

Rapid Intervention Team

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Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH):

29CFR Parts 1910 and 1926 defines IDLH as: “any atmosphere that poses an immediate threat to life, would cause irreversible adverse health effects, or would impair an individual’s ability to escape from a dangerous atmosphere.”

From a Firefighters point of view, an atmosphere can be considered an IDLH if the fire is beyond the incipient stage, hazardous materials exclusion (hot) zone, confined space rescue and any other atmosphere which poses a threat to life. (Any environment in which firefighters would be wearing an SCBA)

Operations

A fire attack into a structure fire beyond the incipient stage shall not be initiated until a Stand By Rescue Team/Rapid Intervention Crew has been established. Entry in a hazardous materials exclusion (hot) zone, confined space or any other IDLH atmosphere shall not be initiated until a SBRT/RIC has been established. The SBRT/RIC shall be located outside the hazardous area and be ready to provide immediate assistance to the entry team.

Rescue Exception

Entry into the IDLH atmosphere can be initiated prior to a SBRT/RIC being established only under the following condition: **Imminent Life-Threatening Situations**

This means that in the absence of a KNOWN rescue problem, the incident commander must have a stand by team (RIC).

A known rescue DOES NOT mean there is a car in the driveway of a home, the time of day or possibly the night watchman is in the building. There must be a **CONFIRMED** rescue problem for the IC to forego initial RIC. This credible report can come from dispatch or from bystanders on scene of the emergency incident. If there is a known rescue problem and the IC does forego the Two-In/Two-Out or initial RIC, it must be established as soon as possible.

If you declare a rescue exception outside a known credible report, you better be able to justify it and your actions. The declaration of a rescue exception should NOT be to go fight fire and not properly set up the ICS and command an incident.

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However, such deviations from the regulations must be exceptions and not defacto standard practices. In fact, OSHA may still issue “de minimis” citations for such deviations from the standard, meaning the citation will not require monetary penalties or corrective action. The exception is for a KNOWN LIFE RESCUE ONLY, not for standard search and rescue activities. When the exception becomes the practice, OSHA citations are authorized. [29 CFR 1910.134(g)(4)(Note 2)]

It is important to note that it is the IC’s responsibility to take care of his or her firefighters operating on the fire ground. CFR 1910 was put into place to protect firefighters. Most firefighters perish in single family residences early on in the incident. An IC who does not designate a RIC early in the incident is playing Russian roulette.

If a firefighter injury or fatality occurs and the IC has not designated a RIC, he or she can and will be held liable.

The RIC Captain should come to the Incident Command Post (ICP) to get an idea of where companies are being assigned. This will give him or her an idea where companies may become trapped. The rest of the crew should circle the building looking for ways to soften the structure. This includes removing security bars, securing utilities, opening roll up doors and placing halogen lights at all of the entrances.

A looming debate occurs over how much a RIC can get involved with firefighting operations. Should they be in a stand-by mode, or can they help with operations? A RIC is established to ensure firefighter safety. This is their number one priority. If they are engaged in strenuous activity and are too taxed to perform a rescue they will be ineffective. They also need to be completely dressed and ready to spring into action. This means whatever they may get involved with must not require breathing air from their SCBA. They may also engage in minor tasks that are not too far away from where the RIC cache of equipment is established.

When assigned to RIC, the officer should do the following things:

- Proceed to the ICP and get a general layout of where companies are assigned and where potential problems are likely to develop.
- Formulate a RIC plan
- Develop a cache of RIC equipment including: Thermal imaging camera, extra SCBA, ropes and carriers, backboard or SKED
- Assign his/her crew to soften the structure
- Place lights at all openings
- Ensure the removal of security bars and opening of roll up doors
- Compete a 360° of the structure