COMMON DENOMINATORS OF FIRE BEHAVIOR ON TRAGEDY FIRES

Five common denominators that contribute to accidents/incidents have been identified through studies of tragedy fires. It is important for firefighters to readily recognize the following common denominators so that future tragedies can be prevented:

- Most incidents happen on smaller fires or on isolated portions of larger fires.

- Most fires are innocent in appearance before unexpected shifts in wind direction and/or speed results in flare-ups or extreme fire behavior. In some cases, tragedies occur in the mop-up stage.

- Flare-ups generally occur in deceptively light fuels, such as grass and light brush.

- Fires run uphill surprisingly fast in chimneys, saddles, gullies, and on steep slopes.

- Some suppression tools, such as helicopters or air tankers, can adversely affect fire behavior. The blasts of air from low-flying helicopters and air tankers have been known to cause flare-ups.

References:
Incident Response Pocket Guide page 5
Common Denominators PowerPoint