



Working Atop Fire Apparatus

5 Minute Lesson Plan for Fire & EMS

On December 14, 2009, a Firefighter Fatality Notice was issued by the U.S. Fire Academy. In December 2009, a Battalion Chief, who was a 21 year veteran of the Shreveport (LA) Fire Department, passed away following an accident. The Fire Academy provided the following description of the event:

The Chief fell from a fire department ladder truck following a parade earlier this year.

At the end of the parade route, the fire trucks pulled to the side of the road to secure any loose empty boxes that held beads or cups. While clearing debris and boxes from the ladder truck, he fell approximately 10 feet, landing head first on the concrete roadway.

The Chief's heart stopped and CPR was performed. He was transported to a hospital where he regained a heart rate, and his condition was listed as critical. He suffered fractures to his cervical (neck) spine and was placed on a breathing machine. In early March, the Chief was transferred to a rehab facility in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Chief has been in a relative state of a coma since sustaining debilitating injuries as a result of this accident and passed away on December 12.

Fire officers and firefighters are reminded of the hazards of working on top of apparatus. Some functions can not be easily avoided without purchasing new fire apparatus, such as packing hose. However, there are many tasks that are performed atop fire trucks that can be better controlled.

NJPEOSH requires fall protection when working at heights over 4 feet in the General Industry Standards. Many surfaces on top of ladder trucks were not designed as walking or working surfaces. A firefighter in a hose bed with side rails is exposed to a significantly less hazard than working from the tops of side cabinets to do the same job. Other job tasks that may be completed from the top of cabinets are: top-side vehicle or equipment inspections, mounting tools or other equipment, or using the truck to perform station maintenance. Sometimes, in an effort to maximize equipment on a vehicle, it may be stored or mounted where climbing on top of cabinets is needed to access. Department officers and truck committees should look at every activity where a firefighter must climb on top of a vehicle over 4 ft. high and look for a safer way to conduct that job.

Discussion questions:

1- What job tasks in your department require firefighters to walk on top of surfaces higher than 4 ft. and not designed for firefighter use?

2- How else can the job task be completed? If the job can not be performed from a safe work platform, what other protective measures can be put in place to protect the firefighter?



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