



February: Reports Related to Roadway Safety

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Report Number: 05-0000155

Synopsis: Firefighter almost steps in to oncoming traffic

Event Description:

My engine company was dispatched for a motor vehicle collision on a three lane road, east of a parkway early in the evening. We pulled up to the scene and parked directly behind the rear end collision, only taking the center lane of the three eastbound lanes. As I climbed down out of the engine, looking west, I saw my E3 firefighter stepping down from the jumpseat area facing east with his back to the traffic. Traffic was pulling around us and as the congestion worsened, cars were pulling out from the center lane at increasingly high rates of speed to get past the crash site and squeeze into the #1 lane. I yelled "LOOKOUT" to the E3 firefighter as he started to step down onto the pavement. He quickly stepped back onto the engine running board as a car sped past the wagon nearly sideswiping us and driving directly through the area where he was stepping.

I leaned back into the cab and told my driver to pull the wagon into the #1 lane and block the #1 & #2 lanes. I then asked a police officer to shut down the #3 line as well so we could work on the patients.

The department I was working for at the time operated under the rule that the FD had two obligations at motor vehicle collisions: treat the patients and keep traffic moving. In this case, it almost cost a firefighter his life. The civilian drivers were not the least bit concerned with us. The driver that nearly hit the E3 firefighter was looking over his shoulder as he passed us and did not look forward until he was nearly past the wagon.

Lessons Learned:

The lessons learned on that day included:

1. Maintain situational awareness at all times. The E3 firefighter failed to do that when he climbed down from the engine looking toward the incident scene and not at the traffic. He was following his regular pattern and it nearly cost him his life.
2. Stop the traffic and block the roadway to ensure safe work areas.
3. If you have an SOP that puts firefighters at risk, re-write it to keep the crews safe. Our policy of cooperating to keep the road open was flawed.
4. We needed to conduct more training for operating on the roads. We simply used our normal behavior pattern. Most of our calls were on quiet, narrow residential streets. Once we pulled into a block, the street was effectively blocked of any traffic movement. You could get off the rig without even a thought of vehicles coming by.
5. Personnel safety has to be at the forefront of an officer's thoughts. I should have warned the E3 firefighter to watch traffic. I had the advantage of being able to see traffic in the outside mirror. The E3 firefighter could see traffic from his jumpseat, but he was more focused on the crash than the traffic.

Report Number: 05-0000270

Synopsis: Speeding vehicles crash in to multiple vehicle accident; firefighters narrowly escape.

Event Description:

At the time of the call, our local interstate was under major construction with multiple lanes being added. During that time of construction, which lasted for about 4 years, the lanes that occupied traffic were lined with jersey walls to protect construction crews. During construction it was predicted that there would be multiple deaths related to the narrowing of the traffic corridor due to the jersey walls and the length of interstate involved in this project; about 8 miles total and continuous.

Our station was dispatched to a multiple vehicle accident on the interstate on January 25th at 2:30 am. Enroute we had our normal discussion of duties and our assignments once on the scene. Upon arrival we noticed the accident was just past the on ramp to the interstate we were traveling on.

We noticed that there was a tractor trailer stopped short of the on ramp, parked in the slow outside lane. At this point he had that lane shut down. We parked the apparatus at the top of the on ramp, just short of the interstate, and asked that the police department block traffic to the entrance of the on ramp we occupied. There were very few vehicles in the lanes of travel stopped on our side of the interstate. In fact it was very unusual for traffic to be that light and to be that quiet.

Our crew dismounted the apparatus and proceeded to the accident scene with proper turnout gear and equipment to perform their tasks of accessing injuries and any possible hazards that may be present.

Just before the crew approached the vehicles, two vehicles out of nowhere entered our emergency scene at a high rate of speed and hit the multiple car accident. It happened so fast we had to take accountability of our crew as well as bystanders and victims. Luckily there were no patients in the original vehicles. They were all on the grass area of the interstate behind the jersey walls at the time of the second collision.

If our crew had been just a little quicker in dismounting the apparatus or if we had arrived a little sooner, we would have possibly had three fatalities involving fire personnel.

