Bricelyn Street Fire
Multiple Fire fighter Fatality
Pittsburgh, PA
February 14, 1995

SUMMARY

On Tuesday, February 14, 1995, a fire in a one-family dwelling resulted in the deaths of three Pittsburgh, PA fire fighters. Three other fire fighters were also injured.

The building involved was a three-story, wood-frame structure with a basement and was constructed on a sloping grade that caused the building to have a different appearance depending on the side being viewed. Fire fighters entering the building saw only one side and were not aware of the building's actual arrangement. The fire fighters' distorted perception of the building may have impaired their ability to assess alternate escape routes.

During interior fire fighting operations, the stairway used by fire fighters to enter a room collapsed. Sometime after that collapse, fire fighters outside the building realized that other fire fighters were trapped inside. Since fire fighters from several companies were working at the scene, fireground supervisors were not able to quickly assess which companies...
and individual fire fighters were working in the building. After several
trapped fire fighters were rescued through an exterior window, a full
accounting of all fire fighters was not performed. Unknown to the
incident commander, three other injured fire fighters remained trapped in
the building. These fire fighters were discovered after most of the fire had
been extinguished and smoke had been removed from the building, about
one hour and ten minutes after they originally entered.

Adherence to procedures that allow for quick accounting of fire fighters
on the fireground and the use of rapid intervention teams are precautions
that can reduce risks to fire fighters during structural collapse and other
unplanned events that can threaten fire fighters during suppression
operations. The importance of these precautions is evident in two NFPA
documents, i.e., NFPA 1561, Standard on Fire Department Incident
Management System, and NFPA 1500, Standard on Fire
Department Occupational Safety and Health Program. Both have
complete sections containing specific accountability requirements. In
addition, NFPA 1500 contains requirements for rapid intervention
crews.