



Box Alarm TRAINING

POSITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

Many fire departments all over the country utilize riding assignments in order to pre-assign a firefighter's roles and responsibilities. I have heard of many arguments for and against riding assignments. I encourage you to thoroughly research the different methods that are being used and find a method that works best for your department. In this article we will break down assignments into three common types. We will then review the advantages and disadvantages of these methods.



Assigning positions for fire-ground functions can create a much more fluid operation.

In order to grasp an understanding of why departments use assignments let's use an analogy to get started. Every time we respond to a working fire we are essentially running a play just like a football team. We can compare running offense and defense to the roles of the engine and truck companies. Even if you do not have an official "truck company" you still have to play defense or you will lose the game. If you took the best football players in the country and assembled them on a team with no playbook they would not be very effective. They may be a very talented group and make things work, but giving them specific roles and responsibilities will enable them to perform much more efficiently.

Sandlot Football

The first, and most inefficient method of making assignments would be to assign the roles and responsibilities when you arrive on scene. Just like a quarterback would draw routes in the dirt before running a play in a sandlot football game. This is without a doubt the most inefficient method of assigning tasks. However, many departments are bound to a version of this method due to a lack of staffing or fluctuation in response. This is typically where volunteer fire departments are at a major disadvantage. Many volunteer departments never know how many firefighters will respond or what equipment will arrive at a given time. To combat this

problem volunteer firefighters can do a few things to ease the confusion. If riding in an apparatus firefighters can predetermine roles and responsibilities based on riding position or can rapidly discuss the positions prior to arrival. If you allow P.O.V. response to fire scenes, then assigning functions on the fire-ground instead of specific tasks will make the assignment process much more efficient. For example: assign firefighters to perform horizontal ventilation instead of telling them to go grab specific tools and which window to break.

Offense and Defense

The second method of positional assignments would be to assign each arriving company a role and responsibility. This is basically like understanding that you will be playing offense or defense but you still do not know exactly what position you are playing. This is largely because you lack the staffing to fill every position on the team so you might have to play running back and wide receiver. In this method departments typically make assignments based on the order you arrive on scene. The first arriving engine is generally Fire Attack, the second engine is typically Water Supply and the third is a Support Role. This is a great way to have the advantage of predetermined roles for departments that are small and lack the staffing to assign detailed tasks to each firefighter. For instance, if the department does not operate an aerial or dedicated truck company you can still assign the truck company functions to the third or fourth due engine.



Assignments can be made by the order in which each company arrives.

Teammate Positions

The last and most efficient method of creating positional assignments is by assigning riding positions. Now you not only know if you are playing offense or defense, but you also know exactly what your position is and what your role will be when the center snaps the ball. This is typically used in larger urban departments such as the FDNY. The more firefighters you have the more detailed your assignments can be. The FDNY will give you a role, responsibility and even a tool assignment for each riding position. While this helps fulfill the essential fire-ground functions it is very difficult for most departments to take riding assignments to the level of the FDNY. Most departments will have to meet somewhere in the middle. This is just simple math, when an engine is staffed with five firefighters they are able to perform more efficiently because each firefighter has a more focused responsibility. If you are a textbook junkie you might know this as the division of labor. Using riding assignments will reduce the duplication of effort on scene and will offer an enormous advantage to departments capable of assigning riding positions.

Essential Fire-Ground Functions

One of the most direct counter arguments to making predetermined assignments is that every fire is different so if we make predetermined assignments it will limit the abilities of the firefighters to adjust and adapt. If you are using this logic then essentially you are saying that a football team should go to a game without a playbook or without knowing who should play what position. Football coaches do not throw out their game plan because the defense they face this week is different from what they are used to. When football players know their responsibilities they are able to audible to another play when the need arises. Firefighters should

be capable of doing the exact same thing. If you know your role is ventilation and the fire requires a vertical vent, you do it. If the fire requires PPV, then you audible and perform PPV. The worst case scenario is that the fire did need a vertical vent but no one was assigned the responsibility of performing ventilation. It is also said that every fire we respond to is different. While this is true; what we do at every fire is typically very similar. You do not have to over complicate things. It doesn't matter if you are fighting a single story residential fire or a multi-story high-rise, you will have to perform the same functions. The only difference is that it typically takes more personnel, equipment and resources to perform those functions. Let's take a look at the common essential functions.

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

-BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Fire Attack

- This is typically the assignment of the first arriving company. The faster and more efficiently we put water on the fire the better it gets for everyone.

Water Supply

- Water supply is typically assigned to the second due company. This may require the company to perform a forward lay to supply an engine with water, connect to an FDC or standpipe system, or perform a relay operation.

Search and Rescue

- This assignment is usually given to a truck company but can easily be assigned based on your arrival on scene. Crews might perform forcible entry, throw ladders, or perform searches in order to rescue victims.

Ventilation

- Ventilation is typically assigned to a truck company also but can be performed by any engine company with the necessary equipment.

We can elaborate tremendously on the above essential functions and can argue that many more essential functions could be added but with using the K.I.S.S. method those are the functions that need to be filled. If we had one Incident Commander, one Driver/Operator and eight firefighters we should be able to fill each of those functions. As the incident becomes larger and more in depth then it will require more resources to perform the same functions. Take the time to evaluate your department's game plan and discuss how your assignments could help you perform on the fire-ground.



Matt Hinkle currently serves as the Training Officer of the Lafayette County Fire Department in Oxford, MS. Matt has ten years of experience in the fire service and has been an Adjunct Instructor with the Mississippi State Fire Academy for the last five years. Matt runs a social media site and YouTube channel designed to provide firefighters with training videos in many disciplines. Matt has launched a full scale training business called Box Alarm Training and has developed several courses for firefighters. To check out his material go to www.BoxAlarmTraining.com, from the website you will be able to see his Facebook page, YouTube channel, and his Twitter feed @FFMattHinkle.