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Report of the Week

The gates are down for a reason
3/19/09

Report Number: 09-169

Report Date: 02/12/2009 1850

Synopsis

Ambulance almost hit by second train.

Demographics

Department type: Combination, Mostly paid

Job or rank: Fire Fighter

Department shift: 24 hours on - 24 hours off

Age: 25 - 33

Years of fire service experience: 7 - 10

Region: FEMA Region IX

Service Area: Urban

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 01/31/2009 1300

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Human Error

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Other

Event Description

We were responding code 3 to the hospital with one patient. The squad and ambulance were stopped by a south bound freight train. Both emergency vehicles were heading west and went into the east bound lanes to await the end of the train. As the train passed, the ambulance proceeded thru the guard rails back into the west bound lanes. As the ambulance cleared the second set of tracks, a north bound passenger train narrowly missed the ambulance.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned were not to follow the ambulance blindly. Make sure that you can see all the way down the tracks in both directions before proceeding.

Discussion Questions

Trains passing at railroad crossings are not unheard of. For most of us the experience is rare. We approach a crossing, the warnings and gates activate, a train passes and the gates go up. We rarely consider the fact that as we cross over the tracks there are two sets. We are conditioned to the norm of a single train passing through the crossing. Reset the stage with the urgency of a Code 3 response, a "delay" in the gates going up, and our "norm" of only seeing one

train pass the crossing. All of the factors are now in place for this week's near miss. Fortunately the second train was far enough down the track to give the ambulance enough time to get over the tracks. Once you have reviewed [09-169](#) and the related reports, consider the following:

1. What is your department's SOP/SOG on crossing rail tracks?
2. Does your department have an SOP/SOG on operating on or around rail?
3. When did your department conduct its last training session with representatives from the rail agency?
4. Place yourself in the squad. Is there anything you could have done to stop the ambulance from driving through the guard rails?
5. Place yourself in the ambulance. Would there have been any opportunities to pre-empt the driver from driving through the crossing?

Related Reports

[05-567](#)

[06-039](#)

[07-955](#)

[08-509](#)

For further information on railroad crossing safety, visit:

<http://www.on-track-on-line.com/op-lifesaver-intro.shtml>

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.