

Training

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Seconds are critical. Repeated hands-on training in shelter deployment is an essential part of fire shelter training. Firefighters have been injured or died when they delayed deployment or did not get into their shelters in time. Each year, every firefighter should practice fire shelter drills repeatedly. Drill until each step, from dropping your gear to deploying your shelter, can be done automatically. Practice should allow you to deploy the shelter in 15 to 20 seconds. Being able to rapidly deploy your shelter shows proficiency with it; however, do not delay getting into your shelter. If you suspect you will be impacted by high temperatures, heavy smoke, or ember wash from the fire and think your situation can be improved by using your fire shelter, use it.

The number one comment by those who deployed shelters is that they can't believe this is happening to them.

You are much better off getting into your shelter earlier rather than later. Don't let the heat of the fire drive you into the shelter as deploying your shelter while being burned will be much more difficult.

Some firefighters who have been through entrapments have reported that deploying the shelter had a calming effect—they were doing something they had been trained to do. The more you practice using your shelter, the more likely you are to react correctly in an emergency.

Training Scenarios

Remember, always train wearing gloves, a helmet, a full pack, and if you have one, a face and neck shroud. It is best to train in realistic conditions. For example, practicing deployments when it is hot outside, staying inside your practice shelter for prolonged periods, use real fire shelters for training that no longer meet the criteria to go on the fireline (see inspection criteria), train when fatigued, practice in a variety of differing settings, and discuss potential deployments sites while out doing project work and discuss the positives and negatives of each site as a group. It is your responsibility to insist on good, quality fire shelter training and to take the training seriously. Having to deploy your fire shelter can happen to you.

It is recommended that each individual firefighter train in the following six scenarios.

1. Standard deployment. Practice a standard deployment, first by clearing a 4 foot wide by 8 foot long site to mineral soil. Practice preparing the site so you can do so quickly.
2. Deploy your shelter while lying on the ground. If a fire approaches before you are fully deployed, your most important action is to get flat on the ground. Practice deploying your shelter from the ground by opening the shelter and pulling it over you.
3. Drop your gear and remove your shelter while escaping. When speed is essential for escape, drop your gear, and run with just your fire shelter and your tool. There is no need to practice removing the fire shelter from your fireline pack with one hand while running. If you are running from a fire you should drop your fireline pack then remove your shelter to take with you. You can move much quicker and for longer if you are not wearing your fireline pack. You are more likely to remember these steps when stress and fear set in during an escape if you practice them each year.
4. Deploy your shelter in a strong wind. Because fires are accompanied by high winds and turbulence, it is important to practice in these conditions. Some people find it easier to deploy from the ground in strong winds. Try a variety of deployment techniques to find one that works for you. Always remove your pack at the earliest stage of deployment—it is extremely difficult to deploy a fire shelter in the wind while you are wearing a pack. **View this video of shelter deployment in 50 mph winds.** While windstorms provide the most realistic training, you can get a good feel for wind deployments by using one or more strong fans, such as the positive ventilation fans used by fire departments.

5. Deploy your shelter while moving. Practice deploying your shelter while on the move escaping from a fire to use as a heat shield from a fire closing in behind you. Practice running with the shelter while holding onto it and avoiding snagging it on brush and branches. Simulate both successfully escaping from the fire and having the fire overtake you and having to rapidly get into the shelter.
6. Lie in your shelter. While lying in your shelter, picture yourself in an actual entrapment situation. Fear of confined spaces and the dark, combined with extreme heat, turbulence, and noise, can cause you to panic. Imagine the sounds, heat, and fear. Imagine steeling yourself to pain and staying in your shelter no matter what. Some firefighters have suffered claustrophobia while inside their shelters. Spend enough time inside a shelter to find out whether you're claustrophobic. If you are, gradually increase the time you spend inside a shelter to help you adapt.

Practice Fire Shelters

The practice fire shelters are made from green plastic (regular) and orange plastic (large) and can be reused many times (see **Figure 1**). The practice shelter's carrying case is orange. Never mix practice and real fire shelter components. If you do, someone could mistakenly carry a practice shelter to the fireline. This is another reason to inspect your fire shelter when you first receive it and periodically throughout the field season. Practice fire shelters do not deploy like real fire shelters. From opening the PVC bag using the tear strip to deploying the shelter, practice shelters open much easier than the real shelter (see **Opening Fire Shelter**).



Figure 2 Out of service fire shelter to be used for training.

Figure 1 Regular (left) and large (right) practice fire shelters.

Both practice and real fire shelters have marked shake handles to help with quick deployment. The handles extend from the edge of the folded shelter allowing the shelter to be unfolded quickly. When you grasp the handles correctly, the shelter's opening will be toward your body, allowing you to get inside quickly. Practice looking at the shake handles and grasping them with the correct hands before shaking.

Fire shelters should be inspected upon receipt and periodically throughout the season. Shelters that no longer meet serviceability requirements should be clearly marked and removed from service (see **Figure 2**). Fire shelters that have been removed from service can be used in training scenarios to allow firefighters to experience the differences in deployment of a real shelter.