Lessons Learned:

The lessons learned here were to secure the emergency scene before committing yourself and your crews.

All lanes were not secured before emergency crews committed themselves to this incident scene.

We suspect that due to the position of the parked tractor trailer and the position of the fire apparatus, the fast lane traffic could not readily see the emergency lights of our vehicle. We, as an emergency unit, did not make a visible statement and make our presence known to traffic or warn traffic of the hazards ahead of them.

Every individual in your crew must take responsibility for situational awareness and insure the safety of others as well as themselves.

Since this incident, we are insuring that we have control of the interstate when an incident occurs. Make your presence known in a big way. We now have multiple lanes to deal with, five to six in both directions.

If we have an incident on the interstate, we shut down up to three lanes utilizing the apparatus along with traffic cones and the police department. When we do this, traffic is bottlenecked down to two to three lanes of travel. This slows traffic down to a manageable level and makes the emergency scene much safer for crews to operate in. If traffic begins to speed up to a level that is unacceptable, either the police department or fire department will stop traffic momentarily and then release it again.

Take control of the situation and make it as safe as it can be. If necessary, shut it all down. You may have the police department question this action, but it's better to stop traffic than to have a worse scene than you started with when you arrived.

Emergency personnel should wear their turnout gear to be highly visible, especially at night.

The night the incident occurred, we don't know if placing the apparatus across both lanes would have prevented the second collision or not. This is due to the fact that the two vehicles that entered our emergency scene were racing each other and may not have had time to stop anyway.

With this in mind, apparatus placement is crucial. Park the apparatus diagonally to the lanes of travel and far enough back from the incident scene to give yourself a buffer zone in case it is hit. When weather is a factor such as snow or ice, increase this distance. Use common sense and think safety. Know that there are no routine incidents and that we as emergency workers can't afford to take our safety for granted.

Report Number: [06-0000154](#)

Synopsis: Civilian driver talking on cell phone plows through blocked emergency scene.

Event Description:

As a Fire Police Captain responding to an accident during a sudden snow squall, we were forced to close the two westbound lanes of a four lane highway. Cones were put up with flares, and personnel were placed at the point of closure with reflective gear and streamlite wands. The traffic unit, with its directional arrow, was placed 40-50 feet behind this line, and my car was placed behind the traffic unit another 10 feet. Both vehicles had on all emergency red lights. A sign was placed down the highway 75 feet before the closure point. A woman, talking on her cell phone, ran through the cones and flares, the personnel at this point jumping out of the way. The vehicle continued down the highway missing the traffic unit by inches and plowing head-on into my vehicle. After bouncing off the front right fender, the vehicle continued into the center divide. I was standing behind my vehicle at the time, and jumped out of the way at the last minute.

The State Police asked the female driver what happened. She stated she was not sure but she was only going 60mph! - in the snow, with a 5year old in the front seat and an infant in the rear seat and a speed limit of 55mph! She was talking on the cell phone at the time, and did not notice our barriers. There were no skid marks until she bounced off my car. The tire was ripped-off my car and the spindle, lower control arm, strut, wheel and fender were damaged. The car (model deleted) was towed from the scene.

Lessons Learned:

When closing a major highway, we need a larger piece of equipment in place to help protect personnel.

Report Number: [06-0000392](#)

Synopsis: Firefighter struck by passing car at collision scene.

Event Description:

