

International Association of Fire Chiefs

**The 10 Rules of Engagement
for
Structural Fire Fighting**

and the Acceptability of Risk



**Prepared by the
ICHIEFS Health and Safety Committee
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ACCEPTABILITY OF RISK

All fire fighting and rescue operations involve an inherent level of risk to fire fighters.

- A basic level of risk is recognized and accepted, in a measured and controlled manner, in efforts that are routinely employed to save lives and property. *These risks are not acceptable in situations where there is no potential to save lives or property.*
- A higher level of risk is acceptable only in situations where there is a *realistic potential* to save known endangered lives. This elevated risk must be limited to operations that are *specifically directed toward rescue* and where there is a *realistic potential to save the person(s) known to be in danger.*

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT FOR STRUCTURAL FIREFIGHTING

All structural fire fighting operations involve an inherent level of risk to fire fighters. All feasible measures shall be taken to limit or avoid these risks through risk assessment, constant vigilance and the conscientious application of safety policies and procedures.

- The exposure of fire fighters to an elevated level of risk is acceptable only in situations where there is a realistic potential to save known endangered lives.
- *No property is worth the life of a fire fighter.*
- *No risk to the safety of fire fighters is acceptable in situations where there is no possibility to save lives or property.*
- Fire fighters shall not be committed to interior offensive fire fighting operations in abandoned or derelict buildings that are known or reasonably believed to be unoccupied.

RISK ASSESSMENT

It is the responsibility of the incident commander to evaluate the level of risk in every situation. This risk evaluation shall include an assessment of the presence, survivability and potential to rescue occupants. When there is no potential to save lives, firefighters shall not be committed to operations that present an elevated level of risk.

An incident command system shall be established, beginning with the arrival of the first fire department member at the scene of every incident. The incident commander must conduct an initial risk analysis to consider the risk to fire fighters in order to determine the strategy and tactics that will be employed.

The responsibility for risk assessment is a continuous process for the entire duration of each incident. The incident commander shall continually reevaluate conditions to determine if the level of risk has changed and a change in strategy or tactics is necessary. The incident commander shall assign one or more safety officers to monitor and evaluate conditions to support this risk analysis.

At a minimum the risk analysis for a structure fire shall consider:

Building Characteristics

- Construction type and size
- Structural condition
- Occupancy and contents

Fire Factors

- Location and extent of the fire
- Estimated time of involvement
- What are smoke conditions telling us?

Risk to Building Occupants

- Known or probable occupants
- Occupant survival assessment

Fire Fighting Capabilities

- Available resources
- Operational capabilities and limitation

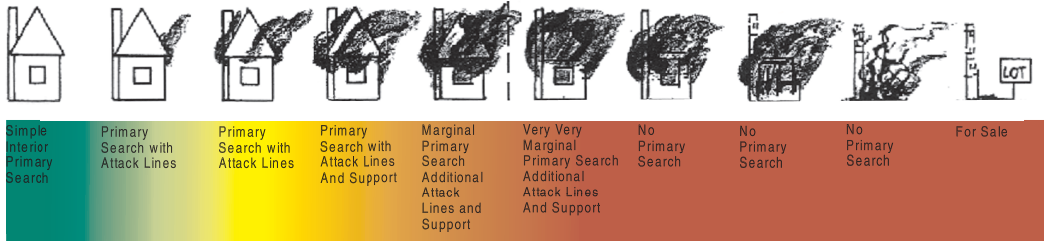
10 Rules of Engagement for Structural Fire Fighting

Acceptability of Risk

- 1 No building or property is worth the life of a fire fighter.
- 2 All interior fire fighting involves an inherent risk.
- 3 Some risk is acceptable, in a measured and controlled manner.
- 4 No level of risk is acceptable where there is *no potential to save lives or savable property*.
- 5 Fire fighters shall not be committed to interior offensive fire fighting operations in abandoned or derelict buildings.

Risk Assessment

- 1 All feasible measures shall be taken to limit or avoid risks through risk assessment by a qualified officer.
- 2 It is the responsibility of the Incident Commander to evaluate the level of risk in every situation.
- 3 Risk assessment is a continuous process for the entire duration of each incident.
- 4 If conditions change, and risk increases, change strategy and tactics.
- 5 No building or property is worth the life of a fire fighter.



Risk Assessment/Rules of Engagement			
Fire Fighter Injury/ Life Safety Risk	High Probability of Success	Marginal Probability of Success	Low Probability of Success
Low Risk	Initiate offensive operations. Continue to monitor risk factors.	Initiate offensive operations. Continue to monitor risk factors.	Initiate offensive operations. Continue to monitor risk factors.
Medium Risk	Initiate offensive operations. Continue to monitor risk factors. Employ all available risk control options.	Initiate offensive operations. Continue to monitor risk factors. Be prepared to go defensive if risk increases.	Do not initiate offensive operations. Reduce risk to fire fighters and actively pursue risk control options.
High Risk	Initiate offensive operations only with confirmation of realistic potential to save endangered lives.	Do not initiate offensive operations that will put fire fighters at risk for injury or fatality.	Initiate defensive operations only.