid Intervention Company and their actions are to:

- Acknowledge receiving their assignment as the RIT. Announce their arrival at the scene through both dispatch and command.
- Bring the right personal equipment to do the job. Rope Bag, Air Supply, Irons, Thermal Imaging, Webbing, Lights, Wire Cutters. Get secondary equipment not in use from immediate vehicles in the fire area involved in the fire or incident. (k-12, ladders etc)
- Go to the sector involved in the offensive/defensive procedures not to the command post. If you don't know where the sector involved in the offensive/defensive procedures is then report to the command post. At larger incidents (high-rise, commercial, warehouse etc) report to a forward area. Check in with a sector officer. Announce your presence and sector position to command. If there is no sector established, establish it! Inform Command
- RIT to establish their presence ASAP at the proper sector of the structure involved. Preferably where the offensive procedures enter the structure. Where has the hose line made entry? Where is the primary search conducted? Are there firefighters on the second floor? In the basement? Where is the main body of fire? Where is the fire going? Who's in charge of whom?
- RIT's and their team leaders are to monitor all fire ground radio communications and to establish an additional radio channel for RIT team communications if possible. This enables the proper tracking methods regarding movement and assignments as well as actions of firefighters within the interior and on the roof. Encircling the building also provides for visual movement and accountability of firefighters.
- RIT's no longer stand around; they are physically extremely proactive like ants on an ant hill. Collecting secondary equipment such as a powered saw, ladders and even establishing a secondary or third hose line lead out if none is present to protect firefighters as well as themselves when needed.
- When RIT's are in need of equipment they should go to the nearest engine or truck and confer with the driver/operator and get it. Driver/operators should be instructed through policy that if a RIT ask's you for something you should give it up if it's still on your rig and not in use.
- Good RIT teams are proactive and allowed to function in that capacity. Seeking approval to perform proactive behaviors is time consuming and occupies radio traffic. Instead advise sectors or command personnel of your actions. If it's closed up, open it up without affecting fire conditions, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor operations of any type the RIT should raise ladders to windows, at least 2, one each, on 2 sides of a structure. RIT's are to provide more ways out of a structure for interior firefighters which also provides the RIT more ways in to get to a firefighter in distress.
- RIT's should help out on hose line advancements while insuring the integrity of the stretch (kinks, turns, doors etc).

- A RIT for the fireground should be like having a giant safety officer for Incident Command. The RIT should inform and update his sector or command on the firefight from improved conditions to worsening conditions that are or have gone un-noticed.
- RIT should continually monitor the possibilities of collapse and its warning signs. Every member of the team should have 2 sides of the structure in view at all times when not tasking.
- In the event of a Mayday RIT can help firefighters that are racing in to remain focused on protecting the rescue effort as well.

The afore mentioned proactive behaviors are just a minor glimpse into the attitudes and adjustments firefighters and their departments should be moving towards regarding Rapid Intervention. It must be remembered that throughout many areas of the country Rapid Intervention can barely exceed the expectations of the “2 In 2 Out” concepts required by OSHA and NFPA. None the less departments should still be involved and train on all aspects of firefighter rescue and survival no matter what the response or manpower situation in providing Rapid Intervention.

### **Implementation and Training**

Fire Departments no matter what the size career or volunteer should implement successful firefighter rescue and survival programs which include Rapid Intervention techniques and philosophies. Training involving these areas of firefighting should occur at least once every 60 days if not incorporated into training routines even more so. The techniques, maneuvers and skills should be simplistic but innovative and are meant to be in order to produce high success rates under extreme duress. If firefighter rescue and survival skills along with Rapid Intervention skills are becoming too complicated and unobtainable during training then it is being presented incorrectly. In the end this will cause nothing more than the unthinkable which is additional injuries and deaths on the fire ground when the real Mayday presents itself on the fireground. Departments and their administrators should seek out and send firefighters to solid programs with experienced instructors in order to bring back appropriate training and philosophies in firefighter rescue and survival. This helps guide and establish strong policies and training programs. Some of the best programs, texts and experienced instructors in the country are right out of the Midwest which the rest of the country also looks to for Rapid Intervention and firefighter rescue and survival training.

Any firefighter and line officer could be assigned to RIT functions on any given response or fire incident and therefore needs to have acquired sound techniques and maneuvers in firefighter rescue and survival. Just as important is that each and every firefighter should have thorough training in his self survival skills. This provides departments and their members an intimate understanding of what a firefighter in distress will be and should be doing during his/hers own Mayday. This allows rescuers a better chance in resolving and assisting distressed firefighters with better predictable behaviors that are known to everyone. Training has to be ingrained into behaviors repeatedly.

Implementation of appropriate and relevant operating guidelines as they pertain to each department's abilities and their mutual aid counterparts is vitally important. This means in order to have a truly successful training program in firefighter rescue and survival you need to involve your neighbors. It does little good if your department is proactive as hell while the mutual aid company arriving at your working structure fire as an assigned RIT hasn't a clue! Another finale note is the importance of standard operating guidelines on your departments and your responding neighbors when it comes to establishing RIT's on the fireground. Your RIT whether it's the thin 2-3 man team or the gracious 4-5 man team needs to be set into place ASAP within a response.

We here constantly on various radio and dispatch procedures of RIT's being put into place well behind the first in companies, sometimes so far down the line in the response that they should be called rehab teams not RIT's. This type of response serves little comfort to the men on the inside of the fire fight. It also begins looking ridiculous to the point of useless when everyone is out of the extinguished smoldering structure or even worse showing up after the Mayday with an unfavorable outcome.. Firefighters are subject to distress earlier then later at fire incidents. Having dispatch or command assign a RIT from a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> arriving engine or truck is pushing the envelope and inviting the eventual being caught with your pants down syndrome when a firefighter in distress as well as the safety of the fireground needs them NOW!

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*Lieutenant Mike Mason is the co-author of Rapid Intervention Company Operations (R.I.C.O.) on Thomson/Delmar Publications which is recognized as the largest and most comprehensive text available on Rapid Intervention.*