

Effective Fire Service Training – S.M.A.R.T #60-04

Identifying Factors That Lead to the Point of NO Return

S – Statement of Intent / Objectives

The intent of this drill is to identify factors that lead a member or team to cross the Point of NO Return. The Point of NO Return is “the point at which you stop becoming part of the solution and start becoming part of the problem.” In this exercise, members will evaluate a given structure, either via photo or by going out into their districts, and determine what could be problematic if they were to respond to it. After each member has identified potential factors that might lead them to “the Point”, they will discuss tactics and solutions to minimize or eliminate the hazard.

M – Material(s)

- Read the article “The Point of NO Return” in the March 2005 issue of Fire Engineering Magazine.
- Photos, videos or actual structures that can be used for evaluation. It is extremely valuable to make your district a priority whenever possible. This gives you the added benefit of increased knowledge of your most likely emergency incidents and lends a valuable sense of realism to the drill.
- The instructor should have a copy of the factors to consider for needed prompting if students are struggling.

A – Actions

Each member will take a turn as team leader evaluating a structure to identify factors that lead to “The Point of NO Return.” These will include:

- Type of building – Consideration is given to how age/construction might fail or otherwise cause problems for the operation/assignment
- Type of occupancy – What is the building used for and how might that affect the team
- Entrance – How does the team enter and does that entrance pose any problems
- Exit – What factors might make the exit problematic and are there other ways out
- Air Management considerations – What impact will the structure have on air needs
- Type of work being performed – How impact does the specifics of the structure have in relation to the assigned task
- Team dynamics – How is the team configured in regards to number of members, experience etc.
- Equipment – Do you have what you need with your standard apparatus to get the job done
- Exposures – Could exposures come into play and impact your particular assignment
- Environmental – How will the weather, wind, humidity etc affect the team
- Command – In what ways can Command affect “The Point” in both positive and negative ways

R – Review / Recording

The instructor will ensure that all factors identified are written down and then discussed by the group in the debriefing. Included in this discussion should be any details specific to the elements that are observed along with any additional insights the students might have. Any missed factors should also be written down to take advantage of different perspectives and experience levels. Finally, solutions and means of mitigating risk should be brainstormed and added to the drill file for future sessions.

T – Talking Points at Debriefing

The instructor will conduct the debrief in order to gain insight into what the students observed, catch any factors that might have been missed, and come up with solutions to the problems that were observed. The “debrief” will begin with the individual(s) responsible for evaluating the structure and time given them elaborate on what they saw. Other members will then be allowed to share their findings and expand the discussion to include any areas that were missed by the initial member(s). Once this is accomplished, the instructor can add any remaining items of importance and proceed to the solution phase. With a written list of the observed “factors”, the instructor can now give the students opportunity to strategize on how to minimize or eliminate the dangers they’ve articulated. Let the students share, in their own words, what caught their eye or raised a red flag. These will vary based on many factors but should be helpful to all the students.