

**Montebello Fire Department
Green Sheet Report**

**Second Alarm Apartment Fire – 316 N. Wilbur Place
Firefighter Injury – 3rd Degree Burns
October 20, 2012
Verdugo Incident #12-0260449**



This report is intended as a safety and training tool, and aid to preventing future occurrences and to inform interested parties. Because it is published on a short time frame, the information contained herein is subject to revisions as further investigation is conducted and additional information is developed.

Summary

On October 20, 2012 at approximately 2130 hours, a Montebello Fire Department Firefighter / Paramedic was injured while fighting a second alarm structure fire in the 300 Block of Wilbur Pl., Montebello. During interior firefighting operations at a two story garden style apartment building, the firefighter / paramedic was operating as the nozzleman on a 1 ¾" handline inside a well involved second floor apartment unit, when he received third degree burns to his right foot and lower leg when his leg broke through the floor. The firefighter / paramedic was treated at the scene and transported to a local hospital for further treatment. The firefighter / paramedic was released from the hospital the next morning and continues to receive treatment for the burn injuries. He is projected to remain off duty for at least 2 months while continuing to receive medical treatment.

Incident Overview

On October 20, 2012 at 2109 hours, Verdugo Communications dispatched Montebello Engines 55, 56, 57, Truck 55, Battalion 55, and CARE Ambulance to a reported structure fire at 316 Wilbur Pl., Montebello. Enroute to the incident, both Engine 55 and Truck 55 reported smoke showing from approximately 3 blocks out indicating a working fire. Truck 55 arrived on scene first due and reported a large two story garden style apartment complex with fire showing to the rear of the complex. The complex was reported to be at the end of a long driveway approximately 300' back from the street.

Engine 55 (4 person crew) layed a 4" supply line from a hydrant approximately 250' north of the fire. Engine 55 assumed "Fire Attack" and the Captain directed his crew to perform a hose stretch of 300' of 2 ½" supply line to the courtyard of the apartment complex. Hose bundles with 100' of 1 ¾" hoseline connected to a 2 ½" to 1 ½" gated wye would be attached to the 2 ½" supply line and be utilized for fire attack.

Battalion 55 arrived on scene and established command as "Wilbur I/C". Wilbur I/C assigned Truck 55 (4 person crew) as the "Roof Division" and was tasked with evaluating the roof for ventilation operations. Truck 55 was staged on Wilbur Pl. to the front of the structure and proceeded approximately 300' to the apartment structure with (2) 24' ground ladders to provide access to the roof of the two story structure. Ladder placement was to the "B" and "D" exposure units adjacent to the involved apartment unit.

Command further sized up the fire and reported a fully involved apartment unit on the second floor of a garden style apartment building with possible extension into adjacent apartment units and extension into the common attic. At this point, Wilbur I/C requested a Second Alarm assignment from Verdugo Dispatch.

As Engine 55 crew was stretching their hose line into the apartment complex courtyard and preparing for fire attack, Wilbur I/C assigned Engine 56 (3 person crew) to secure an additional supply line from a hydrant south of the incident and then assist Engine 55 crew with fire attack.

Upon arrival, Engine 57 (4 person crew) was assigned by Wilbur I/C to perform search of the adjacent apartment units and provide a report on conditions. Engine 57 was further instructed to provide an additional 2 ½" supply line into the courtyard of the complex to support additional hose bundles due to the potential of spread of fire into adjacent apartment units and the common attic. All first alarm units were committed at this point in the incident.

Engine 55 crew proceeded to attach their 1 ¾' hose bundles utilizing a wye to the 2 ½" supply line at the base of the stairwell in the courtyard of the apartment complex. The crew was in full PPE and SCBA and donned their air masks upon making it to the landing on the top of the stairwell on the second floor. The stairwell is located approximately 30' to the south of the involved apartment unit. As the crew completed their hose extension to the second floor exterior walkway, the Captain ordered the hose line to be charged. As the hoseline was being charged, the crew of Engine 55 observed the fire conditions with fire venting out both windows and the entrance door to the unit and lapping above the roof line. The crew directed their hose stream into the window openings proceeding from the south side of the fire to the entrance door achieving some darkening down of the main body of fire that appeared to be in the living room. The crew indicated that it took some time with applying water for the fire to start to darken down. The nozzleman and firefighter of Engine 55 made entrance through the front door of the unit and proceeded into the interior in a crouched position due to the heat levels from the fire. As the nozzleman and firefighter entered the door and proceeded to the left towards the kitchen area, they both noticed the floor become hotter and noticed piles of debris burning at the floor level. At this point, the Captain had separated from the crew and went to check for extension of the fire in the exposure apartment unit to the "D" side. The firefighter directed the nozzleman to reposition himself so that he can redirect his hoseline to attack the fire on the floor level. This was at a location approximately 7' inside the doorway. As the nozzleman repositioned himself, he put additional pressure on his right foot while pivoting around, and his right leg broke through the flooring material. The firefighter assisted the nozzleman in removing his leg from the opening in the floor by pulling on his SCBA harness. The nozzleman's right leg went through the opening up to the level of his knee.

