Taking Ownership of Safety Fatality File

A report by Illinois regulators cites leadership failures by on-scene commanders in the March / 2019 death of a southern Illinois firefighter who was killed while helping battle a house fire.

Godfrey Fire Capt. Jake Ringering was killed and three other firefighters were injured on when a 21-foot wall collapsed in the village of Bethalto.

Although the home was already fully engulfed in flames when the first crews arrived, the report found that a 360-degree walk-around of the scene was never performed to observe potential hazards before the collapse, The Telegraph in Alton reported.

The newspaper, which obtained the report through a public records request, reported that OSHA investigators also found that the fire scene had “no established unified command post with unified task and purpose” to aid the fire crews battling the blaze.

“It was determined through employee interviews that IC (incident command) could not be easily located,” the report states.

Investigators wrote that after a fire crew from the Godfrey Fire Protection District arrived, that crew volunteered to cut open the home’s garage doors to access the spreading flames, even though the garage door was unlocked.

Allowing the Godfrey team to enter through the garage doors – which were beneath the 21-foot peak of the brick gable wall – was a “greater risk than was necessary for the task,” the report

states. It adds that the on-scene incident command allowed the Godfrey crew’s actions even though by that time the home was a total loss and all of its occupants had escaped.

The firefighters should have instead entered a standard door that was offset from the brick gable wall’s peak, the report found.

“If FF (firefighters) were on the side of structure less debris would have impacted FF and potentially could have saved a life and lessening injuries,” it states.