

FireOpsOnline.com

Your Online Resource for Free Fire Training, Drills and Tips

Snapshot Size-Up #137

Missing Floors

For as long as you and I can remember, the number "13" has been feared as being an unlucky number that many in society have avoided for one reason or another. It is for this same reason(s) that some building owners and property managers have eliminated the number as a floor reference or apartment reference in their buildings. This fear or superstitious reference is technically referred to as "triskaidekaphobia". Many of us in the fire service are reminded of this as we enter into buildings to look for the presence or lack of the number "13" as we start to ascend up into high-rise buildings. But this superstition doesn't end here. The Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese and Asian—to name the most common—also fear the number "4" because it is a "homonym" for death in their language.



In many of the diverse areas of the country, fire departments have to expect distant practices and cultures to be in their own back yards, and prepare to deal with what others may see as the norm. My "back yard" is such an area. In Jersey City, a city of 300,000 in less than 12 square miles, we need to be prepared for every language and culture. As a matter of great concern, we have number of high-rise buildings that do NOT reference the number "4" anywhere in their buildings. This concern can be as simple as a missing apartment number, but more importantly, a missing floor reference. In a number of high-rise buildings in our city, the fire department will not find a 4, 14, 24, 34, 44, etc. throughout the building! This is a great concern! Think about it. As a matter of JCFD policy, elevator use is limited to "two floors below the lowest floor" reporting smoke and/or fire. A missing 13 or 4, 14, 24, etc. will greatly affect our decision making. This is critical information that must be part of a pre-plan or at the very least part of an on-scene "size-up" with the information shared and followed without exception!

And as a matter of common sense, these same concerns are not limited to densely-populated urban areas... so take a look the next time you are inside a high-rise elevator, you might be surprised to discover the building is "missing floors".

Deputy Chief Mike Terpak (Jersey City Fire Department) is the founder of Promotional Prep, a NJ based consulting firm designed to prepare firefighters and officers as they study for promotional exams. He is also the author of *Fireground Size-Up, & Assessment Center Strategy and Tactics*, and co-author of *Fireground Operational Guides*. Visit www.FireOpsOnline.com for more articles and tips from Chief Terpak.

