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## On the Line: Positioning the Backup Line

*Article and photos by David DeStefano*

Most fire departments have a policy to ensure that a backup line is stretched to support the first attack line for all fires. This line reinforces the original attack line should the volume of fire increase or the original line suffer a loss of pressure or another problem. The backup line should be at least the same diameter as the first line and at least one length longer. The longer length will prove useful in cases where the backup is put into use laterally from the initial line or immediately above it. In addition, having a longer line at the ready will be helpful if the first engine misjudged the stretch and comes up short of the seat of the fire.

One common issue affecting the first-in engine and the first-in truck is the position of the backup line by a subsequent engine company. As action-oriented people, every firefighter on the fireground would love to be as close as possible to the seat of the fire. However, when assigned the backup line, firefighters must remember their primary function is to be prepared to enter the firefight, not to obstruct it.

Often, the backup line is stretched and held fast directly behind--or even worse--next to, the attack line. Although this may get the backup company closer to the seat of the fire, it may also cause an unnecessary bottleneck at a critical point in the firefight. Members trying to advance the attack line may be inadvertently pushed over and have their line stepped on, making it difficult to advance. The additional firefighters may also create kinks in the line. In addition, truck company firefighters trying to get past the line to conduct a search and find the seat of the fire will have more difficulty trying to get past the additional members bunched together, especially in narrow hallways. Officers and firefighters stretching a backup line must be prepared to place their line in a standby position without creating an obstacle. This can be accomplished with size-up and self-discipline.



*(1) Firefighters on the backup line are shown on the lower stair landing, allowing the attack line room to advance freely. This position allows the backup firefighters the ability to see or hear the progress of the first line and deploy quickly if needed.*

Sizing up the layout of the building as the line is stretched will aid the company officer in choosing the proper position. The backup line should follow the path of the attack line up to a point where it can be held in place close enough to the fire to be rapidly deployed, yet allowing for free movement of the primary line as well as members conducting searches. In most cases, the line is stretched dry for ease of maneuvering. The officer supervising the line may choose to charge it at any point he feels it necessary. Holding fast before the beginning of a narrow hallway or on a lower stair landing often provides the needed room for other companies to operate. In most occupancies, this distance will allow the members on the backup line to get a feel for conditions without putting them directly in the firefight.

The exact staging point for a backup line will vary based on building layout and conditions; the key points for this important position are to stretch the correct diameter and length hose and to position it for effective deployment without competing for space with the attack line or truck members trying to conduct searches. This will also help reduce bottlenecks on stairways and in narrow halls in single and small multidwellings.

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