



PAWNEE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
SHERIFF DARRIN VARNELL

Policy # <b>Fire Safety – Entering Burning Buildings</b>	
<i>This policy is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. The policy should not be construed as creating a higher duty of care, in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party civil claims against employees. A violation of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office for non-judicial administrative action in accordance with the laws governing employee discipline.</i>	
Applicable Oklahoma Statutes:	
Applicable Regulations	
ACA Standard	
Date Implemented:08/2022	Review Date:08/2022

- I. **Purpose:** The purpose of this policy is to inform Deputies of The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office of the inherent dangers associated with responding to an active fire scene and attempting to make an entry into the structure for the purpose of conducting a search for a suspected trapped victim or for the purpose of attempting to warn or extricate persons from an active fire scene. This department acknowledges that not all actions by Deputies can be regulated by policy and procedure. Deputies work in a dangerous, dynamic, and rapidly evolving environment and are required to make split second decisions. Officer's actions should not be judged with 20/20 hindsight. However, the more information the officer possesses prior to making a critical decision the better the outcome will be.
- II. **Policy: Deputies of The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office are prohibited from entering a burning or smoke-filled structure except in IMMINENT LIFE THREATENING SITUATIONS.**
  - A. It is the policy of The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office that Deputies will not enter an active fire scene without first conducting an assessment of the totality of the scene for the purpose of:
    - a. Determining if there are persons trapped in the building,
    - b. Determining if there are persons who are present in the building and may not know they are in danger. For example: sleeping occupants of the home where the occupant is unaware of the imminent danger posed by fire and smoke,
    - c. Determining whether the entry and announcement, or rescue attempt will reasonably be met with success,
    - d. Prior to conducting an entire perimeter check of the structure (all sides)

- e. Determining if entry and announcement can be conducted with a reasonable amount of safety afforded to the officer.

### III. Definitions:

- a. **Flashover:** a flashover occurs when all the combustible materials in a room reach their ignition temperatures at the same time.
- b. **Carbon monoxide poisoning:** occurs after enough inhalation of carbon monoxide (CO). Carbon monoxide is a toxic gas, but, being colorless, odorless, tasteless, and initially non-irritating, it is very difficult for people to detect. Carbon monoxide is a product of incomplete combustion of organic matter due to insufficient oxygen supply to enable complete oxidation to carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).
- c. **Fire extinguisher:** A **fire extinguisher**, or **extinguisher**, is an active fire protection device used to extinguish or control small fires, often in emergency situations. It is not intended for use on an out-of-control fire, such as one which has reached the ceiling, endangers the user (i.e., no escape route, smoke...), or otherwise requires the expertise of a fire department. Typically, a fire extinguisher consists of a hand-held cylindrical pressure vessel containing an agent which can be discharged to extinguish a fire.
- d. **Imminent life-threatening situation:** Circumstances where immediate action could prevent the loss of life or serious injury

### IV. Overview of Fire Department Operations:

A. Fire department operations are broken into five major functions:

- a. **Engine Companies** – supply water to extinguish the fire. Engines need access to fire hydrants to supply water for firefighting. They also need access to the building on fire to minimize the length of hose needed. When engines have to make long hose stretches it can dramatically reduce the amount of water that can be delivered to the fire. A typical first alarm will have three engine companies assigned. It is generally considered very important that at least the first-in engine gets close access to the building.
- b. **Ladder companies** – provide ventilation, forcible entry and rescue for trapped occupants. They will have an aerial device that extends between 75 to 110 feet. Most aerial ladders are able to supply elevated water streams through one of a number of methods. Ladder companies will have hydraulic jacks and outriggers that will extend beyond the width of their vehicles. They need additional room to operate. It is very important that as many ladder companies as possible are able to get as close to the building as possible. The further away from the building they are positioned, the less high they will be able to reach on the building. In addition, the placement of an aerial ladder can be complicated by the presence of trees, electrical wires, and other obstructions that may not be immediately obvious. Of all of the fire department vehicle that need access to the building it is the ladder company.
- c. **Rescue, Heavy Rescue, or Squad Companies** – provide search and rescue, and heavy rescue services such as may be required in a building collapse. While at

most fires it is not critical that rescue companies be located close to the building in collapse situation it is beneficial to have their apparatus located closely to minimize the distance personnel have to travel to obtain needed equipment such as jacks, cribbing, the jaws of life, etc.

