

FIREFIGHTERS ENTANGLED IN HVAC WIRING

SUMMARY

When firefighters report being entangled in wires, but is not in distress, a partial R.I.T. activation may be a reasonable decision. This mayday event escalates, however, due to a lack of communication with the R.I.T. team and the entangled firefighters, this event escalates.

EVENT DESCRIPTION

While at a working structure fire, engine 1 was working in the basement extinguishing all remaining fire and hot spots. The engine company officer and nozzle man became entangled in HVAC duct wiring. The nozzle man and the company officer worked on cutting themselves out with a cutting tool that all firefighters are required to carry in their gear. The company officer notified command that they were in the basement, were not in distress, and were tangled up in wiring. Command sent half of the RIT team to assist.

The engine company was working on the first floor to ensure the stairwell was protected at all times. The engine company officer attempted to contact command, but was unreadable. Command requested for the message to be repeated a second time and no answer was received. Because of this, command declared a mayday and a full RIT was sent after the engine company. As soon as county communications transferred all additional companies to an additional channel, the safety officer notified command that the firefighters were disentangled and were exiting the basement with PAR. The mayday was canceled and normal operations were continued.

The mayday was declared due to not being able to communicate. The engine company has had multiple trainings in self extrication and this training proved to be beneficial. They worked as a team and kept calm and were able to cut themselves out. The engine company self-extricated before the RIT company reached them. In addition, it was very positive that the engine company officer did not hesitate to notify command what was happening instead of waiting until they were in distress.

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TAKE AWAYS

Firefighters resorted to their level of training and kept calm and continued to attempt to disentangle themselves from the obstacle while other personnel responded to assist. Communicating the mayday, continuing to work to free themselves and keeping calm were identified as strengths in this situation and likely made it successful.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your department's policy or guideline say regarding transmitting a mayday?
 2. What does command need to know to mitigate a mayday situation?
 3. When do you transmit a mayday?
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LEADING PRACTICES

This report is a very good example for leading practices. The firefighters identified they were in trouble, communicated their situation to command to muster resources to assist and the firefighters continued to mitigate the situation themselves. The smoothness of this operation will vary due to the level of training of personnel and the type of situation that personnel are in. If conditions are terrible, the mental fitness of the firefighters will play a large role in how well they communicate and maintain their abilities to free themselves or find a way out.

Not only must firefighters prepare themselves to avoid a mayday situation, or how to handle one but it's just as important for command officers to drill. Command officers must identify their process for handling a mayday and develop their skills and mental fitness. They'll have a lot to think about on a fire scene where there's a lot going on already.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Safetystandown.org Resources](#)

[Mayday Project: Mayday by the Numbers](#)

[IAFF Fire Ground Survival Program](#)