



Mecklenburg County Guidelines: Mayday Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) Emergency Evacuation

Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to provide a uniform procedure for Mayday situations, Deployment of a Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) and Emergency Evacuation situations for the fire departments that contract with Mecklenburg County.

This guideline will assist in managing the rescue of lost, trapped, or distressed firefighters. It will also provide basic guidelines for firefighters to follow if they become lost or trapped.

The rescue of trapped or lost fire fighters in a burning building is especially time sensitive. There is a narrow window of survivability for a fire fighter who is quickly depleting their air supply from their Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) or trapped by approaching fire. Individual fire fighters must not delay reporting to Command if they become lost, trapped or in need of assistance. Fire Officers must also not delay the reporting of lost fire fighters or inability to complete accountability reports. Incident Commanders and Fire Officers must always assume that the missing fire fighter is lost in the building until the fire fighter can be accounted for. Command must also restructure the strategy and action plan to include a high priority rescue effort.

MAYDAY Procedure

The radio message “May-Day” will be used by lost or trapped fire fighters to report their status as being in trouble and needing rescue. The firefighter may also activate the radio emergency button if possible to insure communications with a dispatcher and confirm the RIT is activated. Any member may use May-Day to report a lost fire fighter. Any report of May-Day will receive priority radio traffic followed by the emergency traffic tone. The term May-Day will be reserved ONLY to report lost or trapped fire fighters. The term “emergency traffic” will be used to report other emergencies.

It is imperative that all firefighters know and understand the procedure, as it will be the sole method for firefighters who find themselves or others in a life-threatening situation to communicate such an emergency at any incident.

A Mayday should be declared when any of the following situations occur:

A firefighter becomes lost or disoriented in a burning building, becomes entangled, is in danger of depleting their SCBA air supply in an Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH) atmosphere, becomes trapped, pinned, or prevented from leaving the IDLH environment, structural collapse has occurred, trapping firefighters (interior or exterior), operating inside a burning building is injured or incapacitated, or any other event that places a firefighter in immediate danger and may necessitate assistance or by the company, group officer or other member who cannot account for an assigned fire fighter who is operating in the hazard zone. The Mayday would generally occur following a Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) that fails to locate/account for the suspected lost member by a member who witnesses or has confirmed that a fire fighter is lost or in trouble.

When any firefighter encounters any of the above situations, he or she should immediately transmit a Mayday. It is a firefighter's nature to exhaust every possible means of escape before calling for help. However, on a fire scene, this could be a fatal mistake. As soon as the situation is realized, a Mayday should be declared.

Procedures for transmitting a Mayday:

Communicate to Central "May-Day". This term is reserved only for firefighters in trouble. Central will then immediately relay the information to the Incident Commander. Communicate to Central/Command the following information:

The radio message shall begin with; "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday," and shall include the following information:

- L - Location (i.e., floor/quadrant/wing)
- U - Unit (i.e., Engine 2)
- N- Name (i.e., F/F Smith)
- A - Assignment (i.e., checking for extension)
- R -Resources needed (i.e., ceiling fell, need manpower)

Include pertinent information of physical condition, status of SCBA and other beneficial information:

Firefighter: "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. This is Firefighter Smith with Name of Department). I have fallen through the floor into the basement and I can't find the way out, I am not trapped but I think my leg is broken. I entered the structure on Division A. I am running low on air."

Manually activate PASS device and leave it activated to draw attention to the area where assistance is needed.

Conserve your air – Stay calm, practice air consumption procedures, such as "skip-breathing."

Attempt to self-extricate –You must try everything in your power to remove yourself from the situation. Do not give up unless you are physically unable to extricate yourself. Try to find a way out, and relay your progress to Command and the Rapid Intervention Team (RIT).

Any change in location, status, condition, etc., shall be reported via a radio message. Be sure to turn off PASS before communicating over the radio. Once the radio message is sent activate the PASS again.

