Basement Blaze Claims Career Fireman



You may be considered a veteran in your workplace, but veterans are not invincible.

This fact was apparently overlooked in the tragic death of a 45-year-old career firefighter, who died seven days after a residential basement fire.

Reuben was a lieutenant with nearly 15 years of firefighting experience and training under his belt. But a fire in a two-story brick dwelling erased all that when he partially fell through the first floor and died a week later in hospital.

Reuben was among the first people on the scene. He entered the building to investigate, but he wasn't wearing his self-contained breathing apparatus. Shortly afterward, he reported to the incident commander that a fire was burning in the basement. He then exited the building to help his crew to advance a hose line into the structure through the front door.

Reuben reportedly went back into the building a second time, but soon came out again to catch his breath. His fire captain told him to get off the porch and get some fresh air, but Reuben went back inside a third time as the captain was working on ventilating the basement.

While attempting to exit the building again, one of his legs became trapped in the weakened floor. Fire rescue crews located Reuben within minutes and quickly removed him from the house. But he died from smoke and soot inhalation days later.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

If you were Reuben, what would you have done? Based on the recommendations made by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), an employee in this situation should have:

- Worn his self-contained breathing apparatus when working in toxic or oxygendeficient atmospheres.
- Been trained to recognize the dangers of operating above a fire. As soon as firefighters become aware of structural instability, they should immediately exit the structure and notify their incident commander.
- Made sure he was working with a team of two or more firefighters. One

firefighter should never operate alone inside a burning structure because there is no added safety net of fellow team members helping you in a crisis.