

Grand Forks Fire Department

Standard Operating Procedures

SOP# 607.02	Section Operations	Title Lost or Trapped Firefighters
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I. Purpose:

To provide procedures and guidelines to identify individual and command responsibilities for lost or trapped firefighters.

II. Scope:

The rescue of trapped or lost firefighters in a burning building is especially time sensitive. There is a very narrow “window of survivability” for a firefighter who is out of SCBA air supply or trapped. Individual firefighters must not delay reporting to Command if they become lost, trapped, or otherwise in need of assistance. Company officers must not delay reports of lost firefighters or inability to complete accountability reports. Command and Sector Officers must always assume that the missing firefighter is lost in the building until the firefighter can be accounted for. Survival depends on a mix of predictable self-survival actions by the lost firefighter and the Incident Commander.

III. Definitions:

Mayday: Radio terminology used by any unit or individual to report that firefighters are lost, trapped, or in a life-threatening situation.

Emergency traffic: Term used to communicate an urgent or important message other than lost, trapped, or otherwise endangered firefighter.

Personal Accountability Report (PAR): Report given to Command or Operations that all members of the crew are accounted for.

IV. Mayday

1. The term MAYDAY shall be reserved only to report firefighters who are lost, trapped, or in a life threatening situation.

They shall transmit the word “MAYDAY” via radio by announcing in increments of three “MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY” followed by a radio message to Command identifying themselves along with their location. Information pertaining to the location should be as specific as possible. (E.g. MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY, Engine 8 to Command, we are trapped in the basement on side 3. This shall be repeated until acknowledged by the Incident Commander.)

2. This report should include the following:

- Unit(s) involved and how many firefighters are affected.
- The last known location-including the side, quadrant, floor, sector, etc.
- Description of any life threatening situation; (e.g. Firefighter running out of air).

3. The term “MAYDAY” typically will be used in the following situations:

- a. By the member who is lost, trapped, or in trouble.
- b. By the company officer, sector officer, or other member who cannot account for an assigned firefighter who is operating in the hazard zone. This “MAYDAY” would generally occur following a PAR report that fails to locate/account for the suspected lost member.
- c. By a member who witnesses or has confirmed that a firefighter is lost or in trouble.

4. Any “Mayday” shall receive priority over all other radio traffic.

V. Emergency Traffic

1. The term “emergency traffic” shall be used to communicate any urgent or important message other than a lost or trapped firefighter.

2. Examples of emergency traffic situations:

- Imminent collapse feared
- Structural collapse has occurred
- Someone has suffered an injury that is not immediately life threatening but needs immediate assistance.
- Loss of water which endangers personnel.

3. Any report of “Emergency Traffic” will receive radio priority.

VI. Lost or trapped Firefighters

1. Company Officers or Sector Officers unable to locate a crew or a firefighter assigned to them shall immediately notify Command.

2. The report should include the following:

- The unit(s) involved and how many firefighters are affected.
- The last known location-including the side, quadrant, floor, sector, etc.
- Actions being taken, by whom, and what units are involved.

VII. Radio Notification

- A. Firefighting positions shall NOT be abandoned during the rescue effort. To protect trapped or lost personnel from the effects of the fire, firefighters must confine and control the fire.
- B. Firefighters who find themselves lost or trapped should use the term MAYDAY to announce their situation while they continue to attempt to find their way out.
- C. Firefighters should not delay notification of distress and shall provide the following information:
- personal identification
 - what sector they are operating in
 - where they THINK they are (as accurately as possible) or where they were last sure of their location
 - Description of the building structures surrounding them or a description of the area where they are.
 - Any other information that might direct rescue crews to their location

VIII. PASS Device Activation

- A. As soon as a firefighter becomes aware of being lost or trapped, the PASS Alert device must be manually activated to sound the audible tone. The device must remain activated until rescue is effected.
- B. The firefighter should use whatever means they have at hand to signal to other crews in their location.

IX. Firefighter Actions

- A. Lost crews shall stay intact as a crew.
- B. Where doors, windows, or other means of egress are not available, firefighters should attempt to reach an exterior wall. Once at the wall, they will normally be able to search for doorways, windows, and hallways.
- C. If firefighters cannot find a way out, but can find safe refuge (protective room or floor) away from the fire, they should take advantage of this location. Command should then be advised of the safe refuge area.

D. A conscious effort must be made by the lost firefighters to control breathing and pace physical exertion activities to extend their air supply.

- The firefighters should maintain composure and remain calm.
 - Unnecessary talking or physical activity must cease.
 - If firefighters cannot get out, they should assume positions on the floor that maximize the audible effects of their PASS devices, ensure that flashlights are pointed toward the ceiling.
- a. This procedure will enhance the rescuers' ability to see and locate downed firefighters.
 - b. The firefighters should attempt tapping noises to assist rescuers in locating them.

X. Incident Commander

1. **IMMEDIATELY** upon receipt of the Mayday, the Incident Commander shall request a Personnel Accountability Report (PAR) for all Companies operating on the fireground.
2. The Incident Commander shall **ALWAYS** assume that the missing firefighters are lost or trapped in the building until they are accounted for.
3. Rapid, concise decisions and actions must be taken to increase survivability.
4. The Incident Commander shall immediately direct Central Dispatch to sound alert tone #2.
5. This tone shall be followed by a general announcement as directed by the Incident Commander.
6. The Incident Commander shall restructure strategy to include a Priority Rescue effort while maintaining fire control.
7. A rescue plan must be developed and communicated to necessary personnel for implementation.
8. Additional personnel may be requested based on circumstances and potential. Early consideration should be given to the need for heavy equipment in structural collapse.
9. The Incident Commander cannot develop an effective rescue plan until accurate information is available.
10. The Incident Commander may have to withdraw crews to the exterior to obtain accurate personnel accounting.

11. Command will immediately send the Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) to the most appropriate location to initiate search and rescue efforts.
12. Efforts should be concentrated on reinforcing existing positions. Keeping the fire out of the rescue area, and providing appropriate resources, ventilation, and lighting.

MAYDAY decision parameters should be made and discussed at the fire station.

The following MAYDAY decision parameters are for a single-family dwelling, 1 or 2 story with or without a basement:

1. Tangled, pinned, or stuck, low air alarm activation. (MAYDAY)
2. Fall through roof. (MAYDAY)
3. Tangled, pinned, or stuck and do not extricate self in 60 seconds. (MAYDAY)
4. Caught in flashover. (MAYDAY)
5. Fall through floor. (MAYDAY)
6. Zero visibility, no contact with hose or lifeline, do not know direction to exit.(MAYDAY)
7. Primary exit blocked by fire or collapse, not at secondary exit in 30 seconds.(MAYDAY)
8. Low air alarm activation, not at exit (window or door) in 30 seconds. (MAYDAY)
9. Cannot find exit (door or window) in 60 seconds. (MAYDAY)

Remember that it is our responsibility as firefighters to determine the parameters for declaring a MAYDAY!