

# Los Angeles Fire Department

## Greensheet



## FIREFIGHTER NEAR-MISS INCIDENT LANKERSHIM STRUCTURE FIRE

January 7, 2008

This report is intended as a safety and training tool, and aid to preventing future occurrences. Information contained herein is subject to revision as further investigation is conducted and additional information is developed.

# LANKERSHIM STRUCTURE FIRE FIREFIGHTER NEAR-MISS

## **SUMMARY**

On Monday, January 7, 2008 at 0713 hours a category “B” assignment was dispatched to 5303 N. Lankershim Blvd., in the North Hollywood area of Fire Station 60’s first-in district. Battalion 14 was first on scene and reported a 2 story commercial building with nothing showing. Initial investigation reported “a good fire inside”. Further investigation found fire in between the first and second floors.

The initial assignment was deployed to attack the seat of the fire and initiate vertical ventilation. The command post was established in the parking lot west of the building. The Incident Commander requested one additional Task Force and at 0724 hours OCDS dispatched an additional Task Force, RIC companies, Battalion Commander and Division Commander.

Included in the initial dispatch was Engine 76 who was assigned to the second floor. The 3 members of Engine 76 made their way up the west stairway to the second floor bringing their own 1 3/4 inch handline. During firefighting operations, while attacking the attic fire, the nozzle member ran low on air, gave the nozzle to another member and lost his way back to the stairway. During his search for the stairway he ran out of air, found his way to a window and broke it out with his axe. He was seen by members on the “B” side of the structure and successfully rescued using a 24-foot straight ladder. The member was transported to a local hospital and was treated and released. The member remained on duty.

## **INVOLVED STRUCTURE**

The fire building was a 2 story brick and heavy timber structure built in 1926 as a commercial bank building. The 53’ (A) x 110’ (B) x 60’ (C) x 73’ (D) building was located on the North West corner of Lankershim Boulevard and Weddington Street in the community of North Hollywood. The building had just completed a significant remodel and occupancy type change to include a restaurant and bar on the first floor with a nightclub and dance area on the second floor.



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## INCIDENT OVERVIEW

On Monday, January 7, 2008 at 0714 hours, a first-alarm assignment was dispatched to 5303 North Lankershim Blvd., in North Hollywood. The assignment consisted of Task Force 89, Light Force 102, Engine 76, Engine 77, Engine 78, RA 889, RA 78, EMS 12 and Battalion 14.

Although the incident was in Fire Station 60's first-in district, the dispatch did not include Task Force 60 as Light Force 60 was closed for EMT details and Engine 60 was on another response.

The initial size-up was a two-story commercial structure with nothing showing. Subsequent investigation revealed a working fire, possibly located between the floors.

Lankershim I.C. deployed the initial assignment and at 0723 Hours, Engine 76 arrived on-scene and was assigned to Fire Attack on the second floor. The Captain, Nozzle member and Hydrant member from Engine 76 proceeded to the "B" side of the structure, off Weddington Street. They took a 1-3/4" handline that had been previously flaked out by Engine 89 Engineer, up the west stairwell located at the "B / C" corner of the structure. They ascended up the stairwell attacking the attic fire. The Captain was using their infrared camera with the hydrant member pulling ceiling with a pike pole.

During firefighting operations, companies encountered heavy smoke, minimal visibility, but no heat. During firefighting operations, a portion of the ceiling collapsed onto members of Engine 76, knocking the Captain and the Hydrant member to the ground. Members of Engine 76 were pulled out from under the drywall by members from Engine 78 who had been assigned to firefighting operations on the second floor. After being assisted by Engine 78, the Captain and Hydrant member from Engine 76 continued working to pull ceiling and chasing the fire above them. The nozzle member had heard the ceiling fall but continued firefighting operations. He was unaware that he was separated from the other crewmembers of Engine 76 by approximately 8 to 10 feet.

It was not until the Nozzle member from Engine 76 first shutdown the hoseline that he became aware his SCBA low-air audible alarm was sounding. He turned to tell his crew he was low on air and needed to leave the building. He did not see members of his crew immediately behind him; he did, however, turn to his side and notice another member. He told that firefighter he was low on air, gave that firefighter the nozzle and proceeded in a direction he thought would lead him back to the stairwell.

Instead of reaching the stairwell, the Nozzle member from Engine 76 struck a wall, started



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to move along the wall and ran out of air. He attempted to depress the Emergency Trigger button on his radio, but was unable to do so due to his large, wet gloves. He removed his right glove and attempted to depress the button a second time, and was once again unable to do so. He followed the wall looking for an exit and states that he saw light and headed in that direction. Upon reaching the light, he broke out the window with his pick headed axe. He removed his helmet and utilized it to signal for help out the window. This window is located on the "B" side near the "B / C" corner of the building.

He placed his head through the opening and took a breath of air. An off-duty member alerted firefighters on the "B" side of the situation. An Emergency Traffic was announced on the Tactical Channel (18), which was heard by the trapped member. The IC acknowledged the Emergency Traffic and notified OCD, who broadcasted the Emergency Traffic over the appropriate channels. A 24' straight ladder was raised to the window and the Engineer from Fire Station 78 ascended the ladder as the member in the window disappeared from view. The Nozzle member from Engine 76, after placing his head out the window, realized he would be unable to escape with his SCBA. Knowing the ladder was coming; he went to the floor to remove his SCBA in order to effect a self-rescue. While climbing the ladder, the Engineer from 78's saw the trapped member disappear. The Engineer reached into the window and down to grab the trapped member. The Nozzle member from Engine 76 was able to exit the window under his own power.

