Engine Company as the “Truck” in the Volunteer Fire Service

By: Greg Sellers, Smithfield (VA) Fire Department

So, you hear it a lot “What’s my Truck coming to me”. Well, in the day and age of limited staffing and multiple use apparatus, you may not have a true truck company responding. So, as the incident commander you have to assign an incoming engine as the “truck” because truck jobs still need to be completed. So what are those “truck jobs”, well they are search, ventilation and forcible entry, to name a few.

As an officer of the engine assigned as the “truck”, you must be thinking about what equipment do I carry and who do I have and are they capable of performing those tasks. You really can’t effectively perform vertical ventilation with all outside qualified FF (IDLH) or interior search with yourself, a junior FF and an exterior only FF acting only as a Driver/Operator. I’d like to give some insight as to how an engine company can perform the duties of the truck company without the truck apparatus.

**Search**

Interior primary search must be performed by two interior qualified firefighters. A Vent, Enter, Isolate and Search must be performed by at least two interior qualified as well. These are Immediate Danger to life and Health (IDLH) tasks and must be completed quickly and proficiently. The tools needed are basic tools carried on an engine. These are Thermal imaging camera, halligan, flathead axe and/or 6’ hook. For the VEIS add the ground ladders, which is normally the 14’ or 24’ carried on an engine company.

**Forcible Entry**

For this task, basic forcible entry tools such as the halligan and flathead axe/sledgehammer can be used for most inward and outward doors. Additional tools you can carry may include a “K-Tool” or “A-Tool” for through the lock entry. You can also have a Rotary Saw with a metal cutting or diamond tip combination blade for cutting steel. A good tool for case hardened padlocks is a duckbill lock breaker and normal padlocks, a standard bolt cutter with large handles for increased leverage. Another good tool is a hydra-ram or rabbit tool, used for steel (commercial) inward opening doors.

**Ventilation**

Tools for ventilation vary, depending on the type of ventilation to be done. Horizontal ventilation (removal of windows) is usually done with a hook, halligan or some other sturdy hand tool. Vertical ventilation can be done with the standard compliment of engine company ground ladders and hand tools. As far as power saws, a chainsaw with a carbide tip chain designed for fire/rescue work or a rotary saw with a carbide tip wood cutting wheel works well. Again, the construction of the roof will with dictate which saw will be used having the correct blade attached. Positive pressure ventilation is the norm now once the fire in knocked down. There are several PPV fan options available, depending on the room you have you may want to consider a fold-up battery operated PPV fan. If you have the room, then a standard electric PPV blower may work for you. Be sure to have the capability to power the fan off a generator or house power. Gas power fans are good but they are loud and put off a fair amount of carbon monoxide, so I think an electric PPV fan is a better option. As always, the thermal imaging camera is a valuable tool to identify heat signatures while operating on the roof.

**Additional Tasks**

The previous three tasks are the core jobs of a truck company but there are plenty other jobs that need to be completed. Here is a list of a few more with some equipment you may stock:

**Utility control:** gas, water, electric

Have a set of meter covers if pulling an electric meter is in your SOP

Have a residential water key to secure water to structures, a fork end of halligan works well to

**Overhaul/salvage:** Rolls of plastic sheeting can be carried as opposed to standard salvage covers. These can be left at scene for occupant to use and cut to size needed. Also have a good sturdy slap stapler and/or hammer and roofing nails

As you can see, a properly “staffed” and equipped engine can act as a truck company if needed. Staffing means everything, if you don’t have the right people to do the jobs, they can’t be done. So make sure your apparatus is properly staffed with at least 2, preferably 4, interior qualified and “truck trained” firefighters. When it comes to training, hold in-house truck based classes, hands-on an classroom. Send firefighters to truck company based classes then bring what they learned back to the department to share and pass the knowledge.

Running a truck company takes more than a ladder truck, its takes training equipment, personnel and the right mind-set.