

Scene Size Up

As you pull up in front of the actual fire building, the five-point size-up begins. We will use the acronym B.E.L.O.W.

"B"-building. As you report on the scene, give a quick radio report of the fire building. Most times a simple "Engine 1 is on the scene with a working fire in a 2 1/2-story frame, fire on the first floor" will suffice for a house fire.

While conducting the building part of your size-up, cover the following points as well. Evaluate the room's layout or the building's floor plan. Note the locations of windows and doors, for egress and possible emergency exiting later. Anything you can determine from the outside can only help you once you are inside

Type of construction: wood frame, lightweight truss assemblies, masonry, steel.

Fire's effect on the building: collapse potential, avenues of fire spread.

"E"-the extent and location of fire in the building. Many times, this is obvious as you pull up in front of the fire building. Fire venting out of two front bedroom windows is a good tip-off of the location of the main body of fire. But sometimes, we are confronted with just the opposite.

Visible smoke can help you identify what is burning and where in the building the fire might be located.

The amount of fire and the location from which it is showing can indicate how much fire is present.

The officer should try to identify where in the building the main fire is located, what is actually burning, and how much fire there is.

Visible smoke: volume, color, intensity. Visible fire: volume, intensity, access to fire area.

"L"-life hazards. The life hazard in a burning building can be broken down into two categories-civilians and firefighters. The people trapped in burning buildings deserve our best attempt to try to remove them safely. We should be able to recognize what is a survivable atmosphere and what is not.

If victims are visible from the exterior, assess the degree of danger to them. Do they represent the more severe life hazard, or are they the people who have not reached an exterior opening yet? If the people are in imminent danger, their removal becomes a priority. The number and ages of the victims will determine how many firefighters will be needed to assist them to safety.

If reports of people trapped are given by people on-scene or repeated over the radio, the priority changes to that of interior search. Make all personnel operating and arriving on the fireground aware of the new information. Depending on fire conditions, the time of day, and the available personnel, victim removal or search may take priority over other fireground operations. One very important point to remember, however, is that more lives are saved by properly positioning and operating the first handline than by any other fireground tactic. So even with reduced staffing, putting water on the fire remains a high priority. Once we put water on the fire, usually everything else gets better-but not always.

Strategic Considerations

Reported life hazards: radio reports, civilians on location.

Visible life hazards: degree of danger, ease of removal, available personnel.

Search operations: primary, secondary, victim removal.

"O"-occupancy. Even when dealing with house fires, there are some variables to consider. Group homes, foster homes, and houses where the owner runs a home business all can change the "occupancy" of the building. Woodworking shops with different varnishes, stains, and cleaners and home gunsmiths may increase the fire load beyond what would normally be expected in a private home.

"W"-water supply. Water supply plays a very important role in fire attack. The engine company cannot move in on a fire without water. The truck company cannot complete its searches without water.

What are the important aspects of water supply? Which size lines should you use? When dealing with a fire in a private home, how much water should you anticipate needing? Where should the initial handline be stretched?

As for handline selection, the bigger the fire, the bigger the hand-line. Pretty simple. Handlines of 1 3/4-inch size can be used on most fires in private dwellings and apartments. An exception to this rule is when the operating forces are confronted with a heavy body of fire, especially in a house. When the fire has control of the entire first floor of a home, the stretching of a large handline, such as a 2 1/2-inch line, will help to rapidly knock down the heavy fire. This line does not have to be advanced throughout the entire first floor; it can be operated from an area inside the front door and be used to knock down as much fire as possible. Once the heavy fire has been knocked down, a smaller line can be used for final extinguishment.

Once you select the proper size handline, which location should you stretch it to? For most house fires, stretch the first line to the front door. If you consider a fire in a multistory private dwelling, the interior stairs to the upper floors are usually, not always, found near the front of the house. That fact, coupled with the fact that 90 percent of today's fire departments stretch a preconnected handline first, almost rules out stretching to the rear of the house to attack the fire from the unburned rear of the structure.

Second and third lines also have rules for deployment. The second line should always go to the same position as the first, as a backup line. After checking with the officer of the first line and finding that there are no difficulties, this line can now go to the floor above the fire.

Third lines should also check on the progress of previous lines to ensure that they are okay. Once they are sure that all is well, they can go to an area determined by the incident commander or by need. This line should have sufficient hose to cover the entire building.