

01/10/2005 12:09

IPSWICH FIRE DEPT. → 916175075670

NO.124 001

Date of Report: 31 January 2001

Location: 19 Lafayette Road

Date of Incident: 23 January 2001

Time: 1857 hours

Apparatus was dispatched for a reported structure fire at 1857 hrs. First arriving units noted heavy fire coming from the structure upon leaving fire headquarters.

Call firefighters Lieut. John Morris, firefighters Chris Gregory, Steven Doucette, Dennis Howes and AJ Prescott were on scene prior to Truck one. Lieut. Morris after donning his turnout gear at the Greek Orthodox Church, noted that there was a noticeable amount of smoke in the immediate area, and he could hear people saying there were people still in the building. He immediately radioed fire alarm and confirmed that there was a structure fire.

Chris Gregory was working late at the insurance office on Market Street. After hearing the tone for a reported structure fire he immediately left the office located directly behind Lafayette Street. Upon leaving the office, firefighter Gregory noted that upon leaving his place of employment, he heard a woman's voice screaming for help.

Upon exiting his private vehicle on Lafayette Street, he noted Police Officer Copper getting out his vehicle and reporting to the dispatcher. He could see heavy smoke coming from the left rear of the structure. He also stated that he could hear someone yelling jump. Firefighter Gregory walked up to the front door and saw a flash of blue flame through the storm door glass. He then stepped off the porch and observed a woman running up the driveway with an infant in her arms. He then went to the side of the building to see if there was a back entrance. Heavy black and gray smoke was coming out the back windows and eaves. Firefighter Gregory returned to the front of the structure where he met firefighter Steven Doucette. As firefighters Gregory and Doucette were approaching the front of the structure the left rear window blew out and the rear of the structure became fully involved in fire.

When the ladder truck arrived on scene, Firefighter Gregory donned a Self Contained Breathing Apparatus and placed his accountability tag on the front seat, and then proceeded to the front of the structure and attempted to make entry into the building, where they were forced back due to heavy fire and lack of water pressure.

When Lieutenant Morris arrived on scene, he noticed two people attending a small baby in a snow bank. He observed fire coming out windows on both the first and second floors. His attention was then drawn to the rear of the structure where he saw two civilians attempting to raise an aluminum 2 section ladder to the rear of the house. Someone stated that there were two people still in the structure and they were on the third floor. Upon looking up to the third floor area, Lieut. Morris could see heavy black smoke emitting from the rear window.

He climbed the civilian ladder to the second floor to observe the inside of the structure. After three unsuccessful attempts to open the window heat was noted below him. When he looked down he noticed heavy fire coming from the first floor door directly below the center window. Due to the heat, Lieut. Morris had to descend the ladder.

Truck 1 laid a hydrant line from Wayne and Lafayette to supply the truck with water. It was later found that the hydrant stem used for opening the hydrant would not work. Firefighter Smith set the pump panel, and supplied handlines for the attack crews.

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NO.124 002

A second alarm was sounded almost immediately and was followed by a third alarm for additional manpower and equipment, both to the fire scene and to cover headquarters.

The State Fire Marshals office was notified as per procedure. An investigation unit was dispatched to the scene to assist with the cause and origin investigation. Due to the deaths, a Cpac team was also dispatched to investigate the fatality sequence of the investigation.

Upon investigation, it was found that the fire originated on the first floor in the left rear living room area. Exact cause of the fire is undetermined but accidental, possible causes are smoking, candles, or electricity. The fire extended to the third floor due to a door being opened in the living room area. The fire extended up an interior stairway, trapping the occupants in the third floor apartment. The mother was found in the rear kitchen near a window, the three year old girl was found in the front room, under rubble. The infant was thrown from the third floor window to the ground by the mother. Investigation revealed that both battery and hard wire smoke detectors were present in the structure. Upon listening to the 9-1-1 tape, a smoke detector could be heard sounding for a period of time. It was found by the State Police Electrical inspector that the hard wire detectors were disconnected from the circuit breaker box in the basement area, as well as being cut at a junction box.

Mutual aid was called from Rowley, Topsfield, Essex, and Hamilton. Med flight was notified as well as additional equipment from Beverly Control.

DATE OF REPORT: 14 February 2001

LOCATION: 19 Lafayette Road, Ipswich, MA 01938 TIME OF INCIDENT: 1857 hours

DATE OF INCIDENT: 23 January 2001

An investigation into the origin and cause of the fire at 19 Lafayette Road was conducted by the Ipswich Department of Public Safety, fire and police divisions, along with State Police Officers assigned to the State Fire Marshal's Office and District Attorney Kevin Burkes' Office.

It was determined that the fire originated on the first floor in the rear of the house, in the living room area. Investigators have identified three most likely heat sources in the area of origin, they are smoking materials, candles, or an extension cord. No evidence was found leading investigators to suspect an intentionally set fire. Investigators also were able to determine that the hard-wire interconnected system of smoke detection was present in the structure, but was disabled at the time of the fire. Evidence of the presence of several single-station battery-operated smoke detectors was found.

The fire extended from the living room area into the rear stairway, which lead to the second and third floor areas of the property. A resident of the property was able to enter the building and alert occupants on the second floor and third floor of the fire. While attempting to remove the occupants of the third floor, the room quickly filled with dense black smoke and heat. One person was able to escape from a window with the assistance of civilians on scene.

When firefighters first arrived on scene, they stated they could see heavy black smoke coming from the rear of the structure and eaves. The first arriving piece of fire equipment was Truck 1, with one firefighter as the driver operator. The remaining on duty crew was at a previous medical aid call. Engine 4 laid a supply line from a hydrant at Wayne and Lafayette. It was later determined that this hydrant was inoperable, so a second line was supplied from an additional hydrant.

