

# COMMENT

## FROM THE EDITOR

I've had a great run as your editor. Your Associate Editors, the central office staff – including Lynn Strother and, especially, Lois Smith – have done fabulous work to keep this enterprise afloat. I think we have an excellent product here and am very grateful for all the help. I'm going to pass the torch to my able successor, Melody Carswell, by relating an ergonomics anecdote that came to mind this summer when my eldest daughter announced that she was following in her dad's (jumbo) footsteps to become a volunteer firefighter.

Come back with me to the late 1990s. My youngest daughters and I are sitting there watching a movie, and my brand-new volunteer firefighter's beeper goes off: structure fire (no injuries) in the next town. I say "Gotta go," and I'm gone. I make pretty good time down to the firehouse and jump on engine 4-1, and we go to assist. I'm in the cabin behind the driver's compartment; we're running on red illumination (to preserve night vision). The six of us are donning our turnout gear and bunker pants and helmets and Scott air packs. (Well, I'm just a probationary member, so I'm not putting on a Scott pack, I'm just trying to find something to hold onto as we career down the road.) The energy level is high – this sounds like a confirmed structure fire and not another false alarm.

We pull up alongside several other engines and trucks to disembark. There must be 50 firefighters there, and someone says that the building is unoccupied and there are visible flames coming out of the windows. (I crane my neck but can't see anything past the jumble of air tanks and helmets.) The lieutenant says to me, "Kelley, you're a probie, so you'll stay with the truck. Go sit in the front with the driver and do what he says."

Eager to stay out of the way, I climb into the passenger seat just vacated by the captain of the company and sit there with my hands in my lap, thinking "don't touch anything, Jeff." All of a sudden, pandemonium breaks loose. There are sirens and horns blaring and I'm looking around trying to figure out what the commotion is and I realize that Everyone Is Looking At Our Truck.

The driver shouts over to me "HEY PROBIE, GET OFF THE &%\*\$# FOOT-SWITCH!" I look down and realize that my jumbo fireman's gum boots are "big-footing" two buttons on the floorboards. After yanking my feet off the floor, I get my flashlight out and look. Sure enough, it says right there: "horn" and "siren."

Shortly thereafter I find myself standing in the rain a hundred yards down the road with flares and a flashlight in my hand, directing traffic, wondering if I'm ever going to make it as a firefighter (and wondering who decided to move the horn switch from that classic pull-cord that hangs from the ceiling of the fire engines you see in the movies).

Needless to say, my little gaffe was the subject of some humorous comments back at the firehouse after it was all over. It seemed that everybody knew that another probie had found the footswitches.

Did I mention that the movie I left my girls watching when I dashed out of the house was *Backdraft*? No lie.

My thanks to readers and staff.

John F. (Jeff) Kelley

**I look down and realize that my jumbo fireman's gum boots are "big-footing" two buttons on the floorboards.**

