FIREFIGHTER SURVIVAL PROCEDURES

All personnel should perform the Self Survival procedure when experiencing a Mayday situation. All command personnel should be knowledgeable of the procedure so incident command and firefighter rescue operations are more efficient.

Initiating a Mayday

An individual assigned to an incident shall use the hailing term “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday” to announce a Firefighter Missing, Down or Trapped. This shall be done by a firefighter when their life is in danger and immediate assistance is required or by any individual assigned to an incident if they have knowledge that another firefighter’s life is in danger and they need immediate assistance. The following situations require the immediate initiation of a Mayday call on the Incident Tactical Channel or by activating the EAB:

1. Separated from Crew / “Lost” (Firefighter Missing)
   a. Loss of visibility
   b. No physical contact with hose line, lifeline and/or partner

2. Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) Malfunction or Low Air
   a. SCBA Malfunction and/or low air alarm activation in an IDLH and unable to reach an exit safely

3. Injured and/or Disabled (Firefighter Down)
   a. Injury resulting in reduced ability to exit safely

4. Trapped, Pinned, and/or Entangled in Debris (Firefighter Trapped)
   a. Mobility compromised due to heat, structural collapse, debris, and/or inoperable/blocked doors/exits.

5. Any life threatening condition that cannot be resolved in 30 seconds
   a. The 30-second rule serves as a reminder to focus on self-rescue and to gather as much information about the situation as possible.

Once a Mayday is called, the distressed firefighter shall perform actions that improve survivability. These actions can include performance of the IAFF Self Survival procedure using the mnemonic G-R-A-B L-I-V-E-S. The sequence in which these actions are performed is dependent on the situation encountered. Performance of these actions will improve the chances of survival while alerting rescuers to the distressed firefighter’s location.
1. Check Air in SCBA Air Cylinder

   **GRAB LIVES – Gauge**

   (1) Firefighter checks air remaining in SCBA air cylinder. Knowing the quantity of air in the air cylinder will give an indication of the time necessary to find a more tenable atmosphere. If possible, this shall be reported to incident command.

2. Initiate a Mayday on the Tactical Radio:

   **GRAB LIVES – Radio…**

   (1) The distressed firefighter shall notify incident command of the Mayday using the portable radio. This can be accomplished by using the microphone or the EAB. Los Angeles Area Fire Departments with operable EAB’s shall have an organization in place to accept the distress signal emitted by the EAB. Refer to the communications section for more information.

   (2) Verbalize the Firefighter Emergency using the term "MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY."

   (3) Once the distressed firefighter keys the microphone or activates the EAB on the portable radio, his/her initial radio transmission shall be:

       “MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY”

       a. All radio traffic shall cease after hearing the hailing term

       b. Incident command will respond by stating:

           “Unit calling Mayday identify.”

       c. The distressed firefighter will identify the nature of the Mayday by transmitting the following information:

           (1) **WHO** is calling the Mayday? “This is FF Smith from Engine 1…”

           (2) **WHAT** is the emergency? “I’m lost…”

           (3) **WHERE** is the firefighter located? “On the 1st floor.”

       d. If unable to contact incident command, the distressed firefighter shall:
(1) Announce a “MAYDAY” using another frequency monitored by resources assigned to the incident and/or the communications center.

(2) Continue making “MAYDAY” calls until answered.

e. The IC, Operations Section Chief (OSC), or Rapid Intervention Group (RIG) Supervisor will communicate directly with the distressed firefighter and confirm all of his/her transmissions are correctly understood. They shall also communicate the following to the distressed firefighter:

(1) Ascertain the quantity of air remaining in the distressed firefighter’s SCBA. Knowledge of the amount of air in the SCBA can determine the time needed to make a rescue.

(2) Provide a reminder of the “G-R-A-B L-I-V-E-S” procedure for the distressed firefighter to assist the crew in the rescue process.

(3) Rescue Evaluation: Identify specific tools required to assist with the rescue operation, routes of access, methods of rescue, and known hazards.

3. Activate Personal Alert Safety System (PASS) and Allow PASS Light to Be Seen By Rescuers

**GRAB LIVES – Activate**

(1) The PASS device must be manually activated immediately after using the radio to announce the Mayday. The audible PASS device should remain on until rescued. The device should be turned off to communicate via the radio. Firefighters can maximize the strength of the device’s audible alarm and light by positioning the device so it is best heard and seen by rescuers.

4. Conserve Air, Control Breathing

**GRAB LIVES – Control Breathing**

(1) Firefighters must control their breathing and conserve air anytime they don the SCBA. Because air is limited and work effort and duration can be unpredictable, it is critical that firefighters learn to control their anxiety and breathe rhythmically. This task is performed by consciously controlling how much air is breathed and how much physical effort is
exerted. The air in one's cylinder can be further extended by employing the survival breathing technique. The survival breathing technique is performed by extending exhalation two times that of inhalation.

5. Stay Low

**GRAB LIVES – Stay Low**

(1) Firefighters must position themselves near the floor to avoid the super-heated toxic air collecting at the ceiling and banking down to the floor. Staying low also aids in visualizing the hose-line and finding an exit.

6. Shine Flashlight at 45 Degree Angle

**GRAB LIVES – Illuminate**

(1) Personal lights shall be activated and remain “On” when firefighters are working in an IDLH environment. If the flashlight was inadvertently turned “Off,” the firefighter must turn the flashlight “On”. With the flashlight “On” the distressed firefighter shall point the light at a 45° angle and shine it outward where a rescuer may see it.

7. Make Noise

**GRAB LIVES – Volume, Make noise**

(1) Noise originating from the distressed firefighter can get the attention of rescuers. In addition to the audible alarm on the PASS device, the firefighter must also use a hand tool to make noise as it is struck against a hard surface. Because Rapid Intervention Company personnel will be located on the perimeter of the building during an incident, it is best if the sound is generated using an exterior wall. An axe, pike pole, rubbish hook, or any type of forcible entry tool can be used to make the noise. Be loud, be heard, be rescued.

8. Find an Exit

**GRAB LIVES – Exit**

(1) Identifying a viable exit is the most critical element of the Self Survival procedure. An exit must be located quickly when fire conditions change rapidly resulting in the sudden increase of
heat and rapid loss of visibility. A distressed firefighter can best find an exit by moving toward one that was identified during entry. Viable exits are doorways and windows. Exits can also be created by breaching walls and passing through the spaces created between the wall studs. Hose lines can also aid in locating an exit. Once a hose line is found, couplings should be used to determine the direction of travel outside the building.

(2) Firefighters shall perform the technical Self Survival skills of upper floor egress, with or without a ladder in place, disentanglement, and breaching and passing through walls if necessary.

9. Shield Airway

**GRAB LIVES – Shield airway**

(1) When the air in the SCBA is exhausted, firefighters should disconnect their 2nd stage regulator and cover their air intake port with the chin portion of their hood or a gloved hand. Shielding the port will only prevent debris from entering the mask…it will not filter smoke.
The Self Survival procedure should be constantly performed throughout the rescue operations. The distressed firefighter shall keep the rescuers advised of the following information: location, air cylinder quantity, physical status/limitations, and special rescue tool needs.

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