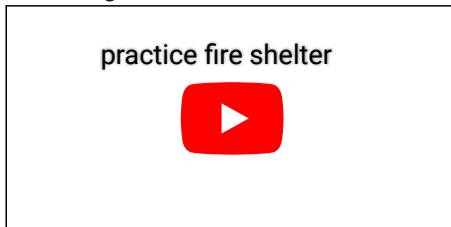
Training Aids

- **Flyer - Instructions for Refolding the Practice Fire Shelter**

- Fire Shelter Use Instructions<200b>:
 - **Spanish**
 - **English**
- **Video Title: The New Generation Fire Shelter**
 - Video Length:25:27



- **Video Title: Refolding Your Practice Fire Shelter**
 - Video Length:3:40



Pack Configuration

Fire shelters are commonly carried on the bottom of fireline packs, in a sleeve that utilizes a high density polyethylene (HDPE) liner. You are not required to carry a fire shelter in this location. However, your fire shelter needs to be carried in a location that is easily accessible. DO NOT carry your fire shelter inside the main body of your fireline pack (**see Figure 3**).

Firefighters should train with a practice fire shelter in the same location they intend to carry their shelter on their fireline pack. This allows firefighters to simulate removing the shelter from their fireline pack, tossing unnecessary gear away from the deployment site, and deploying the shelter.

There have been firefighters who struggled with getting their fire shelter out of their pack because they were not familiar with their pack or the configuration they were using.

If you are issued new gear, become familiar with it and how the shelter interacts. You don't want to find yourself needing to deploy your fire shelter and be struggling to get it out of your pack due to lack of preparation. After training sessions, ensure a real fire shelter has been reinserted into the fireline pack (**see Figure 4**).

Realistic Training is Best

The best training locations are in the field where different deployment site selections can be discussed. Practice evaluating possible deployment sites when out on the fireline so you can recognize deployment sites quickly, even when you are under stress. Remember, deployment requires removing your pack, clearing a site, removing your shelter, getting inside the shelter, and getting on the ground.

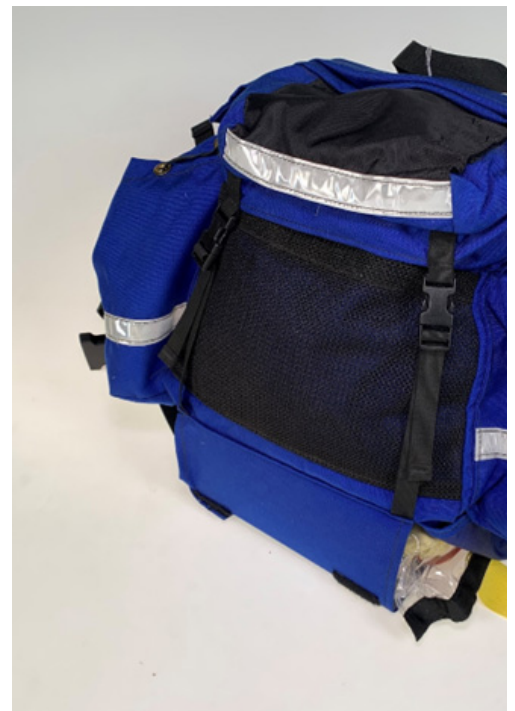


Figure 3 Fire shelter carried on the bottom of the fireline pack.

Training to pull your fire shelter out of your pack with one hand while running from the fire is not necessary. Instead, train to drop your pack and unnecessary tools earlier when an entrapment appears likely. You can move much faster for longer without the added weight of your fireline pack and tools.

"That training saved my life. It sure helped me. Because I knew what to do, when to do it, and where to do it. And it kind of kept my mind about me."

Train when to drop your pack and what to take with you when escaping from a fire. Water and a radio can be helpful during a deployment but are not a requirement. If you have an external radio microphone cord woven through your fireline pack webbing, practice detaching the microphone cord from the radio under mock-high stress, time-constrained situations so you can quickly disconnect if you need to.

Never Train in Live Fire

For more realism in training, some crews have occupied shelters near burning brush piles or in small grass fires. This is unacceptable. Such training is extremely dangerous and risks firefighters' lives. NEVER use live fire for fire shelter training.

For more realistic scenarios, add noise, wind, practice after a long day, in the heat, and remain in your shelter to experience discomfort.

Visualization

In addition to hands-on training, visualize yourself practicing the deployment scenarios. Think of visualization as a dress rehearsal. It is a form of practice that allows you to experience events before they happen. Images have a powerful effect on us. The mind can treat an imagined entrapment as if it were real. If you ever do have to drop your pack and deploy your shelter, visualization makes it more likely that you'll react correctly, quickly, and without panic. Visualization should be used only to supplement—never to replace—hands-on training.

Picture yourself in different entrapment situations. Think your way through the entrapments and imagine yourself reacting correctly to each situation. The most important actions to visualize are:

- Dropping your pack and tools to escape more quickly
- Discarding dangerous items like fusees and gasoline
- Getting on the ground before the fire arrives
- Getting under your shelter
- Staying completely under your shelter even if you are being burned or the shelter starts to fail
- Protecting your airways and lungs by remaining prone, with your face to the ground

"In my career I never thought I was going to have to use one. But when I had to use one I was really glad I had one"

Many firefighters may scoff at fire shelter training or not take it seriously. Keep in mind that the number one comment from firefighters that had to deploy their shelters is that **they never thought it would happen to them.**



Figure 4 Practice fire shelter (left) and fire shelter (right).

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