



ACQUIRED STRUCTURE TRAINING - BEST PRACTICES

Training in acquired structures requires a high level of planning, both in preparing lesson plans and in ensuring firefighter safety. 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 focus on the lessons being taught. Practical training exercises and hands-on drills in acquired structures present significant challenges to fire service instructors.

New Jersey prohibits most 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. Acquired structures also permit functional skill-building, such as ventilation, breaching walls, rapid-intervention rescue, and removing downed firefighters. The benefits of training in acquired structures are many:

- Varied and unfamiliar building layouts,
- Real-life situations and decision-making opportunities,
- Practice on actual buildings and construction methods, and more.

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

NFPA 1403, Standard on Live Fire Training Evolutions, is the national standard and should guide fire departments seeking to train in acquired structures. The Standard was updated in 2023. While much of the Standard addresses live-fire training, several sections are relevant to non-fire training evolutions and building preparation. The MEL Safety Institute (MSI) has updated the **Acquired Structure Training Checklist** to assist fire departments in meeting risk control considerations of NFPA 1403-2023. It is available on [MSI Fire & EMS](#), under the Forms & Docs.

Before accepting a structure for training, 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 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 Acquired Structure Training Checklist and the NFPA 1403 and 1500 Standards to safeguard firefighters before and during practical training exercises.