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Report of the Week Rewind

"To Buckle or not to Buckle"

1/26/2012

Report Number: 05-0000608

Report Date: 11/15/2005 00:11

Synopsis

Lack of seat belt usage results in minor injury.

Demographics

Department type: Combination, Mostly paid

Job or rank: Lieutenant

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 43 - 51

Years of fire service experience: 27 - 30

Region: FEMA Region III

Service Area: Rural

Event Information

Event type: Vehicle event: responding to, returning from, routine driving, etc.

Event date and time: 05/31/1987 16:00

Hours into the shift: 9 - 12

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event:

Do you think this will happen again? Yes

What were the contributing factors?

- Individual Action
- Situational Awareness
- Decision Making
- Human Error

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury
- Lost time injury
- Minor injury

Event Description

We were responding with lights and siren mutual aid to another county for an automatic alarm. I was riding as the officer. We were approaching an intersection approximately one mile from the station. The light was red in our direction. My driver noticed a car approaching from the north and began to slow the pumper by taking his foot off the accelerator. The car did not look like it was going to stop for us so he applied the brakes harder. I was donning my turnout coat and had not yet buckled my seat belt. When the driver hit the brakes, I had both arms in my coat and was pulling it up over my shoulders. The sudden deceleration of the pumper threw me head first into the windshield. I managed

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to turn my head at the last minute, but still struck the windshield with a significant force, causing me to see stars.

The weather was clear and the road was dry. We were a three man pumper.

Lessons Learned

Wearing seat belts is not an option. I wore them in my car every day to and from work then, and still do, but didn't buckle up until I was dressed when I ran calls.

Don your turnout gear before getting on the rig.

Consider cold responses for automatic alarms. 99% of automatic alarms in our jurisdiction are false.

Drivers should not move rigs until all crew members are seated and buckled.

Report of the Week

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the ROTW REWIND!

ROTW REWIND reexamines a report from the ROTW archives. This week's ROTW features Report [05-608](#), initially featured in one of the very first ROTWs in December 2005. Sometimes, the fire and emergency service needs to step back in time in order to move forward. ROTW REWIND revisits a report so you can consider what changes you, your team and your organization have made since the original posting. ROTW REWIND will appear the third Thursday of every month. Please email ROTW@firefighternearmiss.com with your feedback on this new feature.

Good day.

One of the first potential life and death decisions a firefighter/EMT makes is "to buckle or not to buckle." This decision can change the individual's life, the lives of the person's family and the lives of all the members of the person's organization. Wearing your seat belt in either a department or personal vehicle is such a simple decision and a safety measure that should be automatic. If emergency responders know the importance of wearing seat belts, then why is it that firefighters/EMTs lose their lives or get injured being tossed around or thrown from apparatus? As you read this ROTW REWIND, think about what changes you or your organization have made in order to prevent a seat belt near-miss event from occurring. Post your comments on the near-miss [Facebook page](#) on what has changed since 2005.

"We were responding with lights and siren mutual aid to another county for an automatic alarm. I was riding as the officer. We were approaching an intersection approximately one mile from the station. The light was red in our direction. My driver noticed a car approaching from the north and began to slow the pumper by taking his foot off the accelerator. The car did not look like it was going to stop for us so he applied the brakes harder. I was donning my turnout coat and had not yet buckled my seat belt. When the driver hit the brakes, I had both arms in my coat and was pulling it up over my shoulders. The sudden deceleration of the pumper threw me head first into the windshield. I managed to turn my head at the last minute, but still struck the windshield with a significant force, causing me to see stars."

The account in Report [05-608](#) talks about donning PPE while responding to an emergency incident and how this decision could have cost this particular officer his life. The adrenaline rush of the dispatch has a powerful influence on our decision making process. Our ability to control it will lead to sound safety practices like donning our PPE before getting on the apparatus. Once you have read the entire account of this report, and the related reports, consider the following:

1. Does your department have a mandatory seat belt use when vehicles are in motion regulation? If not, can you require everyone on the piece to wear seat belts?
2. If you are a driver, what practices do you employ to ensure the members you are responsible for are safely seated and belted?
3. If you are an officer, what steps do you take to ensure your crew is ready to be safely transported to the scene?
4. If you take no steps to ensure your crew's safety, have you prepared and practiced the remarks you will use to tell their survivors?
5. If you take no steps to ensure your crew's safety, do you know the legal implications?

Make your first potential life safety decision a smart one. "To buckle or not to buckle" is a simple question with a simple answer, always choose to buckle. The lessons learned from this ROTW REWIND, will make a difference on your next response.

Related Reports- Topical Relation: Seat belts

[08-134](#)

[07-865](#)

[08-509](#)

[09-393](#)

[06-241](#)

Have you had to implement a no tolerance policy for seat belt use or experienced a near-miss event? Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today to pass on your experience. You will never know who you may save.

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.