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

Report Number: 09-0001119 **Report Date:** 12/21/2009 02:26

Synopsis
Black ice causes multiple problems for responders.

Demographics
Department type: Paid Municipal
Job or rank: Lieutenant
Department shift: Other: modified la
Age: 25 - 33
Years of fire service experience: 0 - 3
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: 01/24/1998 09:00
Hours into the shift:
Event participation: Involved in the event
Weather at time of event: Cloudy and Freezing Rain
Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?
- Situational Awareness
- Protocol
- Weather

What do you believe is the loss potential?
- Property damage
- Life threatening injury

Event Description
Brackets [] denote reviewer de-identification.

While working in capacity as a [name deleted] on an engine in a combination department, we were dispatched to an MVC on a narrow mountain road. The weather conditions were rainy and cold at the station, but turned to freezing rain as we approached the cars on the mountain. We found three cars blocking the road in the uphill lane. The road was narrow with a cable-type

guardrail and a very steep open drop to our right with a blasted rock cliff to our left. Our approach was up the mountain and we parked behind the cars as we had been previously instructed. The three cars involved had rear-ended each other when the front car had started spinning and came to a sudden stop. The people involved were all milling around the cars and we were surprised to find the road completely covered in black ice.

My captain started interviewing the drivers when a pickup truck traveling down the mountain saw the incident and slammed on his brakes. He locked up on the ice and hit the uphill car head-on at approximately 30 mph. The impact was magnified due to the ice and quickly smashed three cars together and into the people standing behind the last car. Most were harmlessly thrown to the ground, except for one of the drivers who was knocked over the guardrail.

In the ensuing chaos, my captain realized this could continue happening and told me to run up the road and stop traffic. I took off running on the shoulder to get traction. About 400 yards up the road, I noticed a car spinning in slow circles down the hill towards me. I jumped against the rock cliff and the car hit the wall about 10 yards above and then spun around me into the wall below. We managed to get the rest of the cars stopped without incident and rescued the guy who had been knocked over the cliff. He broke his femur, but no other injuries were sustained.

Lessons Learned

During sudden icing storms, cars have little to no ability to stop. The traditional practice of parking the engine to the rear of the vehicles can be disregarded if the greatest danger is presented from the vehicles traveling downhill.