Simultaneous to this, the Captain from Engine 76 was also running low on air; he instructed the Hydrant member to notify the Nozzle member the crew was going to exit the fire floor as a company. The Hydrant member grabbed and yelled at multiple firefighters (5 to 6) which were also headed back to the stairway from the cramped area, looking for acknowledgement from the Nozzle member from his company. Ultimately, the Hydrant member from Engine 76 received what he believed to be a positive response to his inquiry looking for the nozzle member. Believing the Nozzle member was with him, the hydrant member returned to his Captain's location to descend the stairwell and exit the building. While descending the stairs, the Captain from Engine 76 turned around to confirm that his crew was intact. It was at this time the Captain recognized that only the Hydrant member was with him. Both members immediately returned to the top of the stairwell in an effort to locate the missing Nozzle member. During their search, the Captain's air supply ran out completely and they were forced to leave the structure.

At the bottom of the stairwell, the Captain removed his face piece to initiate an Emergency Traffic; at this time he saw the Battalion Chief assigned to take over Division 2. The Captain from Engine 76 notified the Battalion Chief he was missing his nozzle member. The Battalion Chief told the Captain from Engine 76 that he believed a window rescue was in progress and that he (the BC) would confirm who was being rescued. The Battalion Chief did, in fact, confirm that the member being rescued was the Nozzle member from Engine 76.

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The Captain, and two Firefighters assigned to Engine 76 were transported to a hospital for evaluation. All three members were released to full duty the same day.

After the incident involving Engine 76, the Incident Commander made the decision to withdraw all companies from the structure to make an exterior attack on the fire. A second Emergency Traffic was then broadcast by OCD instructing all personnel to evacuate the building and all officers were directed to conduct a PAR and CAR. All members on-scene were accounted for and offensive firefighting tactics were then reinitiated to determine the location of the fire which was in the walls, ceiling and attic spaces.

A knock-down was called at approximately 0930 hours and the incident transitioned into the cause-determination and overhaul phase. A total of 28 fire companies, 11 rescue ambulances, 5 Battalion Command teams, 1 Division Command team and an Arson Unit were assigned to this incident. When RIC was fully implemented, there was a rescue team in place on each side of the structure.

### **CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**

The following have been identified as issue contributing to this incident:

1. Failure to maintain company unity.
2. Complacency, Nozzle member false sense of security as to the location of the stairwell, causing him to feel comfortable leaving the hose line.
3. Crowded work environment at top of the stairwell
  - approximately 9 members working in a 15'x 15' area
4. Separation of Engine 76 crew members due to the ceiling collapse.
5. Extremely heavy smoke conditions on second floor.
6. Complex and unique construction features
  - Double, tiled roof delaying vertical ventilation
  - Soundproofing on the walls and ceiling of the second floor delaying pulling of the ceiling
  - Blacked-out and covered windows further reducing visibility
7. Company's lack of familiarity with occupancy.
8. Extended time on air with due to difficulties locating the seat of the fire.

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**SAFETY ISSUES FOR REVIEW (BOOK 101)**

- COMPANY UNITY/INTEGRITY. All personnel must constantly maintain and monitor company integrity.
- ESCAPE ROUTE. Personnel must remember that the hose line they brought in is their lifeline out. An escape route from a structure needs to be planned and identified with all members. Personnel should always attempt to follow their hose-line out in limited or zero visibility conditions. On the majority of incidents it is almost always the same direction from where you entered and will involve reversing your direction on your hose line.
- SCBA. Members need to understand the capabilities and limitations of their SCBA. Ensure that your SCBA is at full capacity each day. Recognize the time limits each individual has with an SCBA. Closely monitor air use during emergency operations.
- USE OF EMERGENCY TRIGGER. Potential difficulty depressing Emergency Trigger button with firefighting gloves on, this needs to be practiced by all members.
- DECLARING A FIREFIGHTER EMERGENCY. Timely announcement of Emergency Traffic. There is a narrow window of survivability. Do not wait until it is too late. If you even think you are in trouble or lost, declare an emergency.
- SELF RESCUE/SURVIVAL PLAN. Time is critical. Stay calm and think. If you are with another Firefighter stay together. Retreat to a safe refuge area. Stay low, attempt to get out of building. Follow your hoseline out. If you are separated from your hoseline, stay calm, conserve your air, stay low to avoid heat and smoke and search for an exit. Activate your PASS device and flashlight. If out of air and with another Firefighter, buddy breath. Removing SCBA and re-donning may allow you to fit through a smaller opening. Hold your helmet out a window.
- FIRE ATTACK COMPANIES TRANSITIONING TO RIC. Plan for unexpected need to perform Rapid Intervention
  - DON'T RELY TOTALLY ON THE RIC TEAM
- Maintenance of Helmet ID numbers and reflective materials
- Maintenance of personal flashlights