The nozzleman and firefighter on Engine 55 were able to evacuate from the apartment unit and were met on the exterior balcony by the Captain of Engine 55. The nozzleman reported to the Captain that he had received burns to his right leg and foot. The nozzleman was able to walk on his own down the stairwell to the courtyard of the complex and sit up along a wrought iron fence. The Captain of Engine 55 reported that he had a "firefighter down" on his crew due to burn injuries and he had exited the unit

and was now down in the courtyard of the apartment complex. The Captain of Engine 55 and Engine 55 Firefighter continued to perform fire attack utilizing a 1 ¾' hoseline from the outside of the doorway of the apartment unit in an effort to hold the fire in check and try to knock down the remaining fire inside of the approximately 1000 square foot two bedroom apartment unit.

Engine 57's Captain assessed the injured firefighter and assisted him in removing his turnout boot and sock on his affected leg. At this time, the Captain noticed the degree of burns and notified Wilbur I/C of the need for medical treatment. Wilbur I/C directed the on scene ambulance crew to tend to the injured firefighter / paramedic, and Verdugo Communications dispatched an additional paramedic unit to respond to the scene to provide medical treatment. The injured firefighter / paramedic was treated by Los Angeles County Fire Department Squad 50 paramedics and was transported to a local hospital for treatment.

A knockdown of the fire was called at 2153 hours by Wilbur I/C. The remainder of the incident was mitigated without any further injuries or notable occurrences. Fire crews were able to contain the fire to the unit of origin on the second floor with some minor extension into both adjacent units on the "B" and "D" exposure sides. Fire did transmit into the common attic, however it was held in check on the "D" exposure by a partition wall in the attic, and through efforts by the Truck 55 crew, a heat hole in conjunction with trench ventilation limited the fire spread on the "B" exposure side. Second Alarm units were utilized to assist with ventilation operations, fire attack, primary and secondary searches, and salvage operations on the first floor. No civilians were injured in this incident.

Weather

The weather conditions in Montebello on October 20, 2012 were slightly below average for that time of year. The high temperature for the day was 73 degrees F and the low temperature for the day was 65 degrees F. At the time of the fire, there were no discernable winds and the sky was clear. No precipitation occurred on this day.

Conditions

At the time of the alarm, all Montebello fire companies were in quarters and responded without delay at 2109 hours. Traffic conditions were not an issue for responding apparatus and there were no noted delays during the response.

Upon arrival of the first due fire companies, a significant column of black smoke was visible from the rear of the apartment complex – approximately 300' back from the street (Wilbur Pl.). Due to the configuration of the apartment complex and the distance the complex was located from the street, actual fire conditions could not be viewed from the street location. After entering the courtyard area of the apartment complex,

fire crews were able to observe heavy fire conditions involving the single apartment unit on the second floor on the "C" side of the apartment complex. Heavy fire was lapping from the windows of the involved unit over the eave line and extending approximately 5 feet above the eave line. Heavy dark smoke was also visible from several attic vents over an approximately 50' section in each direction of the roof to the "B" side and "D" side of the involved unit.

Fire crews were advised by Montebello PD Officers that all occupants had been evacuated from the structure.

The two story apartment complex contained 34 units and an approximately 40' by 100' courtyard to the center of the "O" shaped structure. The apartment complex was Type 5 construction with stucco exterior walls and a roof that was comprised of asphalt composition shingles. A common attic space contained partitions to limit the spread of fire. Several poke through openings in the partition walls could be observed on inspection after the fire. The fire did not extend past the partitions wall to the "B" or "D" side of the fire.

Injuries / Damages

The fire caused approximately \$50,000 damage to the structure and \$10,000 damage to contents. Direct fire damage was noted in the affected apartment unit (total loss), and the attic space directly above the affected apartment unit, and minor fire damage extending into adjacent units on the "B" and "D" side. Water damage and ancillary damage due to firefighting operations was incurred to three apartment units on the first floor and the two apartment units located on the "B" and "D" side of the involved unit on the second floor.

