

Question of the Month: (February 2010)

“Recently at a fire in our neighborhood, one of the firefighters was asked to get the “tick”. What is a “tick”?

Actually, it is a “TIC”... but a little history before I answer the question.

I still get grief, deservedly so I might add, from some comments I made almost seven years ago during my first fire prevention presentations to preschool groups.

Having been a teacher for over two decades, but brand new to the fire service, I made a point to speak at a level that allowed my audience to better understand the topics being discussed. However, calling the gear worn by firefighters “their costume” still makes me wince when it is brought up. My next attempt at trying to relate to young children and referring to firefighters’ gear as “their outfit” resulted in a long lesson about proper terms used around the fire station. Here, I was the student and ten firefighters, engineers and officers being my teachers. With a different, but very effective teaching style, it became apparent that one does not refer to firefighters as dressing in costumes or outfits when responding to a fire. Lesson learned!

I felt it would be best if I understood proper terms before I tried to educate the public and how a fire department operates. Today I will share a few of the phrases and terms frequently used around the fire house or while out on a call, in hopes that you will better understand the “language” of those whose job it is to serve and keep you safe.

First of all, let me clear something up. Protective clothing or “gear” used for keeping a responder safe (be it fire, medical, hazardous materials etc.) during an incident is called “PPE” or Personal Protective Equipment. Gear specifically worn by structural firefighters is most commonly known as “turn-outs” or “bunker gear”.

Now let’s go ahead and look at a few of the most commonly used terms with a more complete list provided at the link below.

Medical call terms include:

AED: *Automatic External Defibrillator.* A machine which can be used to monitor a patient with a non-functioning heart and apply a shock, if appropriate, to get the heart restarted and pump blood effectively again. It provides step-by-step instructions for any user and can determine if further shock, CPR or continue monitoring is recommended.

EMT: *Emergency Medical Technician.* Someone trained in basic life saving medical skills. There are two levels of EMT’s – *Basic* and *Advanced/Intermediate*.

Paramedic: A person who is trained extensively in advanced life saving skills (requiring two years of schooling beyond the Advanced EMT level) and who can administer medications and provide advanced medical procedures.

BLS: *Basic Life Support.* An emergency response that requires an EMT but not a paramedic. The two levels of BLS calls are:

BLS Red: A 911 response with lights and sirens. Life saving skills within range of an EMT but not requiring paramedic levels or drug administration.

BLS Yellow: A 911 response which does not require lights or sirens (an “emergent but not urgent” call)

ALS: *Advanced Life Support.* 911 call requiring response by a paramedic for possible drug administration or advanced skills.

“The Box” or “The Bus”: Commonly used names for an ambulance

TCR: *Trauma Code Red.* An incident where the patient has been involved in a trauma, such as a motor vehicle collision, that may require surgery. Calling a “TCR” alerts the hospital to have a surgical team on standby in case of need.

Common Fire related terms...

360: The 1st arriving officer on scene does a walk around (360 degrees) and size-up of the situation.

4 GAS: A device to monitor air quality. Newer versions actually are “5 gas” monitors. Gases checked by these typically include: Oxygen, Carbon Monoxide (a gas caused from incomplete combustion of fuels), LEL (Lower Explosive Limits) which looks for the mixture of oxygen and combustible gasses to determine if an explosion is possible, Hydrogen Sulfide which is gas given off by decomposing concrete and displaces oxygen, and VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) which are gases that cause a reaction to other substances and can result in heat, corrosives, toxins, explosions etc.

HAZMAT: Short for “*Hazardous Materials*” These calls require special equipment and PPE to deal with. Examples would be fuel spills, sunken boats leaking fluids, drug labs, oil spills etc.

PASS: *Personal Alarm Safety System.* An alarm device worn by firefighters which emit an extremely loud squeal used to help others find him/her in case of an emergency. Can be manually engaged or will automatically sound if inactive (i.e. a down firefighter) for 30 seconds or more. Approximately the size of two decks of playing cards.

RIT: *Rapid Intervention Team.* A team of at least two personnel whose sole purpose is to be prepared and ready to rescue “our own”. Typically formed at structure fires and larger hazardous material calls.

SCBA: *Self Contained Breathing Apparatus.* A system which provides fresh air from a compressed air tank (common air is used - NOT oxygen as oxygen will enrich the environment to support combustion) to a mask worn by the responder and typically held in place by a backpack style device.

SET OF IRONS/TOOLS: A pair of tools used by firefighters to gain entry and while on internal fire attack and search. Typically consists of an axe and halligan tool (metal bar with a combination of a claw, blade and a tapered pick).

TIC: *Thermal Imaging Camera.* This answers our initial question. A “TIC” is a highly sensitive heat detecting camera which can show changes or variations of temperatures. It can be used to look for fire extension in walls, ceilings or areas not easily detected or seen. TIC’s can sense the presence of a person in low visibility situations such as darkness or smoke filled environments. HazMat teams can get temperatures of containers or even determine how full the container is.

Terms used across the field are:

LODD: *Line Of Duty Death.* A fatality of an emergency responder while they were on duty.

MCI: *Mass Casualty Incident.* A situation where the patient needs of an incident exceeds initial responding resources. Situations with several TCR (Trauma Code Red) patients are common “MCI” calls.

PIO: *Public Information Officer.* The person who collects and distributes information to the media and public.

PROBIE: A newer fire fighter or EMT who is still under probation. Probation lasts approximately a year. Use of the term “probie” can also include the most recently hired personnel, even if s/he has completed their probationary period and this title may stay with them until a newer person is hired.

Like any profession, there are many unique terms and slang used which are inherent to that field which can keep others on the “outside” when discussions are being had. You now have some of the frequently used terms by your emergency medical and fire responders and hopefully feel more a part of our profession – one of several that are in place to serve and keep you safe day in and day out.

Stay safe out there!

For a more complete list of terms click here:

http://www.kootenaifire.com/images/uploads/AskFFJim02_10b_TERMS.pdf

If you have a question about emergency services in your area, please submit your question to “Ask Firefighter Jim” at askffjim@kootenaifire.com. Visit our web page at www.kootenaifire.com for additional information and to read archives of previously answered questions under the link, “Prevention”.