



TOWN OF CANTON VOLUNTEER Fire & EMS Department

Valuing Life...at a Moment's Notice



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Distribution

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MAYDAY! MAYDAY! MAYDAY!

Canton's Volunteer Firefighters Train to Prevent their Ultimate Sacrifice

Canton, CT January, 2010.... “Fire Alarm, we have a second emergency here. Get people up on this floor now or we are going to die! We have no air and we cannot breathe!” On Dec/1999, at a Worcester, Massachusetts warehouse fire, four firefighters died trying to rescue two of their own who also perished in the smoke and confusion.

On August 2007, twenty-seven minutes after a Houston, Texas Fire Captain gasped the words, “*Mayday, Mayday! I'm out of air.... I'm out of air!*” into his portable radio, fire crews, with the assistance of a specially trained Rapid Intervention Team, located and rescued him from the smoke of a structure fire.

Mayday is the universal code word for a firefighter in trouble. They may be injured; trapped beneath a collapsed ceiling or floor; disoriented in the hazardous smoke or separated from their fire crew. Within a short period of time, they *will be* out of air.

“Every Incident Commander,” says Town of Canton Volunteer Fire & EMS Department Chief Richard Hutchings, “has spent sleepless nights wondering how to ensure that everyone comes home alive. As with so many things in the fire service, that answer lies in planning and training for the worst case scenarios.”

To that end, Fire Deputy Chief Michael Krupa, Fire Lieutenant Mathew Bilts, volunteer firefighters Joe Ouimette and J.T. Lederman were recently certified as a Rapid Intervention Team, (RIT), through the Connecticut Fire Academy. In turn, they brought this knowledge back to the Department in a series of training sessions and drills that imparted this critical expertise to other Canton volunteer firefighters.

“The sole responsibility of the RIT crew,” explains Bilts, “is the rescue of a downed firefighter(s). In that role, they must continuously examine the evolving conditions at a fire scene by monitoring fire ground communications; observing where fire personnel are working; taking note of any obstacles that may impede the rescue of those firefighters; and planning for the types of tools and equipment, (a spare SCBA, mask, rescue rope, cutting tools, etc.), they will require if a Mayday is transmitted over the radio.”

Once a Mayday is received, another dimension and priority has been added to the emergency fire scene. The main radio channel that had been used during the initial fire emergency is cleared of all traffic and used exclusively to communicate with the trapped firefighter. Then the RIT crew goes into action.

Once the RIT crew has located the fallen firefighter, job #1 is to ensure that he/she has sufficient air. Command is notified of their location, the conditions they now find themselves in and any additional resources that may be needed to extricate the trapped firefighter.

“By the time a firefighter sends a Mayday,” emphasizes Bilts, “they are already in troubleand they are dying. Through RIT training, Canton’s volunteer firefighters are better prepared to survey the critical markers on the fire scene; determine multiple contingency plans of action and ultimately execute the type of rescue that no firefighter ever wants to have to make – the rescue of one of our own.”

Anyone interested in becoming a member of the Town of Canton Volunteer Fire & EMS Department can visit www.cantonfireandems.org, or drop by 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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