Our 3 person crew was responding code 3 to a commercial fire alarm. I was the apparatus operator on our truck (95' quint tower ladder). We were traveling on a 2 lane road. We had just crossed an intersection when I noticed that we were approaching a 2 vehicle accident that appeared to have just occurred. One vehicle was partially blocking the oncoming lane and was 30 yards in front of our apparatus. There was a moderate amount of smoke coming from the engine compartment. The other vehicle was also partially blocking the lane in our direction of travel and was sitting at a 90 degree angle to the right shoulder. It was 10 yards away from the front of the truck. I informed the Captain who was looking up the address to the fire alarm in the map book. He contacted our communications center and informed them of the incident. He requested P.D. for traffic control and additional resources. I spotted the apparatus to block our lane at about a 30 degree angle from the right shoulder in the direction of travel. The shoulder was narrow, with no sidewalk. The captain instructed us to pull an 1 1/2 inch hose line and said he would check on the occupants. There was 1 occupant in each car, and both appeared conscious. He went in the direction of the smoking car to investigate it first. The firefighter came to the left (driver's side-closest to oncoming lane) side of the quint and positioned himself to pull the hose. I was placing wheel chocks on the driver's side at that time. Other traffic had been going by slowly, snaking through the two vehicles. There was no traffic control in place at that time. As he stepped off the quint with the looped hose load (as opposed to a flat shoulder load or "minute-man") he made eye contact with an approaching driver. The driver was in a compact car, approaching at approximately 5-7 mph. He felt that he had the driver's attention and felt that she understood what his intent was. Unfortunately, she did not yield or stop. As he began to extend the hose line from the bed, he backed into the oncoming lane of traffic. The driver had actually sped up as the firefighter began to walk into its path. Fortunately, the firefighter was only struck by the car's side view mirror, which had the capability of folding back to a closed position, which it did. Thankfully and very luckily, the firefighter was uninjured.

Lessons Learned:

1. Situational Awareness: Understanding that traffic is unpredictable, and that there was no traffic control in place should have made the firefighter more cautious.
2. Communications and Teamwork: If the firefighter had verbally communicated to the driver to stop, or used hand signals, it may have been avoided. If the firefighter had informed me that he was pulling the line at that time, I could have stopped traffic temporarily.
3. Staffing: If we had 4 person truck crew we could have had someone assigned to traffic control temporarily.
4. Procedure: If the hose load was a shoulder type load, he could have deployed the hose without having to step in the direction of oncoming traffic. Instead, the flat looped load we use for crosslays forced him to step into the lane in order for the hose to clear the hose bed.
5. Procedure: In this instance, it would have been more appropriate for me to spot the apparatus parallel and closer to the curb instead of at an angle. This would have still provided enough protection for the vehicles and emergency personnel, and would have given the firefighter more room to complete his task.

Report Number: [08-0000316](#)

Synopsis: Big rig skids into pumper on slick road.

Event Description:

On the morning of February 13, 2007, the [name deleted] Fire Protection District had already responded to, or was on the scene of multiple motor vehicle accidents due to slick highways from a sleet/snow storm that was passing through the area. A standby crew that consisted of both the off-going crew and paid on-call firefighters, responded to our station [number deleted] received a walk in report of an MVA on [highway name deleted]. The crew manned pumper [number deleted] and responded. Pumper [number deleted] arrived on scene and found one vehicle in the median cables. The pumper was positioned on the shoulder and passing lane to block for the crew. The crew exited the pumper to investigate. The captain advised it was a no injury accident. The engineer looked in his mirror as he was getting ready to exit the pumper to set cones when he saw a tractor trailer jack knife and coming at his pumper. The engineer remained belted and was struck by the tractor trailer. The engineer rode out the accident in the pumper. The pumper was pushed several hundred feet down the interstate. The engineer was transported by EMS for evaluation. The tractor trailer driver was uninjured. The crew heard the tractor trailer sliding and was able to run for cover. Although the highway was slick, there was sight distance that was several hundred feet. Apparatus had all emergency warning lights on including an arrow stick. The tractor trailer driver stated that he was driving too fast for road conditions.

Brackets [] in report denote identifying information removed by the reviewer.

Lessons Learned:

The engineer and captain positioned the pumper correctly and prevented additional injuries or deaths to the crew and motorist. Review and continue to train on highway safety. If conditions allow, use additional equipment and warning devices.

Report Number: [08-0000477](#)

Synopsis: Failure to close road leads to injuries to crew.