- d. EMS Companies or ambulances** – basically provide emergency medical services. Close proximity to the building is not as essential for EMS units but immediate access to leave the scene is critical
  - e. Command** – these are usually SUVs or small trucks that transport the chief who will be in charge of the fire (the Incident Commander). Generally, it is preferable to get the IC as close to the building as possible that will give him/her a good vantage point over what is going on. Today, best practices want the IC to remain in or at his/her vehicle, often remaining in the vehicle with a headset on to be able to communicate with fire crews in the building.
- B.** Engine, ladder, and rescue companies should be staffed with 3 to 5 members and will be under the command of a company officer, usually either a captain or lieutenant.
  - C.** An EMS unit will typically be staffed by 2 EMTs or paramedics, one of who may be an officer.
  - D.** The command vehicle will be staffed by either a battalion chief, deputy chief, district chief and may also have another firefighter serving as a command assistant.

## **V. Discussion:**

Deputies are often called upon during their tour of duty to render aid and assistance to victims in need. Often this call for help is in response to an active fire scene. Frequently the officer arrives at the scene of an active fire before members of the fire department. It is at this time that split second decisions are made by the officer as to whether they will enter the building to warn or rescue occupants.

It must be recognized by Deputies that they possess limited training, education and experience related to fire science and firefighting tactics. Deputies are not adequately equipped with firefighting equipment such as fire retardant clothing, breathing apparatus, protective head and eye gear, and fire suppression equipment. Because the officer lacks these tools he is at a significant disadvantage at the fire scene.

### **What might be the hardest decision for an officer to make is to not enter a burning structure or where people might or even are known to be trapped.**

Thousands of Americans die in home and building fires each year. Most fire victims die from inhaling smoke and poisonous gases, not from burns. If you know how to recognize danger signs and how to act appropriately, you will increase your chances of safely getting into and out of a burning building.

A key to survivability at an active fire scene is for an officer to stop get the big picture of the incident they are facing, gather as much information as possible, and make an educated decision as to the probability of victim survival.

The officer should calculate how long the fire has been burning. How much time elapsed between the time of the call and the officer's arrival? The longer the fire has been active the more dangerous the environment and the decreased probability for victim survival.

Deputies should consider a perimeter rescue rather than entering the building. Positioning a ladder at an open window is an example.

The officer should ask; what is the estimated time of arrival of the fire department?

Deputies should consider the type of structure and where the active fire scene is located. If the structure is a multi-floor structure the officer must recognize that the higher he climbs the more difficult it is to retreat or to be reached by fire apparatus. The same can be true for entering a basement of a structure as Deputies may be trapped where there are limited avenues of egress.

More fire deaths occur from CO poisoning than from any other toxic product of combustion. It demonstrates the speed with which CO can incapacitate an individual (within minutes). CO is as "an odorless, colorless, tasteless, and non-irritating gas that is present in all fires ... it is an extremely flammable gas that can travel great distances. CO crowds out oxygen from the blood, poisoning the brain and tissues. Several factors that can lead to CO poisoning include (1) the level of CO in an area, (2) the length of time exposed, and (3) the physical condition and activity of the individual during the exposure.

Risking lives to save others is a noble cause, however it must be done only after calculating the all the risks. With national average response times for fire departments of four to six minutes, Deputies should consider if it is in the best interest of all concerned to wait for the fire department to arrive.

## **VI. Arrival On Scene**

- A. When arriving on the scene avoid parking in an area that would obstruct:
  - a. Traffic flow because this will quickly clog the streets and delay the access of responding fire units
  - a. Access to the building for engines and ladders
  - b. Access to any fire hydrant
  - c. Access to any standpipe connection, sprinkler connection or fire department building connection
  
- B. If you opt to block the street to prevent further civilian traffic **YOU MUST REMAIN WITH YOUR VEHICLE**

## **VII. Procedures when Deputies arrive prior to fire department personnel:**

- a. On arrival at the fire scene the officer will notify dispatch and request the estimated time of arrival of the fire department
- b. Request updated information on victims; are there persons in the structure, how many, where are they located
- c. Attempt to identify someone reliable on the scene who knows the building, knows who is/was in the building, and what is going on. That person is a critical asset for the officer and fire department. Ask that person to remain with you and escort them to the first arriving company officer and/or the chief officer once the

crews arrive. THIS MAY BE THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT TASK AN OFFICER UNDERTAKES TO SAVE A LIFE AT A FIRE.

