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Report of the Week

"Weathering the Storm."

3/15/2012

Report Number: 07-0000652

Report Date: 01/06/2007 15:14

Synopsis

BC vehicle struck by falling tree during storm.

Event Description

Role - Additional Battalion Chief placed in service driving a Suburban. Weather - High Wind (30 to 40 MPH with gust up to 90 MPH with heavy rain). Call - Multiple homes with trees into their homes. Staffing, one engine with three personnel and one Battalion Chief. The Battalion Chief and engine were dispatched to a new neighborhood that had reported multiple homes hit by falling trees. We had already checked on about 10 homes when we went to a new location. At the new location several more homes had been hit. Several home owners were out in the streets looking at all the damage. I made the decision that it was too dangerous to have civilians out in the streets and ordered everyone to get back in their homes and stay there until the storm passed. I advised the engine company that we needed to leave this neighborhood and shelter in place at the Fire Station until the winds died down. The engine and I went to the end of the block to turn around. After I turned around, traveling about 25 miles per hour following the engine, a tree approximately 14 inches in diameter, and 70 plus feet in length, uprooted and fell on my command vehicle. The tree landed on the "B" post at an angle towards the rear doors. The tree disabled all of my radios. The engine crew did not know that I had been hit. I used my personal cell phone to call the Battalion Chief's office. I advised the other Battalion Chief that I had been hit by a tree and needed help. The engine that I was following returned to help me out of my rig. We left the command rig in the middle of the road due to falling trees around us. Upon returning to the Station I advised the Battalion Chief that we should shelter in place until the storm passed. At the time of my near miss we did not have an SOP/SOG for waiting out a storm or sheltering in place.

Lessons Learned

- Shelter in place during storms.
- Staff all apparatus including reserve apparatus (Several stations were land locked due to falling trees on roads and power lines).
- Activate Emergency Operations Center before/during/after weather event.
- Prioritize/Triage dispatch calls.
- Add chain saws on Aid/Medic Units
- Handle minor calls to citizens via phone.
- Increase Communications with public works, police, city services.
- Create SOP/SOG for storm related events. In the Northwest, we train often, and have SOG's for earthquakes and should have similar for major storms.

[Reviewer note: Photos related to this report can be found on the Resources Page, Videos & Photos Section.]

"Weathering the Storm."

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Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal
Job or rank: Captain
Department shift: 24 hours on - 24 hours off
Age: 43 - 51
Years of fire service experience: 24 - 26
Region: FEMA Region X
Service Area: Urban

Event Information

Event type: Vehicle event: responding to, returning from, routine driving, etc.
Event date and time: 12/14/2006 23:30
Hours into the shift:
Event participation: Involved in the event
Weather at time of event: Cloudy and Sleet
Do you think this will happen again?
What were the contributing factors?

- SOP / SOG
- Communication
- Weather
- Staffing
- Procedure

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Property damage
- Minor injury
- Life threatening injury

Report of the Week

2011 was a record year for tornadoes in the U.S., both in damage done and the sheer number of strikes. In April alone there were 753 confirmed tornadoes. On May 22, 2011, an EF-5 tornado devastated Joplin, Missouri. With wind speeds of 200 miles per hour and a path that spanned six miles long and three fourths of a mile wide, this single tornado killed 157 people and left a nightmarish scene for the emergency personnel who responded that day.

March is usually the beginning of the tornado season and, while we hope that 2012 is not another record year for tornadoes, most forecasters are predicting higher than normal tornado activity. It is important to remember that, as first responders, there are some situations that require us to protect ourselves and our equipment first so that we may be available to render aid to the victims of tornadoes and other weather related incidents. Several helpful resources are available such as the [Tornado Lifts Fire Apparatus](#) article and related videos posted on the website of IAFC's Safety, Health, and Survival Section. In addition, FEMA has compiled [Tornado Pathfinder: A Guide to Literature](#) which outlines material in the NETC library dealing with tornadoes.

Report [07-652](#) is one example of a near-miss incident involving extreme weather.

"...Several home owners were out in the streets looking at all the damage. I made the decision that it was too dangerous to have civilians out in the streets and ordered everyone to get back in their homes and stay there until the storm passed. I advised the engine company that we needed to leave this neighborhood and shelter in place at the Fire Station until the winds died down. The engine and I went to the end of the block to turn around. After I turned around, traveling about 25 miles per hour following the engine, a tree approximately 14 inches in diameter, and 70 plus feet in length, uprooted and fell on my command vehicle..."

Review Report [07-652](#) and the related reports listed below and discuss the following issues with your crew members:

1. Does your department have a clear policy regarding severe weather safety for personnel?
2. What would you do if you and your crew found yourself in the path of a dangerous storm?
3. What preplanning has been done as a department or station to prepare for severe storm conditions?
4. Does your department conduct or participate in tornado drills?
5. What would you do in the event your communication center is disabled by a severe storm?

As emergency responders, we are used to the idea of putting ourselves in harm's way to protect others, but sometimes it's important that we protect ourselves first. Please take time to read the accounts that others have experienced and put the lessons learned to good use in your department or station.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Extreme Weather

[09-772](#) [06-260](#) [08-238](#) [09-177](#) [08-244](#)

Do you have a story to share about a response during severe weather? Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today so everyone goes home tomorrow. Share a story – save a life!

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.

If you would like to subscribe to the ROTW please e-mail ROTW@firefighternearmiss.com with "Subscribe" in the subject line.

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