

Fire and Ice!

Written by Cherry Carl with Lt. William Craft

My brother-in-law, Lieutenant William Craft, has been a firefighter/instructor in Buffalo, New York, for 29 years. He has had to fight fires in all kinds of weather, but one of the worst conditions is in the middle of winter when fire and ice combine to make the job more difficult and dangerous.

I asked him what it's like to fight fires in weather that is so cold that icicles hang from his moustache! He said that the hardest thing to deal with is the ice. You have to walk flat footed so that you don't slip and fall on the ice. The entire fire scene is covered with extra ice because of the water coming from the fire hoses. The water never stops once the firefighters reach the scene and the engines or pumpers get started. They have to keep the water flowing all the time so that the hoses don't freeze up.

Every firefighter has what they call "turn out" gear, which includes their boots, coats, and pants. They all carry spare gloves because when their first sets get wet, their hands get too cold to handle the equipment. They also carry an extra set of clothes with them. Special hoods cover the head, neck and ears of the firefighters

to keep them from getting burned, but the hoods also protect them from the cold that often reaches temperatures that are way below freezing.

When a fire call goes out, more than one truck and crew goes to fight the fire. There are four crewmen on each rig: one officer and three firefighters. Each type of vehicle is built for a special purpose and each crew has a specific job at the scene of the fire.

Three engines or pumpers go to each fire. These carry the hoses and the water used for fighting the fire. The engine team or crew is responsible for putting water on the fire. Two trucks with ladders and forcible entry tools have the job of search and rescue and ventilation. They have to ventilate the building through the roof or windows before anyone can enter the building because the fire is too hot to go inside.

A special team called a "fast company" is always on standby with an officer. They are there for firefighter assist and act as a search team is necessary. They always carry a Stokes litter that is loaded with tools, first aid equipment, an extra air bottle, hand tools and a thermal imaging camera. If a firefighter is missing or injured inside the building, the fast team goes in to find and rescue him.

Two chiefs go to fires. One is the battalion chief and he acts as the eyes and ears of the team outside the building. The other is the "incident" commander and he stays outside with the "fast company."

As you can see, a fire scene is a very busy and dangerous place. Teamwork is important for many reasons. There is a law that is called "two in and two out." This law makes sure that there is always someone outside to serve as search and rescue for those who are inside fighting the fire.

Buffalo gets well over 130 inches of snow every winter. As a matter of fact, they recently had seven feet of snow in one week! Teams of fire crews have to go out frequently during the winter months to make sure that the fire hydrants are uncovered and ready for use. You can see Lieutenant Craft and his team digging out a fire hydrant next to a neighborhood school in the picture below. (Lt. Craft is on the right.)



One of the most dangerous winter rescues that Lieutenant Craft has worked on is when people fall through the ice on lakes or ponds. This kind of rescue puts the lives of the firefighters in danger, especially when the ice is thin. Every waterfront company is required to go through ice rescue training at least once a year so that they are always prepared for this kind of incident. Lieutenant Craft is one of the instructors for this type of training since Buffalo is right near Lake Erie and Niagara Falls.

Everything in and around Buffalo freezes in the winter, people become careless with fires while trying to stay warm, and that combination causes more "fire and ice" for firefighters!