Event Description:

Our department was dispatched at 0304 for an MVC with injuries; motorcycle versus car, with the motorcycle catching fire. A 4 man crew responded with our engine, on scene within 5 minutes of dispatch. Upon initial arrival at the scene, the eastbound lanes of the highway were closed to facilitate the crews working the scene. Two firefighters from the engine crew, and a good Samaritan who had stopped when he saw the accident, were assisting the ambulance crew with patient care and loading, while the other two worked the burning motorcycle. The county sheriff on scene, who was also the shift supervisor, demanded that we reopen the road to traffic. The engine was repositioned to the side of the road, and the crew then made their attack on the burning motorcycle. One firefighter was on the nozzle, the other working the pump panel. Since the pump panel was facing traffic, the engineer was standing on the side step board, off the road and away from traffic. This is the standard operating procedure for pumping when facing traffic.

While the motorcycle fire was being extinguished, a vehicle passed by the engine at a high rate of speed, on the inside lane. The Samaritan was standing on the driver's side rear of the engine, having blood washed from his hands and arms from when he was assisting the ambulance crew and firefighters with the driver of the motorcycle. A state trooper was diverting traffic to the outside lane away from the accident, and signaling drivers to slow down. A late model Dodge pickup was traveling at a high rate of speed when the driver in front of him slowed as required by law. The driver of the Dodge slammed on his brakes, and swerved to avoid rear ending the car in front of him. In doing this, the driver of the truck lost control of the truck, causing it to hit the firefighter and the Samaritan who were standing on the ground, and then striking the pump panel and the engineer.

The firefighter who was standing on the ground was thrown into the side of the engine, and then to the ground. The Samaritan was struck by the right side of the bumper, throwing him against the pump panel, back against the truck, and then to the ground. The engineer standing on the side step board was thrown face first into the pump panel, then drug along the side of the engine, coming to rest face down near the front bumper of the engine, approximately 15 feet from where he was standing.

The engineer was airlifted to the hospital with possible head and spinal injuries. The other firefighter and the Samaritan were taken by ground ambulance. One with a broken leg and possible internal bleeding, the other with a broken foot.

Damage to the engine included; body damage to the driver side crew door, front left fender; tank to pump valve handle bent to almost a 90 degree angle, Tank fill valve handle broken, Storz fitting on LDH intake broken, pressure gauge for preconnect 2 shattered, and the pump housing was cracked when the LDH intake was struck by the front end of the pickup truck.

State law requires that drivers move to the outside lane and slow down when passing an emergency vehicle stopped on the road displaying their emergency warning lights. Initial investigation determined that the driver of the pickup was exceeding the speed limit when he came upon the accident scene. When the driver in front of him slowed before proceeding past the accident, the pickup truck driver was caught off guard, and reacted; leading to the accident.

The main contributing factor to this accident is that the road should have remained closed until all emergency workers had cleared the scene. There was an off ramp leading to the service road along the highway no more than 1/4 of a mile before the scene. The road should have stayed closed, with the state trooper or county sheriff directing traffic onto the access road, and away from the accident. With all firefighters tied up in working the accident scene, law enforcement personnel should have either kept the road closed, or monitored and diverted traffic around it in a slow and safe manner.

All firefighters on scene were wearing their prescribed PPE, and reflective vests to remain visible while working a night scene.

Lessons Learned:

- Wearing proper PPE does not always ensure that you will be seen. Be constantly aware of the changing situation around you.
- Law enforcement and the fire department need to have an agreed upon SOP outlining the duties and responsibilities of each during an accident scene on the roadway.
- The engineer standing on the step board, off the ground and away from traffic most likely kept him from losing his legs as the truck's bumper struck the vehicle right at the point where the engineer would have been standing, had he been standing on the ground.

Report Number: [08-0000511](#)

Synopsis: Firefighters almost struck by approaching vehicle at accident scene.

Event Description:

The scene is right shoulder/breakdown lane of divided highway in western [city deleted] suburbs. The highway runs north and south in this area bordered on the west by a [deleted] ridge and mixed residential, commercial and retail to the east. Also along the east border is a bike path.

