

Operating Guideline # 815

Buddy System

Created: December 9, 2019

Revised: February 21, 2025



PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Operating Guideline (OG) is to establish guidelines to provide for individual safety through the use of the buddy system.

GUIDELINE:

1. Firefighters working at an emergency scene, entering a burning structure, entering a hazardous area, driving a fire apparatus, or working alone must employ the “Buddy System” or must be accounted for at all times under Chief direction. The purpose of this system is to ensure that if one firefighter becomes injured, trapped or unconscious, the buddy will be available to assist or call for help. Alternatively, in rare circumstances a firefighter may be tasked to work alone with a radio and a supervisor monitoring their work.
2. When at all possible, attack or rescue crews should operate with even numbers (2 or 4 firefighters) of team members. This number includes the company officer. Should one member of the team have to leave the building, the entire team exits together as a team or unit. This applies whether the team is comprised of 2 or 4 firefighters (or more). The team must remain in constant communication with one another, and in limited visibility situation, all should remain in physical contact with one another.
3. In the rare event the situation dictates that an entry team be required to operate with uneven numbers (3 or 5 firefighters) including a company officer, it is extremely important that the buddy system is followed because it is easier for one firefighter to go missing before someone notices. Under this team concept, no one exits a hazardous area alone. If a situation makes it necessary for one member of the team to exit, then the entire team exits.
4. Operating teams will function at all times under the buddy system. If the team is comprised of two members; two go in and two come out together. If three go in then three come out together.

RESPONSIBILITY:

It is the responsibility of all members to comply with the provisions of this OG and particularly that Company Officers (supervisors) and firefighters (workers) ensure that they adhere to their duties in accordance with the provisions of this document and the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

DEFINITIONS:

Buddy System: a safety practice in firefighting that pairs firefighters together to work in hazardous areas. It's one of the oldest and most important principles taught to firefighters.

REFERENCES:

- Occupational Health and Safety Act (RSO 1990, c. 0.1)
- S. 21 Guidance Note GN 2-2, the Buddy System