



TOWN OF CANTON VOLUNTEER Fire & EMS Department

Valuing Life...at a Moment's Notice



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Distribution

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As Temperatures Drop, Canton's Firefighters Get Wet to Keep You Safe

Canton, CT February, 2010.... River freezing over? Time for Canton's volunteer firefighters to take the plunge and conduct a series of cold water rescue scenarios that, experience says, they will likely encounter during the winter and early spring months.

"We've pulled fishermen out of still frigid water in early spring and rescued people who run out onto the frozen river after pets, only to become victims themselves," recalls Town of Canton Volunteer Fire & EMS Department Chief Richard Hutchings. "Each year, we drill to ensure that we're ready with the right pre-planning, training and equipment to save lives."

"When someone falls into the cold water, the first instinct of both firefighters and witnesses," notes Hutchings, "is to take action and jump in. That is exactly the wrong thing to do. That's how we end up with a multiple victim emergency."

Instead, cold water rescues - done right - follow a number of critical, tactical options that evolve with the circumstances of the emergency.

Step I: The Rescue Team. Because the current under ice may be strong enough to drag both rescuer and victim under, cold water rescue teams always consist of two firefighters per victim; the first firefighter remains on land holding a safety rope tethered to a second firefighter who dons a thermal dry suit and will be executing the actual rescue. In addition, as in all emergency situations, EMS personnel stand by to administer critical care to the victim(s) and to monitor the condition of rescuers.

Step II: The Evolution of a Rescue. If victims are able to assist in their own rescue, firefighters first attempt to **REACH** them using hand tools such as pike poles or even ladders placed on the ice. If victims are further offshore, firefighters **THROW** polyethylene safety rope out to them to grab onto.

When, however, the victim is injured, suffering from hypothermia or otherwise unable to assist in their own rescue, firefighters **ROW** or even slide the Department's inflatable boat, Marine I, out to them.

As the emergency escalates, firefighters may have to **GO** in for the rescue by either physically crawling over the ice or even swimming out to the victim. This is the most dangerous of all rescue options. Victims suffering from hypothermia have been known to attack their rescuers, further endangering them both.

In the **GO** option, the firefighter ties a rope around the victim, then clips that rope onto the main tether line of their thermal dry suit. The firefighter on shore then hauls them both to safety.

"It's not any more high tech than that," stresses Hutchings. "No fancy equipment, just training and experience. In winter, conditions deteriorate quickly. This impacts the weather, the integrity of ice on the water and ultimately the ability of the victim to survive. So, the sooner Canton's volunteer firefighters & EMTs are called in, the better the chance that everyone gets to go home alive."

Anyone interested in becoming a member of the Town of Canton Volunteer Fire & EMS Department can visit www.cantonfireandems.org, or drop by the Collinsville, North Canton or Canton firehouses any Monday evening during The Department's weekly practice drill at 7:30 p.m.

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