Dispatched to a rollover accident, initial response was 2 engines (1 for traffic safety) and an ambulance. Self assigned was the district chief temporarily housed with the first in engine and ambulance. The approach to the accident location is uphill across a short bridge with no change in grade of highway. Near the top of the hill is a right hand curve with off ramp. Weather conditions at this location were wet roads and temperature close to or below freezing (first truly cold conditions of the fall). The bridge did have black ice noticed by the engineer. In the trailing ambulance I noticed the townhome complex sprinkler systems operating and a rising mist. The engine parked and angled toward the shoulder in the breakdown lane on the right side of the highway with wheels chocked. The ambulance parked 150 feet in front of engine hugging the soft shoulder of the breakdown lane. The rolled over vehicle was on its roof approximately 100 feet up the adjacent hill on the right on the fence bordering the bike path. Most of the crews of both rigs were on the hill interviewing and checking for injuries; there were none.

The engineer was preparing to set out cones as the chief arrived and pulled up behind the engine. The traffic safety engine had not arrived on scene yet. There were skidding noises and the engineer quickly moved around the truck to the right side and the chief closed his partially opened driver door, as a pickup truck traveling sideways at highway speed struck the rear left corner of the engine. The pickup truck impact was right rear quarter of the bed. It came to a

stop approximately 100 feet in front of the ambulance. The engine shuddered forward and about a foot and had to be backed off the chocks.

Lessons Learned:

Situational awareness is a key. The cold, the bridge, the sprinklers, time of day are all contributing factors to a potentially bad outcome. Something had already gone wrong for someone and that's why we were there anyway. Preparation and knowing how and where to position and what the created safety zones are leads to going home the next day. Dumb luck and not ignoring an unexpected noise will always help. A couple of seconds sooner or later and this would have been a tragic event instead of property damage only.

Even if you are tired or just woke up, train yourself to notice all you can and place yourself in the best spot for a good outcome. I was in the ambulance and we were in a good safety area to work from. The engine was as prepared as it could have been and did its job. The chief didn't ignore something, and narrowly missed participating in his own funeral.

Report Number: [09-0000877](#)

Synopsis: Situational awareness prevents tragedy

Event Description:

While reporting to my duty station, I came upon an accident. I stopped to render assistance to the victim of a single vehicle accident. My POV was properly placed off the shoulder of the road with warning lights activated. While treating the victim of the accident and making notification to the Emergency Communications Center, I observed lights flashing off of the trees. Turning around, a vehicle was observed coming straight toward me and the victim of the accident. I pushed the victim over the guardrail and then vaulted over the guardrail myself, falling approximately thirteen feet before landing on the ground. Shortly after recovering from the fall and checking out the victim of the original accident, we returned back up to the road way and observed that the vehicle that was heading toward us had crashed into the rear of my POV and then spun around and struck the original accident vehicle. My POV had been pushed against the guardrail causing a partial displacement of the guardrail. This was the exact area where the original accident victim and I were standing just prior to the second collision.

The victim and I both sustained injury from the second collision with the original victim sustaining a laceration to his hand and myself having to have both hips replaced.

Lessons Learned:

It is paramount that you pay attention to your surroundings at all times while working any emergency incident. No immediately identifiable way to prevent a similar incident. The driver of the striking vehicle was not using good judgment at the time of the incident. The driver was driving too fast for the road conditions. The importance of self control and incident management are important. We have to be able to immediately assess the changing environment of any emergency situation.

Report Number: 10-000044

Synopsis: Ambulance involved in collision on highway.

Event Description:

Our department only has two paid firefighters on an engine who work 48/96. We supplement with volunteers doing shift work with us. On this particular day, it was a firefighter and me (FF/Paramedic).

The initial call was in another department's district. It came out as a possible 2-vehicle accident with unknown injuries approximately 15 miles south of town. When we heard that, we realized that the call could be in our district due to boundaries but we decided to wait until a unit arrived on scene to inform dispatch exactly where the call was. The ambulance arrived on scene first and reported that one vehicle had slid off the road and had no injuries or damage. Another vehicle just happened to roll over and come to rest approximately 50 ft. from the other vehicle. The ambulance stood down the incoming fire unit from the neighboring district and reported that it was in our district and for us to respond to assist with traffic. As we responded, we noticed that most of the highway was clear but some windblown spots contained icy areas. We run a two-lane highway with a speed limit of 65mph.

