



ACQUIRED STRUCTURES TRAINING

Many firefighters are injured and even killed during training exercises each year. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), about 8,000 firefighter injuries occurred during training. The most common injuries during training were sprains and strains, heart attacks, and heat/cold stress injuries during training. Training is supposed to be a time for firefighters to develop firefighting skills and gain critical knowledge. A safe training environment is essential for firefighters to be able to focus on the lessons being taught. Practical training exercises and hands-on drills present significant challenges to fire service instructors.

Training in acquired structures especially requires a high level of planning, both in preparing the lesson plans and for the safety of the firefighters. New Jersey prohibits most all live burn training for fire departments except in burn buildings at approved fire academies. However, many fire departments use acquired structures and theatrical smoke to simulate fire conditions as part of a comprehensive training program. The benefits are many:

- varied and unfamiliar building layouts,
- real-life situations and decision-making opportunities,
- the chance to practice on actual buildings and construction methods, and more.

But, these real buildings present many challenges to the drill ground instructor. Often, these buildings are slated for demolition due to their poor condition. Creating a safe learning environment is paramount for instructors to develop a successful training event.

NFPA 1403 Standard on Live Fire Training Evolutions is the national standard and should guide fire departments wishing to train in acquired structures. While much of the standard discusses live fire, several sections are relevant to non-fire training evolutions and building preparation. The MEL Safety Institute (MSI) has developed a [Drills in Acquired Structure Risk Control Checklist](#) to assist fire departments in meeting risk control considerations of NFPA 1403.

Before accepting a structure to train in, the fire department must conduct a feasibility assessment to ensure the building is suitable and can be made safe for training. Consider if the local building inspector or engineer should be included to evaluate the structural integrity of a donated building. Some structures are so damaged that interior training is just not possible. Be prepared to refuse unsafe structures that have been offered for training.

The Division of Fire Safety does not require a permit for non-live fire training in an acquired structure.

Training officers are encouraged to review the checklist and NFPA 1403 and 1500 Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program to safeguard firefighters before and during practical training exercises.