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“Plan Your Practical Training “At” the New Firehouse”

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One of the biggest challenges of any department is providing the needed hands on, practical training for the firefighters. For paid departments the training usually results in dedicating so many hours per year of the firefighters “on the clock” time to send them to the proper facilities. This increases the department budget by duplicating personnel needed to cover the one away at training. The volunteer departments face the problem of finding opportunities for their personnel to have time away from their regular jobs for training, which usually means evenings or weekends. Much of this training will require that valuable apparatus be out of service as well. Out of service personnel and apparatus will have adverse effects on your ISO ratings. None of these scenarios are unfamiliar to any department.

While most stations have some sort of space that can be used for classroom training, very few have the luxury of an *emergency training center* on site. Understanding that fact, let us consider how you can achieve some much needed and required training through some fairly inexpensive additions to your new facility. Some of these ideas can even be incorporated into your existing buildings for very little money.

Inside Training Opportunities

If your new facility is to be a multi-story building, it will have to include stairwells. Most stairwells are configured in a “scissor” pattern – back and forth with two landings per vertical floor. By adding another five to six feet to the width of the stairwell, a clear vertical space can be accommodated with the stairs wrapping around it. This vertical space can even be enclosed to create a shaft if desired. The resulting vertical space can be utilized with rope training from floor to floor. If the vertical space is enclosed, an elevator shaft simulator is formed. Since the stairwell is likely already rated, the training shaft should not have to be rated. The vertical and horizontal spaces in the stairwell can also be configured with large diameter plastic or metal pipes for confined space rescue training.

Most buildings will have an above ceiling or attic type space. These spaces are normally a maze of framing, ducts, conduits, etc. Once the building operating systems are put in place, a narrow catwalk (or catcrawl) can be looped through the overhead space. Numerous training opportunities exist with such a platform. Care must be taken to provide side rails. Also, the attic access hatch should be planned for a lot of wear and tear.

There are many training opportunities that can be built into the apparatus or support spaces. If the building is to be fire protected, consider housing the riser in an alcove or corner of the apparatus bays. The firefighters need training around a riser pipe so why not use your riser for that purpose. Be sure to plan enough room around the riser so that groups can be gathered for instruction. If the riser is close to a vehicle bay, be sure to place a steel bollard between it and the “wayward” vehicle. Even if your building is not protected, a simulated riser can be set up in the bays for training purposes.

Most stations have enough height to accommodate some sort of storage or mechanical mezzanine as part of the apparatus support spaces. There are several training revolutions that can be planned in conjunction with the mezzanine. The wall that separates the mezzanine from the apparatus bays can include several door and window openings. These openings are excellent props for ladder training when the weather may be bad outside. The extra space in a mezzanine can also be configured with large, portable, plastic pipe for confined space rescue training. These pipes can even penetrate the mezzanine floor for greater vertical challenges. Strategically placing a roof hatch in the floor of the mezzanine to a storage space below, allows for simulated rooftop training. If the apparatus bays are to have mezzanines on each side, consider placing upper doors or windows to each mezzanine that align. Hooks and pulleys can be added to the overhead structure that will allow basket rigging and rescue training from one mezzanine to the other.

Outside Training Opportunities

If the building is to be multi-story, the stairwells will likely be placed on the outside perimeter. By incorporating large, operable window openings in the upper levels of the stairwell, you can gain valuable ladder training opportunities from below. Placing outside door openings at each upper level of the stairwell will allow for rope training. Just be sure to plan on the landing pad below and the anchoring mechanisms for the ropes.

Many of you are already using the large, plastic pipes for confined space rescue training on your grounds. Planning the locations of these props during the facility design will help guarantee their success. You may also want to have several sections of the pipe buried during construction with both ends surfacing so that you can incorporate these underground portions with the above ground pipe. This will increase your ability to reconfigure your confined space “trail”, thus keeping even the old-timers on their toes with different challenges.

With a little more space and money, a drafting pit can be placed on site to test your pumpers and personnel. Depending on the capacity of your apparatus, a single pit or two pits will be necessary. These normally will take no more space than the average dumpster pad. In order to work correctly these pits must be designed properly and will likely cost over ten thousand dollars each.

Conclusion

Most of the training opportunities mentioned can be incorporated into the design of a new facility for between five to twenty thousand dollars. The valuable training received, not to mention keeping your personnel and apparatus in service during training, is well worth the money and preplanning.