

# **Second Alarm Fire**

## **2437 Parallel Lane February 7, 2007**

### **Introduction**

At 0432 hours on February 7, 2007 a house fire reported with persons trapped was dispatched to 2437 Parallel Lane in Burtonsville on Incident #07-0012498. Responding units found a two story single family dwelling fully involved. It was determined that no one was trapped but one occupant was transported with burn injuries. The RID and a second alarm were struck. Battalion Chief 1 assumed command and all units were ultimately engaged. The last units cleared at approximately 0200 hours.

### **Order of Dispatch**

Box Alarm: 0432 hrs. – E181, E121, E161, HCE111, E41, T25, T18 RS15, M159, BC2, BC5, EMS2, RDO, GDO

RID: 0437 hrs. – T12, RS3

Second Alarm: 0441 hrs – E151, PGE412, E241, E211, PGE312, AT18, AT19, PGAT10, M20

### **Weather**

Temperature at time of dispatch was 19 degrees. Winds were 5 – 10 mph, skies cloudy with light snow falling. Ground was covered with several inches of previous snowfall. Weather was a significant factor, compromising firefighter safety and complicated suppression efforts.

### **Building, Access and Topography**

The building is two story single family dwelling of ordinary construction approximately 25 years old. It was occupied by two persons, one of whom was home at the time of the fire. The house was located in a suburban residential neighborhood of approximately one third acre lots, streets were free of restrictions. All sides were easily accessible but snow cover and ice formation made surfaces slippery. The building has a pitched wood truss roof with asphalt shingles. The house was literally fully involved upon arrival making any entry impossible. The building was equipped with a battery smoke detector and no suppression systems.

### **Fire Suppression Logistics'**

Most units who should have been on a first alarm were committed on a house fire in Prince Georges County. That incident was winding down when the dispatch for a house fire with persons trapped was made. Battalion Chief 1 was monitoring the channel and directed PSCC to utilize these units which were all much closer. All units with the exception of Truck 12 went in service and started responding. This created some

confusion on the order of response and arrival which was never fully clarified. Response was slowed due to snowy road conditions. Medic 159 asked for the RID and then a Second Alarm so all units who had been dispatched were ultimately assigned by PSCC to an order on one of those assignments. The Second Alarm units were staged and then committed as needed.

The fire originated in the first floor family room. The adult male occupant was attempting to fuel a space heater and spilled the fuel which ignited. He ultimately exited the building without calling 911 which resulted in a significant delay in reporting the fire. Medic 159 requested the Rapid Intervention Dispatch enroute and then a Second Alarm upon arrival. Rescue Squad 15 was the first fire unit on the scene and assumed command for a brief time until the arrival of BC1. The occupant was able to confirm that no one else was in the building prior to being transported to Medstar for burns to his legs. With the house fully involved initial hoses lines were placed on exposures, especially Delta exposure, which were smoking badly due to radiant heat. Blitz fire monitors, heavy hand lines and eventually the wagon pipe on Engine 181 contained and knocked down the fire. Water supply was established from hydrants and was not an issue. Due to the collapse of the structure pockets of fire remained well into the morning, monitored by an assignment reduced to two engines and a truck.

Stretching of hose lines was hampered by extremely icy ground conditions and by an arcing electrical power line on Side A. One firefighter received an injury in part due to poor footing. Numerous slips and falls were observed but no one reported injury. Several drivers reported cold related pump panel issues but these did not cause any disruption to operations. A frozen relief valve however did cause a pressure surge in a hose line which whipped and injured a firefighter.

### **Organization**

Units attempted to maintain SOP discipline but that was complicated by the nature of the incident. All units arrived out of dispatched order. BC1 arrived early in the incident so was able to monitor and track unit's assignments as they called them on the radio. Although confusing overall suppression operations were smooth, rapid and did not compromise any critical mission. Divisions/Group established included Side A, Side C, EMS, RIG, Rehab, Accountability, Safety, Investigation and Staging. Approximately 76 fire department personnel were on the scene.

### **Communications**

The incident was dispatched on 7-Alpha. Fire ground operations were conducted on 7-Charlie. Additional channels were utilized by Staging. PSCC personnel did an outstanding job sorting out the assignments and assisting Command with unit clarification in a professional, helpful and efficient manner. Mutual aide units were able to appropriately communicate with issued or loaned portables.

### **Safety and Welfare**

The building was occupied by one adult male who self evacuated prior to arrival. He was transported to Medstar with burns to his legs by Medic 159. One firefighter received a laceration to his face when struck by a hose line. He was transported to Holy Cross by Medic 20. Bus 27 was staffed and was on scene to provide shelter for fire department personnel and Canteen 4 was on the scene. A County salt truck was requested to treat the streets. Command completed a PAR approximately 30 minutes into the incident, no additional checks were necessary to fire control.

### **Investigation**

Investigation Division led FM 54, 59, 51 and 16. The fire was determined to have been accidental and started when the occupant spilled fuel while attempting to refill a portable heating unit. Damage was estimated at \$750,000 to the building and \$225,000 to the contents and \$25,000 to an auto in the driveway.

### **Overall Analysis of Operations**

Given the involvement of the building, time and nature of dispatch and weather conditions, this incident went very well.

### **Lessons Learned**

1. In situations such as this where the normal dispatch of units is complicated by other events, PSCC must carefully track and organize deviations so that the information can be relayed to Command when requested.
2. Battalion officers are flooded with information while responding to a box alarm. Trying to interpret or act on radio traffic creates a dangerous mental diversion away from safely operating their vehicles. Although it may initially handicap the Command Officer, getting involved in incident direction while enroute should be avoided or carefully limited, a driver's focus should be kept on safely arriving at the scene.
3. Personnel need to exercise due caution when operating on slippery ground surfaces. Speed of operation execution may have to be sacrificed in order to perform them safely. Always remain conscious and aware of your environment.