- d. Deputies will not enter an active fire scene to recover any animal or family pet.
- e. **IMMINENT LIFE THREATENING SITUATION:** If personnel find an imminent life-threatening situation where immediate action could prevent the loss of life or serious injury, entry into the hazardous area shall be permitted.
  - i. No exception shall be permitted when there is no possibility to save lives.
  - ii. When actions are taken in accordance with this section, the officer shall immediately inform dispatch by radio, who in turn will notify fire dispatch so that necessary support and backup will be provided.
  - iii. Any such actions taken in accordance with this section shall be thoroughly investigated by the Department through the after action review process established below with a written report to be submitted to the Sheriff.
- f. Do not open doors or windows of the fire building to ventilate smoke from the building. Experience shows it is very unlikely that ventilating smoke from a building will actually help victim, while it is extremely likely to cause fire to accelerate making it more likely the victim may perish. Breaking windows is prohibited.
- g. Deputies should consider the use of the department issued fire extinguisher when entering the fire scene.
- h. Be alert for rapidly changing fire and smoke conditions. Fires grow exponentially!!!
- i. Deputies should feel every door before opening it. Place the back of your hand on the crack between the door and the door frame; if it's hot, do not open the door. Even if the door is cool, open it cautiously. Stay low in case smoke or toxic fumes are seeping around the door. If heat and smoke come in, slam the door tightly.
- j. If you use a window for your escape, be sure the door(s) in the room is closed tightly. Otherwise, the draft from the open window may draw smoke and fire into the room.
- k. If you are unable to escape from a room because of a fire on the other side of the door, stuff clothing, towels, or newspapers in the door's cracks to keep smoke out of your refuge.
- l. Remember "STOP, DROP, ROLL" if your clothing catches fire. The moment it happens, stop where you are. Drop to the ground, and cover your mouth and face with your hands to protect them from the flames. Then roll over and over to smother the flames.

- m.** Never ever use an elevator in a burning building. Fire conditions can cause an elevator to malfunction trapping occupants or even worse, taking them directly to the fire floor. Instead, go directly to the nearest fire- and smoke-free stairway.
- n.** If you are in a building on fire and cannot get to a fire stairway, go to a room with an outside window, preferably one facing the street side that is accessible by fire department aerial equipment
- o.** Stay where rescuers can see you through the window, and wave a light-colored cloth such as a hand towel to attract their attention.
- p.** Do not go above a fire. That is the most dangerous location on the scene.

### **VIII. When the fire department arrives:**

- A.** Relay pertinent incident related information to the company officer of the first arriving fire apparatus. Each company that arrives on scene will have a company officer or acting company officer (senior firefighter acting in the officer's absence).
- B.** Every firefighter and officer who arrives on scene will likely be running through mental checklists and may not be fully attentive to the information you are providing. They may have so much on their minds that they may not be able to process what you are telling them. If you cannot communicate your information to the company Deputies, communicate the information to the chief officer, who in turn can direct the engine, ladder and rescue companies via radio.
- C.** If you have identified someone on the scene who knows the building, escort that person to the first arriving company officer and/or the chief officer.

### **IX. After Action Review:**

- A.** Following an event that results in an officer entering an active fire scene prior to the arrival of the fire department an incident review will take place.
- B.** Those participating in the review should include:
  - a.** The involved Deputies
  - b.** The involved officer's supervisor
  - c.** The department's officer overseeing training
  - d.** If possible a ranking member of the fire department
- C.** The purpose of the review will be to determine if there were any issues requiring a re-evaluation of agency policy and/or procedures or training needs identified.
- D.** The completed review will be forwarded to the Sheriff.