Incident Command (IC) Procedures for a Mayday Incident

If a Mayday is declared, the Incident Commander should immediately take the following steps:

1. Order all non-emergency traffic over the radio to cease. An "urgent message" notification should be sounded to alert all personnel working on scene of the Mayday situation. A firefighter rescue will require radio discipline.
2. **Do not abandon firefighting efforts! If anything, commit more resources to firefighting efforts to buy time for the RIT team.** Efforts should be made to keep fire from spreading into

the area where the firefighter rescue is taking place. Command and crews should take aggressive measures to protect trapped or missing fire fighters from the effects of the fire. Efforts should be concentrated on reinforcing existing positions and keeping the fire out of the rescue area and providing appropriate ventilation and lighting. In some situations it may be appropriate to write off some areas of the building in order to relocate companies and crews to better protect the rescue effort.

3. Activate the Rapid Intervention Team (More than one RIT team may be activated if conditions dictate). Replace the RIT team(s) with another team as soon as they are committed.
4. RIT Team Operations shall be conducted on a channel as directed by Command
5. Immediately request two (2) additional departments, along with additional MEDIC units.
6. Cease primary search activities – **At this point, the downed firefighter is priority!!** Prepare to re-allocate these resources. If a search crew is operating in the immediate area of the downed firefighter, they may be committed to rescue efforts, along with the RIT team. However, it is critical that efforts be coordinated between the different crews.
7. Command shall obtain important information from the downed firefighter (LUNAR) and request frequent radio updates from the downed firefighter in reference to his condition. This information should be relayed to the RIT team.
8. If available, place a Chief Officer over rapid intervention / rescue efforts. This Chief Officer will be in charge of the “Rescue Group.” This group leader will be responsible for coordinating rescue efforts, and must keep in close contact with the Incident Commander.
9. Request Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) from all units on scene. An officer should be assigned as Accountability Officer. The PAR shall take place on the fireground channel.
10. Assign a Safety Officer (Ideally a Chief Officer) to the rescue operation that may be taking place in post-collapse conditions or a flashover environment. Emotions may be high and fire fighters will tend to want to free-lance and take chances. A Safety Officer must be assigned to monitor activity and evaluate the safety of the operation. An available chief officer should assume this position as soon as possible. Other Safety Officer responsibilities will be to conduct an assessment of the hazards, thus, allowing time for the rescue group officer to concentrate on the critical rescue effort.
11. Obtain frequent updates from the RIT team, as well as Division leaders and crews involved in suppression activities. These updates should include progress reports, along with fire and structural conditions.
12. Closely monitor fire conditions and structural stability. This is the responsibility of all personnel on the fire scene.
13. Open all doors and windows if appropriate. If doors and windows can be opened without adversely affecting the fire, do so immediately. If not, unlock the doors, but leave them closed.
14. Ensure that ventilation is performed – The chance of survival is increased with decreased smoke and heat conditions. This also enhances search and rescue capabilities with increased visibility and less extreme conditions.
15. After firefighter is rescued, immediately obtain a PAR. After all personnel are accounted for, consider a change in strategy (offensive to defensive).

A Mayday situation requires strong leadership to coordinate search activities and to deal with a very emotional situation. Limit free-lancing, and restrict rescue personnel to only the number needed.

The abandonment of rescue efforts will be a difficult decision, and will most likely be highly contested by personnel on the scene. However, if survival of the downed firefighter is no longer likely, and fire / structural conditions significantly increase the risk of additional firefighter fatalities, interior personnel should be withdrawn.

Rapid Intervention Team

The Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) primary purpose is locating and rescuing firefighters that are missing or trapped. For the safety of all personnel on the fire ground and for efficient fire ground operations, it is imperative that at least one dedicated rapid intervention team is available for rapid deployment. The rapid intervention team must be equipped with the necessary tools and equipment to perform their task.

A rapid intervention team shall be implemented at incidents involving an IDLH atmosphere and other incidents where firefighters are subject to hazards not involving an IDLH atmosphere including but not limited to the following:

- Hazardous materials Incidents
- Trench rescue
- Confined space rescue

Upon declaration of a working fire by on scene personnel the Incident Commander will advise "Central" of a "Working Fire." The working fire protocol will automatically re-tone all departments originally assigned and advise of a "working fire." The IC shall assign a rapid intervention team/s to the incident as needed. The IC shall immediately request sufficient resources to insure that a RIT is in position at the incident.

