

THE NFPA NEEDS TO RECOGNIZE REASONS TO “RIDE WHILE PUMP AND ROLLING”

The National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) states that a firefighter should ride within a “fully enclosed personnel area”. The NFPA defines a “fully enclosed personnel area” as “a driver or passenger compartment on the fire apparatus that provides total enclosure on all sides, top, and bottom and has positive latching on all access doors”.



Basically, it is saying that the firefighter should be inside the cab while the truck is in motion. This recommendation originated from the dangerous situation of firefighters riding and falling off the tailboard of fire trucks in route to a scene. Ever since, the NFPA recommends that you should not ride a truck outside the cab under any circumstances without consideration to wild land fire fighting.

The only way to effectively fight a wild land fire is to stop the head fire. There are four methods to stopping the head fire: Terrain, Mother Nature, Back-Firing and Flanking. In woodland areas, these four methods are utilized by the ground crew. Aircraft may be used to slow down the head fire giving the ground crews time to Flank the fire. In the windy Midwest during a fast-moving fine fuel fire, the Terrain and Mother Nature often don't cooperate. Because the fire is moving too fast, driven by high winds, fire personnel lose the option to Back Fire, therefore the only alternative is to Flank the fire and aircraft are often inadequate or unavailable to slow down the head fire.

The NFPA needs to recognize the importance to ride pump and roll apparatus in the fine fuel windy conditions:

- To be able to fight a fast-moving fine fuel fire that mainly occurs in the windy prairie lands of the Midwest.

A person in good shape can walk 1-2 miles per hour walking a fire line while the fire may be moving 2-10 miles per hour. The only effective way to Flank the fire is to use the ride while pump and rolling method. With a man on a nozzle, three times more fire can be put out with the same amount of water versus a remote control front monitor. This is accomplished with a rapid sweeping motion (hit the head fire, sweep back to overhaul, sweep forward to hit the head fire, sweep back to overhaul).

Hitting the head fire



Sweeping back to overhaul



- To avoid over-exertion and stress due to walking the fire line.

The average age of the rural volunteer firefighter is rising. The majority of these firefighters are in their upper 40's and 50's. I am 52, about the average age in the fire department of which I am a member. Needless to say, I am not in the physical shape that I was in my 20's and 30's. A majority of fire personnel aren't in the physical shape necessary to walk the fire line alongside a fire truck. The NFPA reports that in 2007, 39% of firefighting-related fatalities were due to over-exertion and stress. Of that 39%, 37% of the deaths were directly attributed to sudden cardiac arrest. The NFPA also reports that of that 37%, all of the individuals were over 31 with the majority over 40. The US Fire Administration (USFA) states that of the 114 firefighting-related fatalities in 2008, 50 (43.8%) were caused by stress and over-exertion.

- To provide protection while riding and pump and rolling.

Fire personnel are riding on trucks not adequately designed to ride while pump and rolling. A perfect example of this is the incident in Abilene, Texas in February 2009.



Caught on video, a truck with an inadequate design overturned alongside of a railroad track. The side rail crushed against the tank on the driver's side. Fortunately, the firefighters were riding on the passenger side and escaped major injuries. Had the firefighters been riding on the driver's side or walking alongside the driver's side, they could have been seriously injured or killed. If the firefighters would have been walking alongside the apparatus, Flanking the fire, the fire truck could have rolled over and crushed them. In my over 25 years of fighting these types of fires, I have almost been injured in an incident where I was riding on a truck that wasn't designed to ride while pump and rolling. It is this reason that makes each time a firefighter loses their life very personal.



Midwest City, OK made national news in the spring of 2009 because wild land fire destroyed numerous homes and property. Not one firefighter was walking the fire line. Because of the speed in which the fire was advancing due to high winds, walking the fire line was ineffective. Riding while pump and rolling is happening out of necessity. I asked a ranking individual in the Forest Service, stationed in the grasslands, how he fights a fine fuel fire under high wind conditions. With a very serious facial expression he stated, off the record, we call in the volunteer firefighters that ride their trucks while pump and rolling and that it is the only method we have found that has a chance in putting out the fire.



I see resentment against the NFPA from rural Midwest fire departments because they will not address the issue. These firefighters feel NFPA recommendations are being used as a marketing tool. The NFPA needs to address these issues and produce a set of provisions for fire apparatus manufacturers that build trucks designed to ride while pump and rolling.

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Another issue that needs addressed are the pump controls on the back of trucks. Last year Kansas lost a fire chief and another fireman lost his legs.