One Firefighter / Paramedic received burn injuries on this incident. The burn injuries received by the Firefighter / Paramedic occurred during interior firefighting operations. The Firefighter / Paramedic received third degree burns to the top of the right foot, first degree burns to the right calf, and first degree burns to the right wrist after his right leg broke through the second story floor while operating as the nozzleman on an 1 ¾" handline to the interior of the involved apartment unit.

Direct Cause

The direct cause of the burn injuries to the Firefighter / Paramedic was the result of direct contact to burning materials. As the Firefighter / Paramedic and his partner were maneuvering their charged hoseline on the interior of the involved apartment unit, the Firefighter / Paramedic shifted his body weight onto his right foot to redirect the hose stream causing the wood floor on the second floor to break away and allow the majority of his right leg to plunge through the opening in the floor. As his right leg plunged through the opening in the floor, the right leg of his turnout pant was pushed upwards

exposing the top part of his boot and allowing burning embers / materials to enter his boot. The Firefighter / Paramedic immediately experienced a burning pain to his right foot / leg. Upon hearing that the Firefighter / Paramedic was in distress, his partner assisted by pulling him from the hole by grabbing on to the rear harness of his SCBA. Both Firefighter / Paramedics immediately exited from the apartment unit. The injured Firefighter / Paramedic walked under his own power down the stairwell to the courtyard of the apartment complex. The Firefighter / Paramedic was assisted by the Captain of Engine 57 in removing his right boot and revealing that the embers had burned multiple holes in his cotton socks. The socks were removed exposing the burn injuries. Medical aid was provided by on scene paramedic units and he was transported to a local hospital for further treatment.

Contributing Causes to Injury

The burning materials that caused the injury to the Firefighter / Paramedic were located at floor level in the apartment unit. Both Firefighter / Paramedics manning the 1 ¾" hoseline described the interior fire conditions as very high heat and noted that materials were burning on the floor level. Both Firefighter / Paramedics also noted that fire was evident above their heads and was visible in the attic space. The ceiling had burned through at this point exposing the attic area. Fire was visible throughout the entire 1000' square foot apartment complex.

The fire investigation revealed that the cause of the fire was due to ignition of flammable vapors by the stove pilot light located in the kitchen. A handy man had been utilizing a flammable product to apply a series of coatings on the steel kitchen sink to achieve a "porcelain look" to the sink. During the day, the apartment unit had the windows and doors open to achieve natural ventilation during the drying process while the product was being applied. At approximately 1700 hours, all openings in the apartment complex were closed and no natural ventilation was occurring.

The flammable product contained many highly flammable compounds and the vapors were heavier than air. During the investigation process, it was determined that the heavier than air vapors settled onto and into some of the flooring materials accelerating the spread of the fire which may have caused the floor to burn through in approximately 4 locations within 7' to 10' of the entrance door. The hole that the Firefighter / Paramedic's leg plunged through was approximately 24" by 18".

The initial 911 caller statements supported that the fire had already reached "flashover" stage, and broken glass approximately 25' from the involved unit indicates a substantial force behind the fire's development.

Safety Issues for Mandatory Review

Supervision of fire crews during interior structure firefighting is imperative. Company Officers must ensure the safety of their crews by observing fire conditions during firefighting operations and keeping in contact with their crews to monitor their progress, observe hazards, and communicate tactics. The Company Officer did not have direct contact with his crew at the time of the injury as he had positioned himself in the exposure apartment unit to observe for extension of the fire.

Interior firefighting crews must be observant of changing conditions and evaluate fire conditions above, around, and below while advancing hoselines into the structure. Sounding of the floor ahead of the hose line crew may have identified a weakened floor.

With the heavy fire conditions encountered by the hose line crew making interior attack, a second or back up hose line crew should be in position for the protection of the interior crew and to augment fire attack.

Rapid Intervention Teams are essential on working structure fires. On this incident, First Alarm units were committed to basic firefighting functions and the Rapid Intervention Company was assigned to a Second Alarm Engine Company. First Alarm companies met the 2 in 2 out requirements for IDLH atmospheres, however fire conditions and the potential for injury or entrapment was more of a threat during the initial stages of this fire.

Incidental Issues / Lessons Learned

Upon confirming that a Firefighter / Paramedic had been injured, Verdugo Communications immediately requested an additional CARE Ambulance and Paramedic Squad to respond to the incident. The dispatching actions expedited the response of additional resources and assisted the Incident Commander in resource requests.

Clear radio communications is essential for all units operating on the incident. Clear, short, and concise communications must be maintained on radio transmissions. Some radio communications were very difficult to hear through the SCBA mask, with muffled and lengthy transmissions that often needed to be repeated. This was a frustration for some crews that were unable to communicate their needs at critical points during the incident.

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