It has been reported that much confusion first occurred on the fire scene. This could have been derived from the fact that fire apparatus arrived not properly manned. According to reports, call firefighters on scene, previous to the truck arriving were attempting to enter the structure to effect a rescue of the trapped occupants. It was observed that civilians on scene were operating hand lines in various locations around the property.

As sufficient fire fighters arrived on scene with additional equipment a coordinated fire attack was formulated and conducted. Several mutual aid companies from surrounding fire departments were summoned to assist the Ipswich Fire Department.

Based on my experiences, I feel that the members of the Ipswich Fire Department operated in a very professional manner under the circumstances present. They were able to overcome and adapt to the situation presented and complete their assigned tasks. The department as a whole should be commended for their efforts. It was unfortunate that a successful rescue of Lisa and Lindsay Collum the trapped occupants could not be accomplished, but due to the magnitude and intensity of the fire entry could not be gained to the third floor area in a more timely manner.

Responding Police Department members and E 9-1-1 dispatchers should be commended along with the numerous civilians who assisted at the scene. Responding officers quickly and efficiently closed the roads and assisted in keeping crowds back, thereby allowing fire personnel to work more efficiently. Dispatch personnel were very instrumental in dispatching the appropriate equipment and making sure the remainder of the Town was protected. The Emergency Management Director was also on scene offering any assistance needed.

Several civilians assisted at the scene by throwing a ground ladder a window in the rear of the property prior to the arrival of the fire department and were instrumental in rescuing a trapped female occupant. Not to mention the valiant effort to save Carly Collum.

It was also comforting from an emergency management point to see the residents of the Town provide a rehab area as well as food for the emergency workers. Support functions such as the food and warm shelter provided for emergency workers is very often not a concern during times of strife and grief.

## CONCLUSIONS:

Based on facts presented and observations made at the scene, I have drawn the following conclusions to the incident on Lafayette Road.

1. The fire department does not operate with sufficient personnel to conduct an aggressive interior fire attack in most instances. National Fire Protection Standard 1500: Occupational Safety and Health Program section 6-4.4 states that in the initial stages of an incident where only one team is operating in the hazardous area at a working structural fire, a minimum of four individuals is required, consisting of two individuals working as a team in the hazard area and two individuals present outside this hazard area for assistance or rescue at emergency operations where entry into the danger area is required.
2. Sufficient initial responding personnel were at an extreme limit. This led to initial chaos when Truck one arrived. It was reported that civilians (with good intent) were taking equipment off the truck and deploying it haphazardly. The lack of sufficient personnel arriving at the same time caused civilians to feel the fire department didn't initially complete their assigned task of search and rescue.
3. Career as well as call personnel are placed in a precarious spot responding with little or no equipment as well as limited manpower to an emergency scene. The intent is good in that a trained person is arriving on scene as quickly as possible; however, it goes to show that person(s) in a stressful situation as they have no means of accomplishing the necessary tasks safely and efficiently. Departmental operational procedures specifically give guidelines defining what activities various size crews can be expected to safely perform. Civilians observing the emergency workers not being able to accomplish their functions sometimes don't understand they are restricted by limited personnel and available equipment to safely carry out specific operations. Injuring emergency personnel needlessly accomplishes nothing; in fact it creates several additional problems.
4. One person arriving on the initial response vehicle is not an efficient use of manpower. The operator has a difficult enough time, stopping at a hydrant and laying his/her own supply line, setting the pump, and advancing protective hand lines, not to mention attempting to assign jobs to incoming personnel. The rushing around encountered in this type scenario could easily lead to injury and inefficient assignment of personnel. It can be said that responding call personnel as well as off duty personnel should be capable of knowing what needs to be done at the emergency scene. But an emergency scene such as 19 Lafayette Road has the tendency to cause first in units and limited personnel to become overwhelmed initially due to limited amount of emergency responses to such situations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Town provide an adequate number of personnel (minimum of 4 on scene) to allow for mitigation of emergency scenes in a safe and efficient manner, for both responding emergency personnel as well as civilians. This would allow emergency personnel to operate in a more safety induced environment, there by reducing the possible chance for injury to occur, as well as the opportunity to conduct an effective search and rescue operation.
2. Call firefighters be issued a second set of turn out gear. One set of which would be left at Fire Headquarters or Linebrook station depending on station assignment.
3. Call firefighters would report directly to their respective station assignment and ride responding apparatus to the emergency scenes (providing they did not have to pass the emergency scene to arrive at their station assignment). This addresses a several safety concerns. First, it would allow for better accountability of personnel at the emergency scene. Currently, responding personnel report directly to the emergency scene, and either report to the command vehicle or engine company where they are assigned a job. As happened at Lafayette Street, several call firefighters arrived on scene, just prior to the arrival of Truck 1 and were attempting to enter the building without proper protective equipment (self contained breathing apparatus) and protective hand lines. Their location at the emergency scene was not known to initial responding apparatus, hence the responding operator did not know there were trained personnel on scene immediately. Secondly, it also allows the incident commander to employ his/her resources in a more efficient manner there by lessening the amount of chaos initially found at most emergency scenes that lack the proper staffing. Third by having the third piece of equipment standby for three to four minutes for additional manpower allows for safer operation of the vehicle. A piece of fire equipment is much larger in comparison to a car. To safely operate such a vehicle so that it arrives at the emergency scene requires a minimum of two persons (one person would act as a spotter when maneuvering such equipment in confined spaces). Once at the scene and the vehicle is set for ladder or pump evolutions, one person could operate it.