

December 15, 2003

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Dear Colonel Jorda:

Thank you for your extraordinary hospitality during our recent visit to France. We were privileged to work with you and the esteemed firefighters in Bouches-du-Rhone. You indeed have much to be proud of, as was evidenced by the high level of morale and enthusiasm in BDR. We were welcomed like family and made to feel like royalty. None of us will ever forget the friendships made during our visit.

Let me add that the condolences offered for the FDNY losses suffered on September 11th were deeply appreciated.

The trip was an important educational experience since we were able to observe so many of your operations first-hand. Although many of your fire and emergency operations are performed in ways that are similar to our own, we believe that there are several areas where we can learn from each other and mutually benefit.

As promised, we have summarized our observations in the attached document, and have included a CD of our photos. We look forward to receiving your reaction to the enclosed, and to continuing this collaboration in the realization of your efforts to reduce firefighter risk, enhance civilian health and safety, and minimize property loss from fire.

Stay safe, and very best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Sincerely,

Stephan Hittmann

Service Departemental d'Incendie et de Secours des Bouches-du-Rhone
Observations and Recommendations

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Positive Observations

Dispatch

The technology used by dispatchers, specifically your mapping programs, rapid access to the location of hydrants, ability to show topographic details then project these details onto a large wall screen and zoom-in as needed was most impressive.

HazMat

The Level-A suits (with built-in camera platforms), gloves (that attach to the suit and provide considerable dexterity) and large ground mats (that distinguish the various zones in a safe and organized manner) were all excellent.

Helmets

Your helmets are excellent. The flap in the rear (to shed water and giving it a smaller profile, making it less likely to get knocked off) and chrome reflective finish are excellent features. The lightweight emergency helmet for other work also makes great sense. Much of the eye irritation we experienced at the World Trade Center would have been reduced if we had the type of built-in eye protection that your helmets have.

High Angle

Very proficient. Your Tripod/Gin Pole with the built-in crank-haul system makes for very efficient rope operations. Utilizing Petzl Stops in lowering and hauling operations makes for fast changeovers in technical rope operations. While you seem to have little emphasis on c-spine immobilization in patient packaging, the vacuum bag used as a backboard was very efficient, and could be very useful in dealing with injuries in a confined space. Your high angle work in remote or wilderness areas is most impressive. Although we could teach you how to adapt your techniques to an urban environment (for window washer pick-offs, using urban anchors, etc.), your hauling operations in tight spaces are quite efficient. NFPA standards require our equipment to generally be at a higher rating, which we like for safety reasons, since in an urban environment weight and transportation are not major issues.

Hose Reels

The removable hose reels attached to the back of apparatus and used during helicopter and other operations makes stretching long lines to a water supply an easy task for one person. We would benefit from having hose reels such as these which would lessen down time when making apparatus changeovers since all hose now has to be removed and repacked onto spare apparatus. A winch in each firehouse could make this change in seconds, thus getting units in service much more quickly.

Small Vehicles

Having multiple smaller vehicles (including ambulances) in most firehouses we thought was extremely efficient.

Turnout Gear

Your two-layered turnout system was most interesting, specifically having lightweight gear worn under a heavier outer shell. The lightweight turnout gear used during extrication, high angle and similar emergencies dramatically reduces the fatigue factor during long operations such as building collapse or trench rescue. Although we now have coveralls for this purpose, they are difficult to don in moving apparatus and aren't always worn. At certain types of operations, we tend to remove our heavy bunker gear and work in cloth uniforms rather than take the punishment caused by wearing heavyweight turnout gear.

Underwater Rescue

BDR seems highly proficient at both surface and underwater rescue.