The rapid intervention team shall be fully equipped and position their team as directed by command. The RIT shall monitor the operations channel until redirected by command at time of deployment. At the direction of command the team should deploy immediately upon a report of a lost or trapped firefighter. The proper equipment should be readied and utilized as needed. The following equipment should be considered for deployment during an incident:

- a. Portable Radio (each person)
- b. Flashlight (each person)
- c. Forcible entry tools
- d. Search rope
- e. RIT Pack
- f. Thermal Imaging Camera
- g. 24ft ladder
- h. Chainsaw
- i. Rotary saw w/ metal cutting ability
- j. 6ft Pike pole or firefighting "hook"
- k. Wire Cutters
- l. Sprinkler / door wedges

The rapid intervention team shall assume a ready state at the incident and consider the following:

Standby Mode - While in standby mode, the RIT team leader shall:

- Gather the above equipment and stage close to Command.
- Scan the fire ground for potential problems.
- Look for ingress and egress locations.
- Scan windows for firefighters in trouble.
- Monitor exterior fire conditions.
- Know the approximate location of interior teams.
- Monitor radio closely for "Mayday" calls or orders from command to activate the team.

Reasons for Deployment:

- Structure Collapse
- Flashover
- Backdraft
- Rapid increase in fire conditions
- A "Mayday" call
- Visualization of an event in which firefighters are known to be in trouble.
- Activation by Command

Pre-Search Procedures:

- Once a "Mayday" is received all RIT Team radio communications shall be conducted on a channel as directed by command.
- Obtain the LUNAR report from Command.
- Select equipment needed for the rescue.
- Determine best entry point.
- Ensure that all team members have appropriate tools.
- Notify Command that entry is in progress. If needed ensure a protective hoseline will be coming in behind the team.

Entry and Search Procedures:

- Upon entering the Team Leader should have the Thermal Imaging Camera.
- Vent as you go to effect ventilation for visibility.
- Upon reaching downed firefighter notify Command.
- Approach the downed firefighter cautiously due to possible panic reaction.
- Deactivate the downed firefighters PASS alarm.
- Notify Command of the firefighter's status and request any additional resources you may need.
- Perform assessment, air supply changeover, extrication and removal.
- Notify Command that the team is egressing and have EMS standing by.

When searching for a lost member, rescue crews should consider the following:

- Visible sighting of trapped fire fighters such as arms or legs.
- Knowledge of their last known location.
- The sound of the PASS devices audible tones.

Shouts for help from the collapsed area.
Tapping noise, etc.
Sounds of portable radio broadcast in the collapse area.
Breathing, moaning sounds.
The sound of the S.C.B.A. alert sounding.
Radio request for help from portable radios from within the collapse area.
Tracing attack hose lines into the collapse area.
Tracing of line into the area.
Evidence of building structures or locations that were described by lost fire fighters.
Flashlight beams.
Location of ladders, fans, lights, or other equipment being used by missing fire fighters.
Unlock all doors and open doors as needed for ventilation.
Search the immediate area of doorway first.
Search hallways before interior rooms.
Search exterior walls (interior sides) before searching interior open spaces.
Search large interior spaces in a detailed grid pattern.
Ensure all areas are searched.
Take one R.I.T.-S.C.B.A. Rescue Kit for each lost fire fighter in the search area.
Use lifelines when searching "off hoseline" to ensure safety of rescuers

Emergency Evacuation Description

An Emergency Evacuation Signal will be initiated when personnel on the scene recognize the imminent collapse of a structure during firefighting operations or any change in conditions during an incident that will endanger personnel.

Emergency Evacuation Procedure

All observations of building and/or incident conditions recognized as an impending threat to personnel will be reported to the Incident Commander for immediate action.

Once the situation has been reported to the Incident Commander, **Only** the IC will give an order to sound the evacuation signal.

The evacuation sound shall be as follows:

- Apparatus on scene shall sound four cycles of three blasts on the air horn with a five second pause between each cycle. The cycle of air horn blasts shall sound for approximately one minute.
- Central shall also sound the emergency evacuation (Alert 3) tone and advise all units to evacuate the structure.

All firefighting and/or rescue activities will cease and an accountability of personnel will begin immediately. Upon conclusion of a successful (PAR) personnel account report the incident commander may order fireground operations to continue as conditions permit.