



National Fire Fighter Near-Miss Reporting System Featured Report: January 2010

Report Number: 09-0001108

Report Date: 12/17/2009 15:49

Synopsis

Seatbelts save FFs from injury.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Other: Standards Manager

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 52 - 60

Years of fire service experience: 30+

Region: FEMA Region IV

Service Area: Rural

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 12/14/2009 06:23

Hours into the shift: 21 - 24

Event participation: Told of event, but neither involved nor witnessed event

Weather at time of event: Clear with Wet Surfaces

Do you think this will happen again? Yes

What were the contributing factors?

- Individual Action
- Equipment
- Situational Awareness

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Lost time injury
- Life threatening injury
- Minor injury
- Property damage

Event Description

We were dispatched to a motor vehicle accident (MVA) involving a pickup truck and rolled over semi-tractor trailer with ensuing fire under a bridge overpass. Initial dispatch was a multi-unit assignment comprised of 2 pumpers, 1 pumper tanker, and an ambulance provider. Incident weather conditions consisted of dense fog causing

poor visibility and wet/slippery road conditions. All response routes leading to incident scene were 2-lane rural roads with speed limits posted between 45 and 55mph. The tanker pumper (3,000 gallon, tandem axle, commercial truck design) responded with a crew of 2 personnel from the first-due station located approximately 5 miles away. This unit within approximately 1 mile of the incident scene was approaching a sweeping "S" curve at approximately 35mph. When the driver released the accelerator to slow down, the exhaust braking system engaged causing the rear tires to break road traction. The brakes were applied, but the skid on the "black ice" was already in a right-rear motion. As the brakes were applied, the tires came in contact with the off-road surface causing the tires to grab and roll the apparatus to its right side. The unit rolled completely over one full rotation landing upright on its wheels and coming to rest on top of the roadside guardrail. Damage was extensive to all sides of cab and water tank. The guardrail fortunately got entangled with the rear tandem tires which prevented the unit from a continued slide or subsequent rolls down a moderately steep embankment. Additional units were diverted to this call and upon arrival both the driver and officer were triaged, stabilized, and packaged for transport. Both were ground transported with one being taken to the nearest hospital and the other to the local trauma center. Both were treated and released with minor injuries.

Lessons Learned

The happy ending to this storyline is that both the driver and officer survived this serious rollover accident because they were properly using and wearing seatbelt harnesses. Our agency is a proud supporter and participant in the National Firefighter Seatbelt Pledge Campaign with 100% compliance. This pledged support (in writing) adds a higher level of safety awareness. If our personnel had not been wearing their seatbelts, this rollover incident would have most certainly resulted in a very different and tragic ending with both crew members being ejected and potentially crushed by the rolling apparatus. Apparatus can be replaced – our firefighters cannot. The other important point under lessons learned is that drivers should make sure that exhaust braking systems are NOT engaged when traveling or responding on wet and/or slippery road surfaces. Dense fog conditions produce a moisture film on road surfaces, which in this case turned to what drivers in the south call "black ice" conditions. Drivers should check the operational status of these systems before responding. During wet/slippery conditions, these braking systems should be disengaged with use of the brake pedal only per the manufacturer's operator manual recommendations.