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## Report of the Week

**"Use caution, even on green."**  
**07/14/2011**

**Report Number:** 11-0000179

Report Date: 05/14/2011 23:21

### Synopsis

Driver averts accident at intersection.

### Demographics

Department type: Combination, Mostly paid

Job or rank: Driver / Engineer

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

Age: 25 - 33

Years of fire service experience: 4 - 6

Region: FEMA Region X

Service Area: Suburban

### Event Information

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

Event date and time: 05/14/2011 16:19

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Cloudy and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Individual Action
- Situational Awareness
- Human Error

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Lost time injury
- Property damage
- Life threatening injury

### Event Description

[ ] Brackets denote reviewer de-identification.

A municipal ALS equipped engine and a third service county ALS ambulance were dispatched by the same dispatch, on the same radio channel, to a local park for a trauma patient. While enroute, and less than two miles from our station, we approached a heavy traffic intersection, which is blind to the south side. Upon approach, the [brand deleted] signal preemption system (which both the engine and ambulance are equipped with) was delayed in capturing the light. The driver of the engine began to reduce speed and decelerate toward the intersection. As we approached the intersection we captured the light with the signal preemption system, giving us a GREEN light, but for whatever reason, the driver of the engine made a complete stop at the intersection. Just then the ambulance blew

**"Use caution, even on green."**

**1 of 3**

through the intersection, not stopping for the RED light. To our surprise, we didn't hear or see this ambulance until they were in the intersection. Only because of the driver's situational awareness and intuition (gut feeling) did we come to a complete stop to avoid a collision.

Further details about the incident are that the ambulance was dispatched using an Automatic Vehicle Recognition (AVR) system. The system dispatched an ambulance that does not normally respond to this area. They were also responding from an area that was completely unexpected. Under normal circumstances they would have approached this intersection from a different location.

After interviewing the driver of the ambulance, several reasons were given to the near miss incident. They were unfamiliar with our response direction and thought we were approaching from behind them. When they saw us at the intersection they thought we were stopped and letting them through, even though they had the red light. They were uncertain of the location of the call due to the park being on a corner lot and having access from multiple directions/streets.

### **Lessons Learned**

- 1.) SLOW DOWN, approach intersections with caution and ALWAYS COME TO A COMPLETE STOP FOR RED LIGHTS.
- 2.) Be familiar with where units are responding from.
- 3.) If responding from out of your area or into an unfamiliar area, announce your location.
- 4.) Don't ultimately trust the signal preemption system, as there may still be vehicles proceeding through the intersection once you have captured the traffic light.
- 5.) Know where you are going and have situational awareness of other units responding to the same call as your unit.

### **Report of the Week**

Multiple units responding to the same incident from different directions creates the potential for unscheduled arrivals at intersecting points. These points are most frequently intersections that are in one form or another controlled by devices ranging from stop signs to traffic lights. In this week's ROTW, report [11-179](#), reminds us that a green light does not necessarily guarantee the way is safe to proceed.

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*"A municipal ALS equipped engine and a third service county ALS ambulance were dispatched by the same dispatch, on the same radio channel, to a local park for a trauma patient. While enroute, and less than two miles from our station, we approached a heavy traffic intersection, which is blind to the south side. Upon approach, the [brand deleted] signal preemption system (which both the engine and ambulance are equipped with) was delayed in capturing the light. The driver of the engine began to reduce speed and decelerate toward the intersection. As we approached the intersection we captured the light with the signal preemption system, giving us a GREEN light, but for whatever reason, the driver of the engine made a complete stop at the intersection. Just then the ambulance blew through the intersection, not stopping for the RED light. To our surprise, we didn't hear or see this ambulance until they were in the intersection.*

*Only because of the driver's situational awareness and intuition (gut feeling) did we come to a complete stop to avoid a collision."*

Right of way rules, line of sight approaches, traffic light pre-emption devices and emergency response SOPs all support apparatus arriving at the scene of an emergency call. Despite all these efforts, human factor plays a role in the safe arrival of all units to their dispatched destination. Once you have read the entire account of [11-179](#), and the related reports, consider the following with your colleagues.

1. Many departments now have specific rules requiring units to stop at all red lights during emergency response. If your department has such rules in effect, are there any other recommendations for intersection travel to consider?
2. The reporter states the driver's "situational awareness and intuition" contributed to collision avoidance. How large of a role do you believe the two factors played? How do you promote/teach the effect of the "gut feeling" in your driver training sessions?
3. How often do you encounter intersection situations with crossing emergency vehicle traffic? Given your estimate, what is your assessment of the likelihood of a collision based on the frequency?
4. If your agency uses traffic pre-emptive signaling, how often is the system calibrated/fault-checked to ensure accuracy?
5. How many "blind side" intersections exist in your response area? What is the significance of knowing where they are?

Emergency response ranges from high frequency, high risk to low frequency and high risk depending on how many calls for service a department receives. Reducing the risk associated, whether the frequency is high or low is an essential element of keeping our promise to the communities we serve. Doing your part by keeping your speed under control and being on the lookout for hazardous situations like intersections, will promote getting you to the scene quickly and returning for the next run.

### **Related Reports – Topical Relation: Driving: Intersections**

[07-806](#)

[07-839](#)

[07-932](#)

[07-1162](#)

[08-042](#)

[10-057](#)

Experience a near miss with another piece of apparatus while responding? Submit your report to [www.firefighternearmiss.com](http://www.firefighternearmiss.com) today.

*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.*