

## A better mousetrap

By Paul Strong

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One constant in the fire service is there is never a shortage of people who have a better way to build a mousetrap. Without this naturally occurring firefighter forward-thinking mentality, we would certainly see a fire service that is less capable, less safe, and just plain less than it is. Because emergencies can be approached and executed from many different angles, our training and preparation can also be approached in many ways. We see this all the time. You can talk tactics with the 5 year firefighter, the 20 year firefighter, and the “industry expert” who teaches tactics and presents classes around the country. From these three people, there’s going to be multiple approaches to fighting fire. What’s the right way and what’s the wrong way? That’s where the filter comes in. It’s generally about what you and your department buys in to and what approach will work best with the capabilities of the organization.

As long as the incident priorities, Life Safety, Property Conservation, and Incident Stabilization are the platform from which we work, then multiple approaches are just fine. When the incident priorities are forgotten then we no longer operate as a well-oiled machine that completes a job with efficiency and effectiveness.

During my time in the fire service, I’ve enjoyed the dynamics and the flexibility that comes with this profession. I have changed my personal approach to tactics over the years as I have learned new things, gained more experiences, had detailed discussions, read books, and attended classes. Along with that has always been learning from those who died in the line of duty or had near misses. Every firefighter should be taking advantage of the detailed and valuable information that is available to them in LODD and Near Miss reports.

So how does the latest scientific based evidence from UL/NIST fit in? Easy; it does. It’s hard to argue these studies and the results that came out of them. But I have heard some arguments against this information (a better mousetrap). The discussions I’ve had and the blogs and emails that I’ve read from people who seem to have issue with the UL/NIST information are generally from a standpoint of thinking that they are being told, “this is the new way of doing things and this is the only way it will work.” What these people quite often seem to be missing is that the technical experts who produced the data for us have never said, “This is the only way.” In fact, Steve Kerber (U/L Firefighter Safety Institute), clearly states that the information they are putting out is to aid in tactical considerations and how it may, or may not, fit into your operations or staffing. I don’t know about you, but that seems pretty clear to me.

For decades, firefighting tactics have been based on trial/error and past experience. With the updated fire behavior information in modern dwelling fires and the associated tactical considerations that UL/NIST has given us, each department can filter what will or will not work for them. Simply put, pay attention to the information and make some

decisions. Hanging your hat on “that’s the way we’ve always done it” can be dangerous and is certainly not forward-thinking.

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Be sure to attend his classroom session:

**RIC for Real: Learning from Our Mistakes**

*Captain Paul Strong, Valley (WA) Regional Fire Authority*

This presentation focuses on how to better prepare for a rapid intervention crew (RIC) deployment. The lessons learned from 400 firefighters participating in the hands-on RIC for REAL training will be the focus. The three main learning objectives are crew integrity and safety, communication, and air management. Students will learn how ineffectiveness in leadership, individual skills, and crew efficiency were magnified even among solid performers because of RIC preparation misconceptions. ALL LEVELS