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Report of the Week

"Don't Let Safety Slip Away."

1/12/2012

Report Number: 10-0001128

Report Date: 09/28/2010 15:16

Synopsis

Sliding semi-truck plows into accident scene.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Captain

Department shift:

Age:

Years of fire service experience:

Region: FEMA Region X

Service Area: Suburban

Event Information

Event type: Non-fire emergency event: auto extrication, technical rescue, emergency medical call, service calls, etc

Event date and time: 12/19/1997 20:00

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event:

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

What do you believe is the loss potential?

Event Description

Note: Brackets denote reviewer de-identification.

I am a captain at [department name omitted], a fully paid municipal department. On this evening, an unexpected ice storm suddenly created several miles of black ice on our freeway and the surrounding area. In short order, all units were out with multiple accidents.

My crew was working on the scene of an accident with no injuries on a road adjacent to the main freeway. This area was at the bottom of a long downhill section of the freeway. We saw a semi truck slide down the hill and crash into a car. Three of us stayed with the patient. Two others and I headed across toward the freeway to check on the car occupants. Unknown to us, the top portion of this hill was dry, the black ice section started part way down. This is a 70 mph freeway. The people in the car were okay, but relayed to us that part way up the hill there was a person lying on the shoulder that they believed had been struck by a sliding car.

We headed up the hill on the shoulder, walking on a sheet of ice. As we reached the patient, we had walked out on a bridge over a river about 70 or 80 feet down. There was no escape or safe area. The patient was down and several cars

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parked were around the area that had managed to slide or crash to a stop. About this time, a loaded semi truck was just hitting the ice and starting to slide into a jackknife position above us. As I asked the woman my first question, there was suddenly the sound of tires sliding on ice, and cars being struck. I looked up and saw this truck jackknifed against the right Jersey barrier, knocking cars in every direction. It was coming right at us, along with several cars bouncing back and forth between jersey barriers. We had only seconds to react. I tried to move but fell on the ice. I was on my knees trying to get up when the first couple of cars flew by. One car crashed into the barrier above me and redirected around me. I could have reached out and touched it as it spun by. I managed to take a step to the barrier and turn my back to it as the front of the semi, jack-knifed slightly away from the barrier, reached me.

The front tire struck my right boot and tossed me up into the air. I came down on one of the steps welded to the side of the fuel tank and managed to hang on as the cab of the truck slid over to the barrier. I was wedged between a concrete barrier zooming by and a semi truck saddle tank with my legs pointed downhill. The concrete barrier was beginning to push the back of my bunker coat up my back as the truck came to a stop. I opened my eyes and was shocked to be alive, and to find that my legs were still pointed the right way. Everyone else (except the patient) was able to avoid the cars and truck. I missed some work with an injured ankle and a full-body bruise. Working in the street during boot drives still bothers me.

Lessons Learned

As a department, we now position pumpers to protect the work area. We assign someone to watch approaching traffic. Escape routes are critical. We close the road with trucks if we feel it is needed. We are far more careful when ice storms are possible.

Report of the Week

An emergency scene can often present a hazardous work environment for responders in the best of conditions. Add inclement weather to the equation in the form of frozen precipitation or icy surfaces and what would normally be a manageable situation can quickly become life threatening. The mercury is plummeting into sub-freezing temperatures in many parts of the country. As Report [10-1128](#) reminds us, our anticipation of weather-related hazards should be elevated in order to safely perform our duties.

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The harrowing ordeal experienced by the report submitter in this week's ROTW is an example of the unpredictability of incidents that occur during inclement weather. As the weather conditions change, the rules of roadway safety also change. Emergency responders and civilian drivers should change the way they

operate. When the roadway becomes covered in ice or snow, vehicle stopping distances become greatly elongated or practically non-existent and even walking is difficult. It is important that roadway blocking is set up in a way to mitigate these increased hazards. Always consider the worst possible scenario when planning for operations on icy, slippery road surfaces.

Review Report [10-1128](#) and the related reports listed below and discuss the following issues with your crew:

1. Are there specific locations within your jurisdiction that can become treacherous during the winter?
2. What are some basic safety considerations you should think about when responding or working on scene during periods of frozen precipitation?
3. What preplanning have you done as a department or station to prepare for winter weather conditions?
4. What are the capabilities and limitations of the traction devices you use on your apparatus?
5. What are some of the resources you can call upon to assist if needed when roads become slippery? What equipment or supplies can you carry with you?

Responding during winter weather presents special challenges that require forethought and planning in order to maintain a high level of safety. For more information, check out the following article: [VFIS Article on Winter Driving](#).

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Inclement Weather – Winter

[08-576](#) [08-670](#) [09-263](#) [10-048](#) [11-014](#)

Have you experienced a near miss related to winter weather? Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today so everyone goes home tomorrow.

Share a story – save a life!

Note: The questions posed by the reviewers are designed to generate discussion and thought in the name of promoting firefighter safety. They are not intended to pass judgment on the actions and performance of individuals in the reports.