Recommendations

Basic Firefighting

While the ultimate goal of BDR and FDNY are the same, we thought many of the methods used to achieve these goals were different. It appears that you don't respond with a ladder truck to perform search or forcible entry. By way of example, while responding to an alarm at a hospital we walked the halls looking for the source and none of the crew carried a tool of any type. While at a car fire, tools were removed from the engine to force a truck door open, with only a pinch bar and a small hatchet seemingly available. These tools would be considered limited in purpose, quite primitive in fact, by our standards. Further training in this area would be of great value provided you are willing to diversify the tools you use and acquire other types of tools. Additional work is also needed in areas such as ventilation, entry and search. Firefighter safety is an extremely important topic, and from what we observed, removal techniques for injured firefighters are an important area that needs to be stressed. (See comment at end.)

Collapse

Work needs to be done in this area, with emphasis on building construction and types of collapse, stages of collapse rescue, tools, shoring, void entry with breaching and debris removal (light, medium and heavy with saws, torches, air bags, etc.). We view this as a mid-level priority, with access to heavy machinery.

Confined Space

This is the area where we felt work need to be done, especially in terms of safety to the rescuer. Your confined space activities include collapse as part of your regular scenarios. We never observed, however, any method for collapse shoring. A cache of struts and wood timbers, with proper training would greatly minimize the risk to rescue personnel. Firefighter removal techniques and a method to monitor atmospheric conditions are needed. Monitoring for lower explosive levels as well as oxygen and carbon monoxide levels is a critical safety issue. Patient packaging techniques and equipment are important in this area.

Forcible Entry

Tools such as haligans, mauls, heavy axes, etc., are important, as are procedures on their use, which we believe could dramatically enhance your efficiency. We never saw any irons being used. This was a concern to us.

Mask Confidence

Additional training is needed in this area. You should consider running search drills with blacked-out face pieces, setting off PASS alarms during these drills, using search lines, etc., so that mask confidence becomes second-nature.

Miscellaneous Training

Additional training should be provided in the following areas: Auto extrication, communication on the fire ground, engine operations, hose stretches, ladder skills, lock-out tag-out, monitoring of firefighters during operations, removal techniques (trapped firefighters, man in a machine, under a train, elevator rescue, etc.), roof operations, ropes and knots, self-contained breathing apparatus procedures (reduced profile, quick escape, mask confidence, etc.), search techniques, simple entries with a safety line, etc., should all be addressed. All of these require minimal equipment, and must be mastered before emphasizing any advanced training. Training in these areas must be coordinated with access to and use of the appropriate equipment, which we would be happy to recommend.

Special Operations Training

Based on our observation of your equipment and methods, training is needed in breaking and breaching, collapse operations, heavy rigging, shoring and cribbing, torch operations, trench rescue and void search.

Questions

We would appreciate your describing both the basic and advanced firefighter available. Do you have a central training academy? Do you have a burn building?

Comment

I conducted my drill on firefighter removal of an unconscious firefighter, making the point that a "down firefighter" may be the result of a medical condition, not necessarily a fire-related injury. I instructed three of the largest members to don their turnout gear and SCBA's. We then went to the stairs where we asked two of the members to carry the third member (acting as if he was unconscious) up one flight in a wide staircase. They proceeded to carry the member side-by-side, each holding one arm. This method is very strenuous because it overuses the small muscles of the upper body, instead of taking advantage of the more powerful muscles of the lower body. It also invites serious injury to the lower back of the unconscious firefighter. At this point, the firehouse had a run before we could demonstrate our techniques. It was rather late when we returned, and only a few of the members wanted to continue with the drill due to the late hour. We proceeded with two of the smallest members and set the stage by first narrowing the stairway (like you find leading to a cellar). The two members proceeded to carry the unconscious member using our method, with emphasis on leg muscles, which is our prescribed way to carry. The result was impressive, and the two members carried a third firefighter up two flights with less effort, praising the different technique as easier and quicker. This task is of vital importance in the work that we do, and we were surprised that the members seemed so deficient in this area. With a willingness to learn and share information, we see no reason why BDR couldn't adopt an efficient method and practice in this area, as in others.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chief Don Hayde
Chief Fred LaFemina
Lt. Daniel J. Duddy
Lt. Joseph Jardin
Lt. James Kiesling
Lt. David Raynor
Lt. Charles Schmidt
FF Enrico Biletti