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Report of the Week

Cut Right Across Our Path...

04/28/2011

Report Number: 09-0000122

Report Date: 02/05/2009 11:17

Synopsis

Passing vehicle on right results in near collision

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Fire Fighter

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 34 - 42

Years of fire service experience: 21 - 23

Region: FEMA Region V

Service Area: Urban

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 12/05/2008 15:00

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?

- Training Issue
- Individual Action
- Human Error
- Decision Making

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury
- Property damage
- Lost time injury

Event Description

While responding to an automatic fire alarm with a two piece engine company, we approached a city circle with traffic and noticed a small passenger vehicle stopped and slightly to left of traffic flow. Without hesitation, the engineer of the lead engine went around the right side of civilian vehicle with no slowing. As soon as the lead engine past by, the driver of the civilian vehicle thought to go right for sirens and attempted to do so, narrowly missing side impact on the trailing engine. If the trailing engineer had not had situational awareness, and had not been driving with due regard, he would not have been able to slow and avoid the collision.

Lessons Learned

1. Always have situational awareness no matter what task is being completed.
2. Drive with due regard.
3. Never pass vehicles on the right.
4. Have better drivers training in place.
5. Have officer/firefighter in charge, in control of ALL personnel to include engineer.

Report of the Week

Multi-unit responses for automatic fire alarms are commonplace in the American Fire Service. The response mode (i.e., "hot," "cold," mix of both, etc.) varies by jurisdiction based on the department's philosophy and culture. While the responses vary, there is a constant; the unpredictable reaction of drivers in the response path. This week's ROTW, [09-122](#), serves as a reminder of the behaviors that can be encountered with every run.

"While responding to an automatic fire alarm with a two piece engine company, we approached a city circle with traffic and noticed a small passenger vehicle stopped and slightly to left of traffic flow. Without hesitation, the engineer of the lead engine went around the right side of civilian vehicle with no slowing. As soon as the lead engine passed by, the driver of the civilian vehicle thought to go right for sirens and attempted to do so, narrowly missing side impact on the trailing engine. If the trailing engineer had not had situational awareness, and had not been driving with due regard, he would not have been able to slow and avoid the collision."

Most states require drivers to either "pull to the right and stop," or "pull to the nearest curb and stop" to let emergency vehicles pass. As most of us can attest, vehicles will pull over somewhere, but they rarely stop. Civilian drivers have three reactions to responding emergency apparatus: responsible, irresponsible and irrational. Since the odds are two to one in favor of an unfavorable reaction, we need to remain vigilant and anticipatory when we are responding to incidents. The only thing we should be counting on is the other driver can't be counted on. Once you have read the entire account of [09-122](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. [09-122](#) describes an event involving a two-piece engine company. The situation could just as easily involve an engine-ladder combination or other two unit "wagon train" response. This incident involves just one hazard of the wagon train. List three other hazards that might be encountered during response.
2. If the civilian driver in [09-122](#) executed the same maneuver in your jurisdiction would they be:
 - a. Following the state motor vehicle law regarding yielding to emergency vehicles, or
 - b. Violating the state motor vehicle law regarding yielding to emergency vehicles.

3. Several court cases have found in favor of civilian drivers involved in emergency vehicle vs. civilian vehicle collisions. The court has ruled that the emergency vehicle drivers should “expect the unexpected” from civilian drivers based on past experiences many emergency vehicle drivers admit to during testimony. Have you experienced a similar near miss? If so, what actions have you taken since to better avoid collisions?
4. Define “due regard” without looking the phrase up in any reference source.
5. What is your department’s SOP on following distances for multiple unit responses? If you do not have such an SOP, what is your “rule of thumb” and what is the science behind your following distance?

The deference courts formerly extended to emergency vehicle drivers has been slowly withdrawn over the last decade. The new mindset is emergency vehicle drivers know that civilian drivers will react irresponsibly and irrationally when approached by an emergency vehicle. The wisest advice for today’s responding emergency vehicles is: slow down to arrive alive and expect that every other driver on your response route is capable of preventing you from arriving at the scene of your next call.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Situational Awareness-Driving

[05-218](#)

[06-271](#)

[07-1067](#)

[08-437](#)

[09-874](#)

[10-013](#)

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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.