As we arrived on scene, the accident was in the northbound lane and we were coming from the southbound lane. The ambulance was parked on the shoulder (or what we had of a shoulder) facing oncoming traffic. There was a State Patrol and Sheriff Officer car in front of the ambulance. We proceeded to park in front of all of those vehicles to block them from oncoming traffic. We then were informed that we needed to assist with back-boarding a patient from the rollover. We back-boarded the patient and loaded her into the ambulance.

I closed the back doors of the ambulance and took two steps to the side when a vehicle coming from the southbound lane crossover slammed into the rear of the ambulance. It proceeded to hit the front passenger side of the ambulance and finally came to rest back in its own lane off the road. I was standing at the bumper only five seconds prior to this. I scrambled to the driver's side of the ambulance when the impact of the vehicle nearly rolled the ambulance on top of me. However, due to the amount of snow, the ambulance did not roll. The two paramedics in the ambulance were injured along with the initial patient's father. We flew one paramedic, transported the injured father and daughter as well as the two in the vehicle who hit us. The driver had a broken wrist and possible rib fractures. Both paramedics suffered only minor injuries and no other EMS responders were hurt. The highway was then shutdown for us to work the scene.

Lessons Learned:

We run these exact roll-overs and slide-off calls all the time. We park in the oncoming lane often but due to road/weather conditions, we had no other choice. We were lucky this time to have State Patrol on scene with us. We used the engine properly to block the scene from oncoming traffic and had all lights on. The driver who hit us was driving too fast for road conditions and was not paying attention. What we learned was that we need the police to do all traffic control. We did not have anyone away from the scene to warn drivers to slow down. We also need to leave the highway as soon as possible to clear the roads. If we were able to staff an engine with more firefighters, they could have assisted with traffic control as well. Both fire districts should have been dispatched at the same time since the exact location of the accident was unknown. Keep firefighters aware of their surroundings and do not be complacent.

Report Number: 11-0000003

Synopsis: Vehicle mirror strikes FF on accident scene.

Event Description:

Our ladder company, staffed with four, was called for a mechanical extrication of one patient from a vehicle involved in a two-vehicle accident. The accident occurred on a busy four-lane roadway with two lanes in each direction. The department responded with a typical three and one medical response. A battalion chief and a rescue/ambulance also responded. On arrival of the ladder company, there were two engines and a battalion chief on the scene. The engineer on the ladder placed the vehicle against the curb as close as he could possibly get without hitting tree branches with the protruding bucket. The engineer immediately set out traffic cones to close off the outside lane, leaving approximately four feet from the truck to the cones. Traffic was still able to travel in the inside lane.

Upon completion of the extrication, a firefighter was returning to the truck carrying extrication equipment with the right hand and counter balancing by leaning to the left side toward traffic. The firefighter was hit with what is believed to be a protruding side mirror on a passing pick-up truck. The firefighter was knocked against the ladder truck and then to the ground. The firefighter was transported by the ladder truck to the nearest hospital and examined by an emergency room physician. It was determined the injuries were minor. The firefighter was subsequently sent home for the remainder of the shift and was cleared to return to duty four days later. The driver (of the pick-up) was not apprehended and possibly did not realize he had hit someone, though the firefighter believes he did know that he had hit something because the driver applied brakes, but did not stop. The weather was clear, approximately 72 degrees F, and dark with very little moon. All emergency lights on all vehicles were on. Our department has received previous training on apparatus parking and positioning.

Lessons Learned:

- Do not fear having to close all lanes and redirect traffic around or away from incident.
- Use at least a two-man team, one to watch for oncoming traffic and one to carry equipment.
- Be aware of positioning of vehicle and traffic patterns.
- Ensure wheels are turned into curb.
- Position cones in the safest possible position.
- Secure headlights and strobe lights on all vehicles.
- Inform Command/PD of what had occurred ASAP.
- Be aware of how far you are from traffic and stay as close as possible to the vehicle.
- FF was wearing reflective turnouts following the mechanical extrication, but perhaps a safety vest would've helped.
- Provide training on where and how to position apparatus.