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Report of the Week

"Do you smell gas or is it just me?"

4/12/2012

Report Number: 12-0000066

Report Date: 03/02/2012 21:41

Synopsis

Characteristics of gasoline ignored during leak.

Event Description

While on scene of an auto accident with an active fuel leak, one crew was off to the side dealing with the fuel leak. All patients were clear of the area with a vehicle leaking a small amount of fuel from a 30 gallon tank. A firefighter was on a charged hoseline with turnout gear and SCBA with no mask and was close to the leak. The engineer was attempting to stop the leak wearing no turnout gear. A second firefighter also attempting to stop the leak and was reported to have been soaked head to toe with fuel. During the after call critique, the Hazardous Materials Team stated that if you have to get wet from fuel to stop a leak, you have to get wet. The rest of the units were treating patients away from the vehicle and fuel leak.

Lessons Learned

There is a real lack of respect for fuel and its potential. Our risk management profile was not being used - lots of risk with almost no gain. The lack of experienced supervision was absent and everyone was focused on the rest of the incident. Lack of training is very much a big part of this situation. Bad practices, poor supervision, lack of experience, and a lack of training all contribute. I have to wonder how everything would have went if the fuel had flashed and our firefighters were severely burned.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Captain

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 43 - 51

Years of fire service experience: 24 - 26

Region: FEMA Region IX

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: 02/25/2012 13:00

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Witnessed event but not directly involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

"Do you smell gas or is it just me?"

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- Training Issue

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury

Report of the Week

Responding to a vehicle leaking fuel is a fairly “routine call” in the fire and emergency service. Calls of this nature can take on the appearance of looking benign, but pose a serious threat to first responders. Understanding the chemical and physical properties of gasoline or diesel fuel is the key to safely operating on scenes of this nature. Even though responders typically respond in open air environments when dealing with gasoline or diesel fuel leaks, there is still an Immediate Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH) component. Developing a “best practices” approach to donning all appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and self contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) will afford responders the best protection possible. In report [12-066](#), the fire crew didn’t conduct a detailed risk assessment prior to engaging in mitigation tactics to control the leak. Report [12-066](#) details the complacency and apathy that can hinder any crew that is operating offensively on a gasoline or diesel fuel leak.

“While on scene of an auto accident with an active fuel leak, one crew was dealing with the fuel leak...all patients were clear of the area...a firefighter was on a charged hoseline with turnout gear and SCBA with no mask...the engineer was attempting to stop the leak wearing no turnout gear...a second firefighter was reported to have been soaked from head to toe with fuel.”

Report [12-066](#) illustrates that responders need to ensure that a detailed and thorough risk assessment is completed prior to engaging in mitigation tactics. The flammable, combustible and carcinogenic factors were not entirely addressed and firefighters’ lives were put at risk. Fortunately, as a result of this incident, the crews identified and addressed training needs in their after action report. Developing a “best practice” approach to ensure all PPE and SCBA are in place on every call that poses an IDLH threat is the foundation for success.

Consider the following questions for discussion:

1. What level of hazardous materials training competency do your members have?
2. Is gasoline flammable or combustible? What is the difference between these two?
3. Is it safe to simply ‘wash down’ a gasoline spill? What mitigation attempts can be made by a single engine in your department?
4. Does your department have a policy that addresses PPE and SCBA on incidents of this nature?
5. When was the last time you did a “basic” training on gasoline or diesel leaks?

Gasoline and diesel fuel leaks are calls that we all can relate to and are often easy to mitigate. It is important to not let complacency and apathy dictate our

tactics and ultimately put responders' lives at risk. There are multiple training sites and publications available to educate your personnel and heighten their situational awareness to the dangers inherent with fossil fuels. Take the necessary steps to do a thorough risk assessment prior to engaging in mitigation tactics on "routine calls."

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Fuel leak

[06-352](#)

[09-248](#)

[10-499](#)

[11-306](#)

Have you had a near-miss because you didn't address all of the safety considerations while operating on a fuel leak? 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.

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National Fire Fighter Near-Miss Reporting System
4025 Fair Ridge Drive
Fairfax, VA 22033
P: 571-238-8287
F: 703-273-0920
info@firefighternearmiss.com
www.firefighternearmiss.com