

FIRE FIGHTERS GUIDANCE NOTE # 6-33

ISSUE: HAZARDS CREATED BY ABANDONED BUILDINGS

There is a significant risk of injury to firefighters while operating at fires involving abandoned buildings. For the purposes of this Guidance Note, an abandoned building is considered to be one that is in a state of disrepair to the point where it can pose a health and safety hazard for firefighters.

Fire departments should consider the following and develop SOPs/OGs with respect to abandoned buildings:

- Identify and document the location of known abandoned buildings in their response area and make the information available to fire crews;
- Abandoned buildings may be deteriorated and structurally unsound. Firefighting in close proximity to, on, or in such structures may pose significant risks;
- In fires involving buildings that are known or reasonably believed by the fire department to be abandoned, Incident Commanders should exercise extreme caution and give due regard to fire conditions and all relevant fireground factors prior to committing firefighters to interior firefighting positions (Note: firefighters should not be committed to interior operations in well advanced fires in structures that are known to be abandoned);
- If interior firefighting operations are undertaken, a charged hose line should be deployed for each crew. Where thermal imaging cameras are available, and firefighters have been trained on their use and limitations, they can be used to determine the potential of trapped occupants, location of the fire, and other hazards that are listed below.

The following conditions could exist in abandoned buildings and may create hazardous situations:

- Open shafts
- Pits and holes
- Maze like configurations
- Limited/obstructed entry and egress
- Blocked or damaged stairs
- Structural degradation
- Combustible contents: fire load
- Delay in discovery of fire
- Multiple fire locations
- Biological hazards
- Hazardous chemicals

Reference:

GN # 6-11 Rapid Intervention Teams (Rescue)

GN # 6-18 Unprotected Lightweight Building Construction

GN # 6-24 Building Collapse During Fire Situations