

# LADDER COMPANY OPERATIONS

Saving of life is the primary ladder company role. The functions of ventilation, entry, and search (VES) implement that role, and at the same time facilitate confinement and extinguishment of the fire by engine companies. Ladder companies do not operate autonomously, but in coordination with engine companies in carrying out a joint aggressive interior attack.

FDNY ladder company doctrine is based on multiple dwelling operations in general and tenements in particular. Although both post-1929 apartments and projects are larger, the narrow but deep tenement with its wood interior, limited fire stopping, lessened likelihood of building stability, and open stairway construction in older buildings presents the greatest problem to firefighters. Ladder company operations in other building types are variations of tenement basics.

Until October, 2000, ladder company operation at structural fires employed both team and semi-individual operations. However, implementation of Federal OSHA safety rules at that time required that firefighters enter the fire structure only in teams of two or more except when there is a known life hazard. This change impacts operations of the Outside Vent, Roof, and Chauffeur firefighters, who previously operated semi-independently and who made individual entry into the fire building. They must now team up with one another or another member before making entry except when there is a known life hazard. The new procedures also require that a safety team be available. See "IDLH Operations" for further details.

Truck work is demanding and dangerous. At a recent annual Medal Day, 33 awards were made for heroic actions. Twenty-three went to ladder company personnel and four to rescue personnel performing ladder company-type functions. Eleven went to Outside Vent firefighters.

## LADDER COMPANY RESPONSIBILITIES

The first-arriving ladder is responsible for:

- operations on the fire floor;
- determining the life hazard and making rescues as required;
- venting the roof and checking rear and sides from the roof;
- laddering as needed;
- search and rescue above the fire if the second ladder is not on the scene.

The second-arriving ladder handles:

- operations above the fire floor including search, removal, ventilation, and checking for extension of the fire;
- assisting in roof ventilation if needed;
- checking sides and rear of the building;
- augmenting ladder and removal operations if needed.

## STAFFING and EQUIPMENT

Ladder company staffing is one officer and five firefighters, comprising an inside team and outside team. Riding positions and equipment are standardized:

Inside Team	Officer	Hand light, officer's tool
	Forcible Entry (Irons)	Axe or maul, Halligan, Rabbit tool
	Extinguisher (Can)	6-foot hook, Extinguisher
Outside Team	Outside Vent	6-foot hook, Halligan, saw on top floor fires
	Roof	6-foot hook, Halligan, life-saving rope
	Chauffeur	Tool(s) as required

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All ladder company members have a flashlight, safety harness, and a 25-foot utility cord. All but the Extinguisher and Forcible Entry firefighters have radios, although some battalions have radios for one or both of those positions. A 40-foot personal rope is not now carried, pending changes in guidelines.

## ENROUTE PROCEDURES

While responding to the scene, the officer monitors the borough radio channel while the chauffeur monitors the tactical channel on a handheld radio. The inside team generally rides on the right side of the apparatus, the OV (on rearmounts and tower ladders) and Roof on the left.

When possible, the first-arriving ladder company follows the first engine to the front of the fire building. The engine passes the building entrance allowing the ladder to position itself as required by immediate needs. If the first-due engine and ladder come from opposite directions, the ladder stops short of the intended engine company hydrant, the crew (less the driver and tiller man) proceeds to fire building on foot, and the ladder moves into position once the engine connects to the hydrant. Meanwhile, instructions are radioed to the second ladder company if its standard operations must be altered.

Upon arrival, company officers conduct their sizeup using the 13 factors shown in "Engine Company Operations." All members do a visual check as they approach the fire building noting visible life hazards, number of floors, adjoining buildings, number of front windows on each floor, party balconies, fire escapes, and the location of the fire floor and the fire.

## IMMEDIATE RESCUE

If a rescue must be attempted immediately upon arrival, the company officer directs the chauffeur to place the apparatus at the proper distance from the building and to align the turntable with the objective. The chauffeur is assisted in placing the apparatus by the Outside Vent firefighter (OV). Once the ladder is in place, the chauffeur and OV use the ladder to effect the rescue. When more than two occupants require rescue, one member of the forcible entry team assists. Meanwhile, the officer and the remainder of the company enter the building to attempt an interior rescue. The preferred order for occupant removal is interior stairs, horizontal exits, fire escapes, ladders, and last, life saving rope.

When entry must be made and the only company on the scene is a ladder, the OV and FE firefighters constitute the safety team. When only an engine and ladder are on the scene, the safety team is the Control FF and the OV. Entry is then made by other members in both cases.

## VENTILATION

The first element of VES is ventilation, which is carried out for two purposes: venting for fire to make it possible for engine company personnel to enter and extinguish the fire, and venting for life to facilitate entry when there is a known or suspected life hazard. The latter may involve "pulling the fire" to facilitate search and rescue operations, and is often hazardous. Prevention of explosions and control of the spread of the fire are also recognized as reasons to ventilate.

Vertical ventilation starts with opening the roof bulkhead door, scuttle, and skylights. It is normally carried out by the Roof firefighter, who may be assisted by the Roof firefighter of the second arriving ladder company. Additional openings are made as necessary, and may include roof cuts, usually 3x6-feet, and perpendicular to supporting cross members. Top floor ceilings below must be pushed down to complete the opening. At advanced top floor fires, an entire ladder or rescue company may be deployed to the roof, especially in buildings with "energy efficient" windows. Initial roof operations are not considered "entry" for safety purposes.