



National Fire Fighter Near-Miss Reporting System Reports Related to Violent Incidents

Report #	Synopsis	Page #
10-386	Trauma call results in FFs held at gunpoint.	2
09-1037	Shots fired during residential house fire alarm.	2-3
07-815	Suicidal patient poses threat to crew.	3-4
08-651	Hostile crowd threatens EMS crew.	5
10-667	Combative patient armed with a knife.	5-6

10-386

Event Description

Brackets [] denote reviewer de-identification.

My partner and I were dispatched to an assault with gun shots fired and reports of several people down. Upon arrival, my partner and I were staged a block away awaiting the police department to confirm that the scene was safe. My partner and I had [time deleted] on with this department and had [time deleted] experience as firefighter paramedics. We both knew our SOPs very well and felt our actions were within our scope. Within a few minutes of our staging time, several PD cruisers flew by us and were on the scene we were waiting to arrive at. We waited for a few minutes and were advised that PD had stabilized the scene and we approached. When we turned the corner, we saw several cruisers parked with no officers in the area. Dispatch advised us that they had suspects in custody on an adjacent street, so we felt safe to enter. When we pulled up, our initial assessment revealed 2 victims lying on the ground with obvious gunshot wounds. The first victim was obviously deceased so we approached the next and found a critical patient and immediately began treatment. In the process of treating this patient, we failed to notice several people beginning to surround us. This crowd turned out to be the gang members involved and the patient we were treating was apparently on the rival gang because my partner and I were held at gun point and told to leave that patient alone and go back to the first patient we found and "save" him. At that point we felt it prudent to obey their demand and left the patient lying on the ground. We then began treatment on the victim that had obviously fatal wounds and picked the patient up and moved him to our truck and immediately left the scene. We then advised dispatch of the situation and requested backup for the real patient left on scene.

Lessons Learned

The lesson we learned was that scenes can change quickly. And in this incident, we should have requested a confirmation of safety and to have a PD officer on scene with us at all times as a potential assault situation. After this incident was investigated, our SOP changed and it is mandatory to have law enforcement on scene with us at all times in an assault type incident.

09-1037

Event Description

Information in squared brackets [] has been de-identified.

The [deleted] County dispatch center received a 911 call at 9:40 pm. The male caller reported a fire in the basement to the 911 dispatcher. An initial alarm was dispatched consisting of two Engines, one Truck, and one Ambulance were sent to incident [number deleted] for a reported structure fire. At 9:42 pm Engine [1], Truck [1], and Ambulance [1] responded from Station [1]. Engine [2], Engine [3] and Assistant Chief [1] responded to the scene within the next two minutes.

At 9:45 pm, Engine [1] called on the scene establishing command and reporting nothing showing from a two story wood frame residential dwelling. The crew of Engine [1] saw a

police officer carrying a child across the yard at this point. As the crew exited the vehicle, flames erupted on the first and second floor of the residence. A second alarm was requested due to active fire. This entire sequence takes only five seconds. At this time, county dispatch alerts all crews that three people may still be in the residence. Engine [1]'s crew, consisting of Captain [a], Firefighter [b] and Firefighter [c] begin stretching an attack line. At the same time, Firefighter [d] who was off duty and lives within the same block of the incident came to assist operations by taking over as the apparatus operator to begin initial pump operations.

As Truck [1] and Ambulance [1] arrived on scene, the first shots are fired from inside the residence. Engine [1] is struck by gun fire five separate times. Firefighter [b] is at the engineer panel at this time. The other three personnel are exposed to the gun fire in the front yard of the residence and at the officer's side of the engine. All of the firefighters began taking cover once the gun shots were recognized.

The firefighter on the scene can now see a subject inside the residence in the center window on the second floor firing at them. As the figure disappeared from the window, a PAR was taken with all members accounted for.

After some time, initial entry is made into the residence from the front door as heavy fire is found throughout the first floor, up the stairwell into the second floor and with no fire visible in the basement.

The fire was eventually contained and three bodies were located on the second floor, one in the center room where the gunman was initially seen and two in the master bedroom. This finding was relayed to the Unified Command Center. The fire was reported extinguished and the residence was made safe for further investigation, police detectives began their interior investigation.

It was later determined that the male owner of the residence had shot his wife and daughter thirty one times that evening. He then poured gasoline throughout the first and second floors of the residence. At some point, he took his 2 year old granddaughter and placed her outside between the front and storm doors. It was at this location the girl was found by the police who removed her from the scene. Bullet holes were located the next day inside the exterior walls of a home across the street as well as on Engine [1].

Lessons Learned

Keep in mind that this type of event, can happen at any time and anywhere.

