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Report of the Week

Seat belt saves life, again
6/13/08

Report Number: 07-1115

Report Date: 11/11/2007 1614

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Driver / Engineer

Department shift: 24 hours on - 48 hours off

Age: 25 - 33

Years of fire service experience: 11 - 13

Region: FEMA Region IV

Service Area: Suburban

Event Information

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

Event date and time: 06/01/2006 1500

Hours into the shift: 5 - 8

Event participation: Involved in the event

Do you think this will happen again? Uncertain

What do you believe caused the event?

- Equipment
- Individual Action

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury
- Property damage

Event Description

I was riding in the officer's seat responding to a fire alarm, bunker pants and coat in place. As we approached an intersection, I shifted in my seat while putting my arm through the SCBA strap. This action caused the pocket of my bunker pants to catch the door latch, and the door to open while the apparatus was still in motion. I was able to close the door with no further incident; fortunately I was wearing my seat belt which decreased my chance of injury.

Lessons Learned

1. Only don protective equipment when vehicle is stopped. 2. Apparatus manufacturers should ensure that door latches are designed and placed where pockets or other items cannot catch on them causing unintentional operation.

Discussion Questions

The consequences of not wearing seat belts are well known inside and outside the fire service community. Yet the second leading incident type of traumatic death for firefighters is motor vehicle collision. Blunt force trauma resulting from vehicle ejection (partial or full) leads the list of death causes in the category. The preventive answer to these tragedies is clear, but the incidents continue to occur. The question becomes "Why?" The answer is mired in tradition, misdirected actions and complacency. 19 of the 56 firefighters who died from

traumatic injury in 2006 were killed in vehicle crashes.* Most were not belted. Deaths resulting from vehicle crashes are among the most preventable form traumatic death firefighters experience. After you have reviewed the grouped reports in their entirety as part of your Safety, Health and Survival Week focus, consider the following:

1. Do you don your PPE while responding to an incident? Why?
2. Are you seated and belted during emergency response? Why?
3. Do you buckle up for some calls (e.g., EMS, routine service, etc.) but not others (e.g., full assignments, fire with people trapped, etc.)? Why?
4. Are you unbelted and getting dressed with your officer's knowledge? Why?
5. Firefighters are still getting dressed while apparatus is moving? Why?

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.