



From the Fireground
by Jason Hoevelmann

Tool tips for Vent-Enter-Search

VES requires some different parameters than that of a traditional search

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Last month we discussed some basic [principles of the primary search](#) and gave some examples of where we tend to lack in our search methods. This month I want to get a little more advanced and discuss the process of Vent-Enter-Search.

This can be a very hot debate depending on who you are talking to. However, this method of searching can be done safely and effectively *if* you train frequently on this specific task.

Unlike the traditional search methods where we enter through a door and search with the attack team, with the line or even without a line, this search method is started from the exterior and the rules are a little different.

Searching under traditional guidelines we find a wall and methodically search that room or area. Vent, enter and search is much different and some of the priorities are much different.

Conditions

Vent-Enter-Search, or VES, requires some different parameters than that of a traditional search. The main purpose for the use of VES is when certain conditions present themselves and an immediate action needs to take place.

Depending on how each jurisdiction operates, someone should be getting around the fire building. Whether it's an assigned outside vent man/team or an officer or a different company arriving after the initial apparatus, someone has to make a circle around the fire building.

During these trips they should be looking for signs of victims: hand prints in the soot on the window, open windows, curtains pulled partially down, broken glass or a room or area specifically identified by someone who escaped from the building. These are clues that we must use to determine an immediate life hazard.

In those circumstances it could be appropriate to perform VES. The purpose is to search the room or area for victims that have not yet escaped but, due to our size up and observations, are likely still in that area.

Other reasons we need to perform VES is if the attack team and interior search teams can't get to the fire or certain parts of the building. Maybe the interior crews just can't make a knock down on the fire and the path to the bedrooms or living areas are blocked.

This is a condition that VES may need to be performed to search for life. These are some conditions of when VES should be used but it is not limited to these examples. You must use a good size up and experience to determine when VES is appropriate.

Tools

Just like with every skill we perform, we must have mastered the basics of that skill and the tools that will be required. These tools can be our way in and our way out. As you will see later on, your tools play a vital role in the performing of VES.

VES has to be fast. You don't want to get bogged down with too many tools or tools that are too heavy. Pick tools that you're proficient with and that you can use easily. The tools that I prefer are a halligan bar and some type of hook or pike pole. With these two tools you can do what you need to do with VES.

Depending upon how high windows are, you may need a ladder and, obviously, the height of the window will determine what size ladder you will need to deploy. Just be prepared to take the proper equipment with you the first time so you don't waste time having to go back to the rig to get it.

If the windows aren't too high, you can use your halligan bar as a step. Wrap a piece of webbing around it so you can pull it into the room with you once you make entry.

You're going to use your hook or pike pole for multiple uses. First, you need to clear the window. That means the entire window. Try to make it a door, but it has to be fast.

Second, once you get on the sill, you need to sound the floor. Just a note on sounding the floor: don't slam the tool into the floor.

Remember where we find victims? At points of egress, like under windows and in doorways. We don't want to put a hole in a victim or break their skull, especially if it is a young child.

Third, when you make entry, pull the hook and rest it on the sill with the handle in the room you're searching. If things go bad and you can't see the window, you can find that handle and make your way to the window.

Of course, your SCBA is a tool along with full PPE and a hand light and a radio.