

SPECIAL APPARATUS

Recuperation and Care (RAC) Units

by Battalion Chief John A. Calderone

The use of bunker gear by firefighting forces has impacted tremendously on fire operations. While there is no question that bunker gear provides a much greater degree of protection than older turnout gear, it also has introduced new considerations that must be taken into account.

Generally speaking, because of the more encapsulating design of bunker gear and its heat-retention characteristics, firefighters become fatigued more quickly while operating. This is evident--particularly during the warm weather months. To counteract the effects of bunker gear on firefighters and allow fatigued members to recover their strength and energy levels at the scene of an operation, the Department operates five Recuperation and Care (RAC) Units.

RAC Unit 1, located at the quarters of Engine 53 in Manhattan, and RAC Unit 2, located at the quarters of Engine 222 in Brooklyn, are operational year-round. During the warmer months--from May 1 through September 30--RAC 3, stationed at the quarters of Rescue 3 in the Bronx, RAC 4, located at Special Operations Command (SOC) Headquarters on Roosevelt Island, and RAC 5, located at the quarters of Engine 242 in Brooklyn, also are placed into service.

The RAC Units carry a variety of equipment that provides for the creature comforts of fatigued firefighters. This equipment includes misting fans, heaters, blankets, cots, tents, drinks to replenish lost fluids and wet towels.

Upon arrival at the scene, RAC Unit personnel report to the Incident Commander. Then, they establish a recuperation area where fatigued personnel are directed to report for care and assistance. Depending on the weather conditions, members are given liquids to re-hydrate and either cooled

off or warmed up.

All of the RAC Units are assigned ambulance-style vehicles as their regular apparatus. Response of RAC Units varies, depending on the season. From October 1 through April 30--when only two RAC Units are in service--one is assigned to respond on receipt of a second alarm. When all five RAC Units are in service--from May 1 through September 30--a RAC Unit is assigned to respond on every 7-5 signal that is doubtful, as well as greater alarms. At expanding or extended operations, additional RAC Units can be special-called.

Additionally, RAC Units can be special-called to any incident where their services will be beneficial. When operating forces are committed to a labor-intensive operation--such as a haz-mat incident, building collapse, brush or outside fire, prolonged standby or watch line operation--and weather conditions dictate, consideration should be given to special-calling a RAC Unit even though a 7-5 signal has not been transmitted.

As modern technology provides us with advantages, such as better protective equipment, it also presents us with new problems. Incident Commanders must incorporate the bunker gear fatigue factor into their firefighting plan and adjust operations accordingly. Use of RAC Units provides for on-scene fireground care of firefighters and permits these members to return to duty more rapidly.

About the Author...

Battalion Chief John A. Calderone is a 25-year veteran of the FDNY. Currently, he is assigned to Battalion 22. He holds a degree in Fire Protection from New York City Community College and has written extensively on the subject of fire apparatus.



Three of the RAC Units are assigned 1986 Chevrolet former military ambulances.



At the average operation, firefighters will encounter the business end of the RAC Unit. However, these vehicles carry quite a bit of usually unseen equipment.



Two newer ambulances have been converted to operate as RAC Units.

all photos by Chief John A. Calderone