

SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN

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Fire Department Training in Acquired Structures

Many firefighters are injured, and even killed, during training exercises each year. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) [United States Firefighter Injuries in 2019](#), more than 8,000 firefighter injuries, or 13.4% of all firefighter injuries, occurred during training. The most common injuries during training were sprains and strains (62%), and wounds / cuts (16%). There were also 75 heart attacks and 325 heat / cold stress injuries during training. Training is supposed to be a time for firefighters to develop firefighting skills and gain critical knowledge. A safe training environment is critical for firefighters to be able to focus on the lessons being taught. Practical training exercises and hands-on drills present significant challenges to fire service instructors.

Training in acquired structures especially requires a high level of planning, both in the preparation of the lesson plans and for the safety of the firefighters. New Jersey prohibits most all live burn training for fire departments except in burn buildings at approved fire academies. However, many fire departments use acquired structures and theatrical smoke to simulate fire conditions as part of a comprehensive training program. The benefits are many; varied and unfamiliar building layouts, real-life situations and decision-making opportunities, the chance to practice on real buildings and construction methods, and more. But these real buildings present many challenges to the drill ground instructor. Often these buildings are slated for demolition due to their poor condition. Creating a safe learning environment is paramount for instructors to create a successful training event.

NFPA 1403 Standard on Live Fire Training Evolutions is considered the national standard and should be the guiding document for fire departments wishing to train in acquired structures. While much of the Standard discusses live fire, several sections are relevant to non-fire training evolutions and building preparation. The Safety Directors' office has developed a [Checklist](#) to assist fire departments in meeting risk control considerations of NFPA 1403. The checklist is available on the NJCE website.

Before accepting a structure to train in, the fire department must conduct a feasibility assessment to ensure the structure is suitable and can be made safe for training. Consider if the local building inspector or engineer should be included to evaluate the structural integrity of a donated building. Some structures are so damaged that interior training is just not possible. Be prepared to refuse unsafe structures that have been offered for training.

A permit is not required from the Division of Fire Safety for non-live fire training in an acquired structure.

Training officers are encouraged to review the checklist, along with NFPA 1500 Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program, to properly safeguard firefighters before and during practical training exercises. The Office of the Safety Director has experienced fire service officers and instructors who can assist with planning drills in acquired structures.