Skills School:

Pride & Ownership for Firefighter Survival.

By: Lt Roger Brennan, Ellicott Creek Fire Department

Believe me when I tell you, nothing I am about to say is new, ground breaking or earth shattering. In fact, it is largely my opinion of ideas, thoughts, and things learned from fire service legends and great instructors and mentors. My hope is something that I am passing on will spark something in you and force you to take a step back and evaluate how you, your crew, and your department operate and train, both good and bad.

We as fire fighters, we put our faith in our equipment, training, and leadership. It is almost impossible to do what we do without putting all of these together. My focus is on our training, specifically on what I believe is our most important tool is: the SCBA. Sometimes our equipment is older but not as “proven” if you will as equipment used by paid or more active departments. Equipment that works today, may not work tomorrow, but we may not know this until next week: when the truck checks are performed.

On the same token, newer equipment can be problematic as well. New technology can help us perform better but may also cause us to lose our basic skills when relied upon to heavily. So what does this have to do with fire fighter survival? “EVERYTHING” It is IMPERATIVE that we become intimately familiar with every piece of equipment we use. Sadly, the facts are that we in the volunteer ranks cannot dedicate the amount of time needed to achieve this level of training and knowledge. That said, “WE must make our training time count, we must get the most out of our training.”

Let us dive right into talking about our most important piece of equipment, and most trusted tool! The “SCBA” After all, it is our lifeline, our protection from the harmful atmosphere produced by combustion. In order to do what we do, we must be able to master air management techniques and handle SCBA emergencies. We all know that everyone is different when it comes to air management, but everyone can master “How to breath” and gain a basic understanding of their personal “Air Consumption Rate’s” (ACR’s).

It is time to take pride in your tool by becoming confident in its abilities and your ability to use it. It is time to take ownership of your tool, on that day when you put it on it becomes yours, so know it and treat it as well as you know yourself.

In his presentation “SCBA Bootcamp: A Firefighter’s Survival School” at FDIC2018, Chief Trevor Steedman, (Palm Beach Fire Department) states, “Ultimately, we owe it to ourselves, our families and the people we serve to become masters of our trade. The basic tenant of our profession is the SCBA.” He uses the example of the U.S. Marine Corps *Rifleman’s Creed,* substituting the term “SCBA” for the word “rifle,” to express the relationship we should have with our SCBA.

It can be challenging to create a good SCBA training program, but the benefits of instilling good skills and mask confidence cannot compare. Chief Steedman suggest your training program should address the following questions.

1. Does your SCBA procedures and drills prepare you for almost every inevitability?

2. Are principles of good air management stressed and practiced?

3. How often do you personally practice your SCBA air management and survival Skills?

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Here are a few drill ideas Chief Steedman suggests to enhance your SCBA/Mask confidence and establishing ACR’s for your firefighters.

*The Assembly Line:* Strip down SCBA’s into its basic parts, place the parts in a small room, have crew preform a search, find the parts and assemble the SCBA’s while vision is obstructed. When all crew members are on air and packed up, exit the room. Add in a time factor for a more challenging drill.

*D-Fence:*  A “Mayday” based drill which will simulate a pinned firefighter using a large section of chain link fence. Place the fencing over the firefighter and hold down the corners to immobilize them. Emphasize the need for proper mayday procedures and use of air management/ breathing techniques.

*The Ant Farm:* A great drill for establishing ACR’s under consistent working stress and forming solid ground ladder heeling and climbing skills. Setup two (2) ladders at different heights. FF’s will ascend and descend in a particular order. Monitor ARC’s and compare upon each completion of a lap. Each FF will have a basic understanding of air usage.

*Drop Zone:* Another entangle drill. Unlike the D-Fence, this drill uses flexible snow fencing and involves multiple firefighters. While two fire fighters are preforming a search in near proximity, drop a large section of fencing on them to simulate entanglement in wires and grid of a drop ceiling. Individual efforts can potentially lead to each member becoming more entangled by the other. Firefighters must work together to escape. Due to the inexpensive and simplicity of the prop, fire fighters are encouraged to use any and all means to escape.

A couple others are the “*Triple Crown”* and“*SCBA Baseball” (no not playing baseball on SCBA’s).*  These are not the Holy Grail or magic bullet to SCBA and air management confidence. I am sure a google search will turn up many more. However, incorporating these into you training program are sure to enhance your abilities.

We all have those “go-to” methods but we must know and have alternate plans when those do not work. Being practiced and skilled at those Plan B’s can save time and air and most importantly, “your Life”. Take the time to become “Masters of your tools and your trade.” Thanks for reading. I hope you find it useful. Be safe and survival smart!

 *For more training information and news visit “The Mutual Aid” facebook page. Feel free to email me at Firelieu142018@hotmail.com*

 *Information on the SCBA Bootcamp: A Firefighter’s Survival School visit: stbtraining.com*

*Or email:* *striketheboxtraining@gmail.com*