

## **NOZZLEMAN: ALWAYS BE READY!**

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**By Frank C. Montagna**

A few of the senior firefighters in my engine company once told me when I was the nozzleman to always keep the nozzle pointed up and in the ready position when waiting to move into a burning room. This way, I will be ready to quickly knock down any fire that might roll out the top of the door when the forcible entry team forced the door. If the nozzle was pointed downward, toward the floor, I might not get it pointing up and open it in time to protect the firefighters in the hall; and if the hallway was crowded with firefighters, it might not be possible to raise the nozzle quickly if it was blocked by one or two firefighters crowded in front of me. In addition, any time I was assigned the nozzle position, I was told never to put the nozzle down, even when things seemed under control, because you just never know. As the nozzleman, I was expected to be ready to open the line immediately, should the need arise.

This lesson served me well in a cellar fire in a multiple dwelling. The fire had involved the gas heating unit and spread to most of the cellar. I had extinguished the fire, and the truck company reported that the gas to the heating unit was turned off. There were three firefighters overhauling the in the room containing the heating unit. I was kneeling at the door to the room with the nozzle in my hands pointed up and forward toward the ceiling when, suddenly, the entire room lit up as leaking gas ignited, filling the room with flame.

The sudden burst of flame knocked me down onto my back. Instinctively, I pulled back on the nozzle's shutoff handle, opening the nozzle and directing water from my hose stream into the room and onto the ceiling of the room, quickly extinguishing the flames and allowing the firefighters in the room to scramble to safety. Obviously, there was a gas leak in the room. Luckily, I had the nozzle in the ready position even though the fire was out and everything seemed under control.

Although extinguishing a gas flame is not the proper way to handle a gas fire, in this case it was necessary to allow firefighters to escape the flaming room. Proper training and attention to seemingly minor details can save lives. Never let your guard down when you are in the hostile environment of a fire building. If you are the nozzleman, stay alert, hold onto the nozzle, and always be ready to open it.

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