Initial Attack Line Tips

Advancing to the seat of the fire rapidly is one of the primary goals of first due engine company at any fire. To accomplish this several things must already have taken place. These include proper staffing, proper size up to include a 360 of the building by the first due engine officer, having personnel at positions along the hose line to keep the line moving forward at corners, stairs and the entrance to the fire building to prevent the hose line from being hung up on friction points. Many say, “so goes the first line, so goes the fire”, this is never more true than having the proper line size, nozzle selections, and personnel to accomplish the engine companies main objective, to extinguish the fire and provide protection for the primary search crew. I will hope to discuss some of these things with emphasis on what I call “spacing”, or having the attack crew at strategic positions needed to advance the line quickly with little delay in getting to the seat of the fire.

Getting the initial attack line deployed starts with proper apparatus placement. We all know that hose can stretch but ladders cannot so, depending on how your Department S.O.P.’s are written and your apparatus is spec’d out (cross lays, front bumper lines, rear bumper lines) will depend on how you deploy your handlines. Many departments mandate pulling past the structure to give the officer a three sided view of the building as well as leaving room for the truck company. This is good if you have pre-connects or deploy lines from the rear hose bed. It is also a good practice to have lines of different length based on the type of structures you go to (i.e. 200’ for most residential structures but maybe need a 250’ or 300’ line for large structure attic accesses or set back apartment buildings). If your apparatus is spec’d out with front bumper attack lines, you may want to stop short of the structure and have the truck company come in from the opposite direction and nose up to the front of the first due engine.

Stretching of the line is key, first it is imperative, for pre-connect handline that the line is fully deployed from the hose bed prior to charging. On some apparatus, it is not uncommon for hose couplings to wedge between the Chiksan swivel and the wall of the hose bed. It has happened where the line has been charged in the bed and the line was “locked up” and made unserviceable. A good practice is to, as best as possible, stretch in a straight line, perpendicular to the entrance to structure. This prevents kinks and allows for an easier advancement into the building especially up the interior stairs or down the interior basement stairs. Another good tactic is to place the first coupling “just inside or at the door entrance” or bring the first two couplings up to the nozzle. What this does is it allows the first 50’ length to easily enter the building followed by the second 50’ without the couplings getting hung up at the doorway. Remember, as the nozzleman, bleed the air from the line and set your pattern (if a combination nozzle). Fully open up the nozzle to ensure all the air is out of the line and you have proper water flow. Remember door control prior to entering structure, once you open the door you create a flow path. Keep the door shut to control the flow path until you are ready to make entry into the structure with fully P.P.E. and S.C.B.A.

So now we enter the structure, this is when we need to “space” our attack team at proper positions in order to move the line rapidly. Having someone to “hump hose” at the entrance door is a key position. This position keeps moving the line into the structure and keeps couplings from getting caught up at the door way. Having firefighters at corners make moving the line faster as the line won’t get hung up at “pinch points/friction points” along walls and other obstacles. Remember body positioning, don’t get caught between the wall and the hose, stay on the outside of the line and use your upper body to push the line. Also, as the line advances, firefighters may need to move up and take different positions (i.e. front door to interior hallway, interior hallway to top of stairs). Having firefighters at the bottom and top of stairwells is key as well, again these are elevations and friction points.

Staffing is always going to play a factor in how we are able to accomplish this task. But, this task must always be done at every fire so understanding some simple techniques and tricks we should be able to reach the seat of the fire more rapidly. Advancing hose lines requires skill, teamwork and discipline. Firefighters must resist the urge to congregate near the nozzle and understand that they must position themselves along the hose line to keep it moving. Adapt your line advancement to your standard staffing and see what works for you, I promise you, you put people in the right spots you’ll control the fire faster and prevent further damage, this takes training, training, training, so get out there and train, your lives and your mission depends on it.