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Report of the Week

**Good Blocking Prevents More Than a Sack.
03/31/2011**

Report Number: 11-0000035

Report Date: 01/24/2011 13:45

Synopsis

Proper blocking protects crew on interstate.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Battalion Chief/District Chief

Department shift: 24 hours on – 24 hours off (4s & 6s)

Age: 52 - 60

Years of fire service experience: 24 - 26

Region: FEMA Region VIII

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: 12/17/2010 21:00

Hours into the shift:

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

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Equipment
- Decision Making
- SOP / SOG
- Situational Awareness

What do you believe is the loss potential?

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

Event Description

Brackets [] denote reviewer de-identification.

Engine [1] (not my unit) was recently re-positioned at a motor vehicle collision off to the side of an interstate highway. Engine [1] was being relocated to provide the blocking function for the crew treating the victims of the collision. The engineer noticed two vehicles sliding towards the incident on a snowy/icy road. The engineer blasted the air horn to notify the crew of the impending danger. The sliding vehicles (two SUV's) struck Engine [1] and moved it five

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feet. The crews were spared any injury due to the positioning of Engine [1] and the situational awareness of the officer and engineer.

Lessons Learned

The blocking function must be addressed at every collision at an interstate collision and should be considered on busy artery roads/streets. Situational awareness cannot be ignored either.

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There were 10.2 million motor vehicle collisions in 2008 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Fire departments and other emergency responders are present at many of these collisions. The frequency of the incident leads to a high risk to responders due to the nature of the event. From distracted drivers rubbernecking to see what is going on to distracted drivers unaware of an accident, emergency responders at the scene have to have eyes on all sides of their heads.

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A savvy officer orders the engine repositioned to protect crews; an alert engineer blasts a warning to crews inside of a safety zone that trouble is on the way. The repositioned engine is struck by two out of control vehicles, and everyone goes home. Proper apparatus placement at the scene of collisions is no accident. The barriers created by blocking apparatus provide protection, a higher vantage point, and incident screening for all working in the hazard zone. However, the hazard zone isn't always inside the apparatus barrier. After you have read the entire account of [11-035](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. Are your state and local law enforcement personnel versed on the purpose and necessity of emergency apparatus as blocking tools?
2. When apparatus is positioned for blocking, is the front of the rig pointed toward the hazard zone, or away from the hazard zone?
3. Is every riding position equipped with a high visibility safety vest?
4. Does your SOP for vehicle collision include a designated crew member (or members) whose sole function is lookout for traffic hazards?
5. Whose responsibility is it in your jurisdiction to redirect traffic with flares/cones?

Operating at the scene of a roadway incident should not be considered routine. The next time you are traveling the streets of your area, note how many drivers are doing everything but driving. Those are the very same people you'll be seeing at your next vehicle collision. The least dangerous among them are those that have already crashed. The rest should be considered a threat to your safety and the safety of your crew.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Apparatus Placement/Blocking

[05-353](#)

[06-513](#)

[07-1164](#)

[08-152](#)

[09-419](#)

[10-025](#)

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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.