



## **Preparing for the Rare Rescue: Abington Township Fire Department Volunteers Take on Structural Collapse**

In 20 years there have only been three structural collapses in Abington Township, still members of the fire department are out in force—training.

“It’s a high-risk, low frequency type of rescue situation,” said Chris Feder, the Rescue Training Program Coordinator at the Montgomery County Fire Academy. “Unless you work in a major city, you may never see one of these scenarios in a 20-year career.”

Still, more than 30 Abington Township firefighters braved the elements to attend four Structural Collapse Rescue Training sessions from late February to mid-March. The 20-hour training program prepares firefighters for all of the logistics involved in an unstable rescue.

“It just shows the kind of dedication we have here,” said Dave Schramm, the Fire Services Administrator for the Abington Township Fire Department. “Our volunteer firefighters show up when it’s hot or cold. When it’s nighttime. When they have other places they could be.”

Schramm added, “We have firefighters showing up because they want to learn, and they want to be the best.”

Structural Rescue Training teaches first responders how to assess the scene and stabilize any compromised features like a wall or ceiling to prevent a cave-in. Training teaches rescue workers that they need to be aware of their environment, how the structure is built, and how to make decisions based on that information, all at once, in an emergency situation.

“Let’s say there’s an earthquake or maybe a car went through the wall of a home, and rescuers need to get in there,” Feder said. “There’s a lot going on. There are a lot of moving parts. You need to be able to articulate clearly to a crew what needs to happen.”

During the first night of training firefighters attended a three and a half hour lecture that focused on construction type, hazard identification, and building triage. The training also focused on emergency situations where the structural integrity of a single-family dwelling is compromised.

Once the scene has been analyzed and a plan established, the crew can move forward with the rescue operation, which was covered in two separate eight hour hands-on training sessions. Abington has the Paratech Raker System for shoring that they used in the training scenario. The system comes complete with metal support structures that snap together and cut down on rescue time by a factor of five.

“Abington is an aggressive and proactive fire department with a real focus on training,” Feder said. “They are committed to this training, and the turnout at these classes has been impressive.”

Abington Fire Chief Michael Jones thinks that the turnout of one particular demographic has been especially impressive.

“There have been a lot of younger firefighters at these trainings,” Jones said. “It really speaks to the health of this department and its commitment to the safety of the community.”

During the first eight-hour training session the Abington Fire Department trained in teams to secure structures using the Paratech System in different kinds of light as well as different environmental conditions. The second eight-hour training session focused on the same types of scenarios except the firefighters were forced to build structural supports out of wood.

“It’s a great way to work on teamwork in a controlled environment,” said McKinley Fire Company firefighter Gary Schenk. “This kind of training takes a lot of manpower, and it can be physically exhausting. It really forces you to work together.”

“The goal is to ensure that the fire department has all of the skills to perform at an operational level,” Feder said. “When we build and install a Paratech Raker System to support a weakened wall, even the nail pattern is important to constructing such lateral shoring systems. Failure to adhere to the attention to detail could be the difference between success and catastrophic failure.”

Feder added that after Abington completed the training, they are one of a “small handful” of fire departments in the county to have done so together.

“It’s a real testament to the mission of the fire department,” Feder said.

“It just shows the kind of dedication we have here. It shows how committed these volunteers are. We want our members to be ready for anything. This training will get us one step closer,” said Larry Siefken, Fire Training Coordinator for the Abington Township Fire Department.

### **About Abington Township Fire Department**

Abington Township Fire Department has been serving the community for more than 100 years and is made up of five volunteer fire companies: Abington, McKinley, Weldon, Edge Hill, and Roslyn. Approximately 235 volunteers belong to the department and dedicate their time and energy to keeping the community safe.

The ATFD is guided by its Mission Statement: *The Abington Township Fire Department is a dedicated team of volunteer firefighters comprised of five individual fire companies unified as one department with a mission to provide excellent fire, rescue, fire prevention, and public education services to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the community.*

The fire department headquarters is located at 1176 Old York Road in Abington. For more information, call 267-536-1055 or visit [www.abingtonfd.org](http://www.abingtonfd.org).

