

A Forcible Entry Challenge

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There are many different forcible entry problems/challenges throughout the District that firefighters need to be prepared to confront. Recently, while riding around in the box alarm district, the members of Rescue Company 2 found this one:



Picture 1. (Photos by the author unless indicated)



Picture 2.

Located in the 1300 block of Columbia Road, NW, this apartment building has bars/gates installed on the windows of the units on the ground floor. I know, that is not uncommon. What is uncommon, the bars are on the inside of the window. This can be a challenge for firefighters who encounter this hazard. We will examine the two scenarios we may find ourselves in (inside and outside) and some techniques to overcome these hazards.

Inside

Firefighters may find themselves operating inside of the apartment and need to get out. This window gate set-up is a two-piece unit with one half of the gate bolted to the wall (picture 3) and the other half swinging out, away from the window (picture 4).



Picture 3. This side of the window gate does not open. See screws holding frame to wall.



Picture 4. This side opens into the apartment.

The window gate is locked using a pad-lock and hasp configuration (Picture 5). This presents a problem as most firefighters do not carry the tools needed to defeat these locks while performing typical inside firefighting duties (ie., bolt cutters, saw with steel cutting blade or duckbill lock-breaker). There is a technique of using the point of a haligan bar with the force of an axe, but it may take two firefighters to perform (Picture 6).



Picture 5. The locking mechanism. When secured, there will be a pad-lock attached.



Picture 6. Using a haligan point to defeat a pad-lock. (Photo courtesy of Traditions Training)

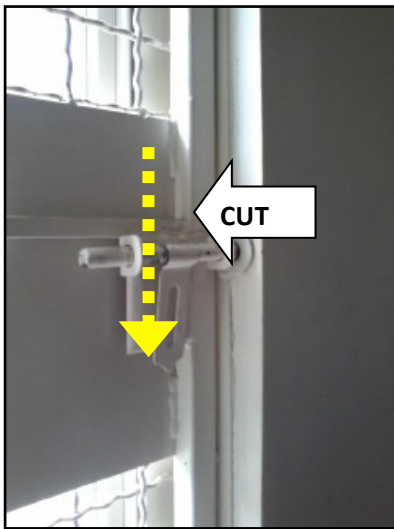
The best option to use if faced with the need to escape quickly is to utilize the sliding-glass door to the patio. All of the apartments that utilize this window gate set-up are located on the first floor. Most of these units have a sliding-glass door which opens to a small patio (Picture 7). This door is just a few steps away from the windows in the apartments. A firefighter will not have far to go to access the sliding-glass door.



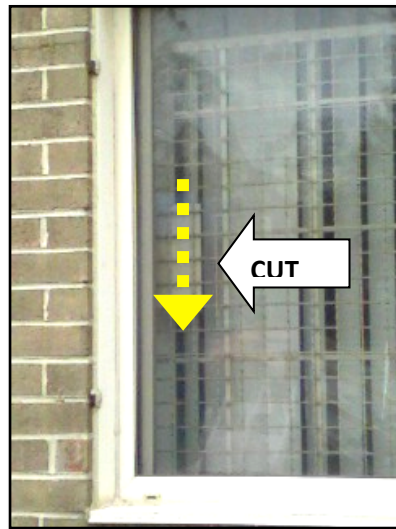
Picture 7. The sliding glass door is only a few steps from the window. (Photo from Google maps)

Outside

Now let's look at how we will open this window gate from the outside. This important job will be made difficult as the gate is inside the window. This means that in order to access the gate to force it open, the firefighter will have to break the window. With this window broken, smoke and/or fire will be free to escape putting the member working on the gate in danger. The key to safely performing this operation will be speed. With a good size-up and knowing how to defeat this hazard, we will minimize the exposure time to the smoke and/or fire.



Picture 8. This is where we need to cut. By severing the bolt here, it will fall out.



Picture 9. From the outside. The lock mechanism is behind this metal shield. Drop the saw blade in this area to cut the bolt.

It is suggested that the member responsible for forcing this window gate use a rescue saw with a metal-cutting blade. By dropping the saw blade vertically and parallel to the window frame on the left side, the bolt securing the window gate will be cut. One properly-placed cut should do the job.

Conclusion

Please review this forcible entry problem with your crew. If you come up with another method to overcome this window gate, please let me know and I will pass it on. There are hundreds of hazards awaiting us in the buildings throughout the city. By getting out of the firehouse and touring your area, you will prepare yourself for the battle. Remember a prepared firefighter will not be a surprised firefighter. Until next time.....TRAIN to LIVE, LIVE to TRAIN.