07-815

Event Description

We were dispatched to an EMS call for a subject who had slit their wrists. I, as the evening's duty officer for our department, advised dispatch I was enroute. I also verified that law enforcement was enroute and advised dispatch "All <department> units would stage until <law enforcement> advised the scene was safe." I then radioed enroute on our department fireground channel and advised all units to "stage until <law enforcement> advises the scene is safe." Several privately owned vehicles (POV) called enroute to the scene as well as one of our rescue squads. The first arriving firefighter in a POV called on scene to dispatch, then advised on the fireground channel that he was in staging, and could hear family members outside screaming. As I continued enroute, a

lieutenant who had arrived in a different POV advised me on the radio "there is no weapon and the scene is under control." In response, I told the lieutenant, "When <law enforcement> arrives and advises the scene is safe, we will go in." Approximately 2 minutes later, as I pulled behind the ambulance crew, which was staged approximately one-half mile from the scene, the lieutenant advised dispatch "you can slow <law enforcement> down, there is no danger." The firefighter and lieutenant who had arrived on scene had entered the house and treated the patient. Upon my arrival, after the law enforcement agency, I observed the serrated knife that the patient had used lying next to the patient on the nightstand. The patient was unconscious upon my arrival, but awoke in an agitated state shortly after I arrived. The patient was loaded into the ambulance and transported to the hospital for treatment.

Lessons Learned

Several errors were made that could have led to a firefighter injury or death at the hands of a suicidal patient. The first error was mine; I should have told the units enroute WHERE to stage, either by landmark or address well away from the incident scene. By just advising the units to stage, I allowed them to drive right up to the house. In fact, the situation I found on arrival; the firefighters in POVs had pulled directly in front of the house, intended to wait in their vehicles until law enforcement arrived. This is unacceptable; I allowed the units to "see" the scene, meaning they were too close.

The second error was a judgment error made by the firefighters arriving in POV's. Even though I didn't advise a location, no unit should stage close enough to a violent incident to be addressed by victims or family members until law enforcement arrives. If family members observe help arrive but not take any action while awaiting law enforcement, it multiplies the stress level of all involved and can lead to potentially violent confrontations. Obviously, this issue needs more emphasis in training.

The third error involves a lack of SOP/SOG involving response to violent incidents. This was discussed at the completion of the incident with our assistant chief, and will be resolved in the next few days with the adoption of an SOP.

The fourth error involves the actions of senior members/officers at similar incidents. I have observed senior members/officers take similar actions in the past (not waiting for law enforcement). Hopefully, the training emphasis and SOP adoption will take care of this issue, but this is a culture change, so it will be the hardest of all to correct.

It should also be noted that the ambulance crew, from a different agency than my department, handled the situation flawlessly in my opinion. The ambulance crew staged about one-half mile from the scene and waited for law enforcement. My department can use their actions as an example and possibly reference their SOP/SOG to formulate ours SOP.

08-651

Event Description

Late on a recent Saturday night, my engine company was dispatched on a typical BLS call to a person injured from a fight. The location was a known hot bed for violent activity and our current directives do not allow us to enter that particular address without a police presence. Upon our arrival, I noticed the required police presence. My crew of two, including myself, went to work. During the EMS call, my driver and I were kneeling down attending to our patient that was seated on the sidewalk, when I noticed a crowd of bystanders slowly encircling us. I signaled to my driver for both of us to put our backs to the adjacent wall where we could at least see them coming. All we had at our disposal was a metal clip board and a jump kit. We intended on using them to the best of our ability to defend ourselves. Unbeknownst to me and while my crew was being encircled, the police were on the other side of the parking lot taking care of another scuffle that had arisen. Luckily, as quickly as the incident started, it was over. From out of nowhere, the police were breaking into the crowd and dispersing them. There was never any violence acted out on my crew that night. I can't be sure if the outcome would have been the same had the police not arrived when they did.

Lessons Learned

From this close call, I have realized that just because the police routinely provide a protective presence during many calls for firefighters, one cannot assume that they are safe from all public danger 100% of the time.

It is up to all personnel on the scene to maintain a keen situational awareness at “all times” and to be alert to disintegrating environmental conditions that may require quick intervention to correct them.

Fire officials should make sure that a police unit(s) is with them during their call at all times and not just assume it to be true. If it takes coordinating a plan with your local P.D. to guarantee this, then do so. Your crew’s safety and well being may depend on it. Let’s make sure we all go home tomorrow.

10-667

Event Description

We were called for a man with difficulty breathing. On scene with police and EMS, we entered the room to find the patient combative, with altered mental status. We approached the patient to provide care and the patient pulled a knife. He took a swing and almost stabbed a member of the fire department. The police department used mace to control the patient. At that point, no one in the room could see or breathe well. The patient still had the knife. He was controlled and taken to the hospital.

Lessons Learned

We need to improve communication between police, fire, and EMS. Police department did not make a wise decision when using mace. There were too many people in one room. No one checked the patient or home for weapons. Is it just an EMS call? This was dangerous for all involved.