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Report of the Week

"Make sure your 'blocking' pattern is secure."

12/08/2011

Report Number: 11-0000154

Report Date: 04/20/2011 16:39

Synopsis

Road blocking saves lives.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Fire Chief

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 43 - 51

Years of fire service experience: 21 - 23

Region: FEMA Region V

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: 04/12/2011 12:30

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?

- Training Issue
- Decision Making
- Situational Awareness
- Individual Action
- SOP / SOG

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Property damage
- Lost time injury
- Life threatening injury

Event Description

Note: Brackets denote reviewer de-identification.

On [date omitted], our department responded to a single motor vehicle accident (car into the wall) on a divided eight lane Interstate. It was about [time omitted], weather was clear and traffic was average for this time of day. Our

"Make sure your 'blocking' pattern is secure."

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response for an accident in this area is one ambulance and one engine with six personnel total. The ambulance arrived on scene and positioned themselves behind a single car on the inside shoulder. The ambulance crew evaluated the patient who was uninjured. Shortly after the ambulance arrived, an official DOT barricade truck with an arrow board arrived and blocked the first inside lane just behind the ambulance parked on the shoulder. The third vehicle to arrive was the engine, which approached the scene from the inside lane. The officer of the engine, following department policy, directed the engineer to pull onto the shoulder and block the ambulance.

At about the same time the engine came to a stop on the shoulder, a commercial panel van crashed into the back of the barricade truck. The crash was high speed, estimated at 75 MPH with no use of brakes. The driver of the van was killed instantly. The barricade truck was pushed across the additional three lanes of traffic, side swiping a semi which managed to maintain control of his vehicle and not crash. The engine officer immediately radioed for a shift commander and additional ambulance. The roadway was shut down for about fifteen minutes until traffic control could be coordinated and the second accident scene protected.

This report is submitted to share an incident where personnel made good decisions and followed department policies resulting in preventing a disaster for responding firefighters. Had the officer not followed policy the ambulance would have been unprotected and possibly a target for the van if it swerved before impact. The firefighters were spared serious injury because policy was appropriately followed. A little luck was involved too.

The point here is that the roadways are not safe. A vehicle traveling 75 MPH was ignorant of an accident blocking two lanes with several emergency vehicles on scene. We are not sure why the driver crashed. If you don't have blocking policies, you need them. If you have them, you better follow them.

I responded to the incident and took command. After sizing up the incident and checking on the crews, I was proud of the decisions made by these crews. They were all shocked and enlightened by what happened. Again, bottom line is to protect yourself and follow your policies.

Lessons Learned

Policies are in place for a reason and they work. Blocking accident scenes on the roadway is mandatory. Train, train, train to follow your policies.

Report of the Week

Proper "blocking" on an emergency scene is essential to firefighter safety. As we move into winter, daylight hours are significantly shorter during peak traffic hours. It is imperative to establish a safety zone with proper apparatus placement to maintain adequate blocking for responders. Often times, firefighters can get tunnel vision and forget to properly protect themselves when operating on motor vehicle collisions. This can result in catastrophic consequences for initial arriving companies and the victims we are trying to

treat. As pointed out in report [11-154](#), it is worth the extra minute to properly “block” the scene, in order to protect each other and the citizens we serve.

“Our department responded to a single motor vehicle accident (car into the wall) on a divided eight lane Interstate...weather was clear and traffic was average for this time of day...The ambulance arrived on scene and positioned themselves behind a single car on the inside shoulder. The ambulance crew evaluated the patient who was uninjured...an official DOT barricade truck with an arrow board arrived and blocked the first inside lane just behind the ambulance parked on the shoulder. The third vehicle to arrive was the engine, which approached the scene from the inside lane. The officer of the engine, following department policy, directed the engineer to pull onto the shoulder and block the ambulance. At about the same time the engine came to a stop on the shoulder, a commercial panel van crashed into the back of the barricade truck. The crash was high speed, estimated at 75 MPH with no use of brakes. The driver of the van was killed instantly. The barricade truck was pushed across the additional three lanes of traffic, side swiping a semi which managed to maintain control of his vehicle and not crash...This report is submitted to share an incident where personnel made good decisions and followed department policies resulting in preventing a disaster for responding firefighters...After sizing up the incident and checking on the crews, I was proud of the decisions made by these crews. They were all shocked and enlightened by what happened.”

Taking the extra steps required to operate safely on any scene is the difference in doing a good job versus a great job. Setting up safety zones by “blocking” with the apparatus, will put firefighters in a position to successfully complete the mission at hand. As [11-154](#) illustrates, the establishment of the safety zone, ultimately saved firefighters from being injured and/or killed. Once you have read the entire account of [11-154](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. Does your department have a policy that addresses proper “blocking” and the establishment of a safety zone on roadways?
2. What other safety equipment can you utilize to increase firefighter safety on the scene of a MVC?
3. How does apparatus placement differ on the scene of a minor MVC with a single apparatus response versus a major MVC with multiple apparatus responding?
4. The reporter states that training and policy are the contributing factors to the success of a “blocking” policy. When was the last time you and your crew reviewed your policy and trained on it?

The severity of an auto collision and the sense of urgency to initiate treatment often times overrides our own safety as firefighters and first responders. The lessons learned from [11-154](#) will make your next MVC response safer for your crew and the citizens we serve.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Roadway Safety – Blocking

[10-025](#)

[11-143](#)

[10-181](#)

[11-020](#)

[11-036](#)

Have you avoided a disaster because of proper “blocking” and establishing a safety zone? Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today to pass on your experience.

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.