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Report of the Week

Pedal faster, chief...faster!

8/20/09

Report Number: 09-750

Report Date: 08/10/2009 2219

Synopsis

Unchecked vehicle rolls at scene.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Deputy Chief

Department shift: 24 hours on - 72 hours off

Age: 43 - 51

Years of fire service experience: 17 - 20

Region: FEMA Region II

Service Area: Urban

Event Information

Event type: Fire emergency event: structure fire, vehicle fire, wildland fire, etc.

Event date and time: 08/10/2009 1430

Hours into the shift: 5 - 8

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again? Yes

What were the contributing factors?

- Situational Awareness

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Minor injury

Event Description

[] Brackets denote de-identification by reviewer.

We received a call for vehicle fire, southbound on the [highway deleted]. Two engines, a ladder tower, and a deputy chief were dispatched to the scene as per our normal response.

Upon arrival we found a flatbed truck with the cab and engine compartment fully involved on the right shoulder. It is important to note that this section [highway] is an elevated bridge and we were positioned facing uphill with only a 4 - 5 foot concrete barrier on the side of the shoulder. The first due engine arrived on the scene and parked up hill in front of the vehicle along with the ladder-tower. The state police were on the scene prior to our arrival and had the shoulder and the right lane blocked and they were positioned behind the vehicle, downhill. As per our protocol the second due engine staged near the toll plaza.

As I arrived on the scene in the deputy chief's vehicle, I was forced to park downhill behind the two state police vehicles. All three of our vehicles were in line on the shoulder starting approximately 20-feet behind the vehicle. As the first-due engine was just starting the suppression efforts, the flatbed's brakes let loose. The flatbed, which was still smoldering with fire in the cab area at the time, started to roll backwards along the shoulder between the concrete barriers and the right lane traffic. The two state police vehicles moved into the right lane, but the chief's vehicle was trapped on the shoulder behind the moving vehicle. I hopped in the chief's vehicle and drove backwards at the speed of the flatbed in case I had to attempt to use the car to stop the flatbed from turning into oncoming traffic. The vehicle rolled down the hill, uncontrolled, for approximately 360-feet until a member was able to turn the steering wheel so that the vehicle turned into the concrete barrier and came to a complete stop.

This vehicle could have easily run over an emergency worker on the scene or turned into oncoming traffic as it was in motion. Two members were injured while attempting to stop this vehicle while it was in motion. One had minor burns and a joint injury, and the second had a [deleted] burn along with a minor laceration.

This was an easily preventable accident had we chocked the vehicle immediately upon arrival. This action is often performed by the ladder company on the scene; however they were still in the process of donning their SCBA's when the brakes let loose.

Lessons Learned

Chock the vehicle, front and back, immediately upon arrival.

Have good communications between all members.

As I arrived on the scene I was aware that the police and I were in a dangerous spot, but due to heavy traffic became trapped downhill.

The companies involved all had members with between 5 - 20 years experience. They have all responded to many vehicle fires on this section of the [highway] but none have ever witnessed a situation such as this.

It is important to train on the basics daily

Discussion Questions

Vehicle fires on limited access highways are a daily occurrence throughout America. The fire services response to such incidents varies, but many fire departments recognize the value of sending units from both sides of the incident to account for incorrect location information. When the units arrive, they can support each other through established SOPs for example, making the first priority to ensure the scene is safe by blocking traffic and securing the vehicle. Once you have read the entire account of 09-750 and the related reports, consider the following:

1. How many pieces of apparatus would your department dispatch to an incident like 09-750?
2. Does your department call for apparatus to park uphill from vehicle fires?
3. Does your department have an SOP for limited access highway incidents?

4. Does your department's SOP call for the wheels of burning vehicles to be chocked?
5. What materials would you use to chock the wheels of a burning vehicle?

Related Reports

05-380

06-356

07-757

08-443

Have you ever been struck or nearly struck by a rolling vehicle? Get your account posted to www.firefighternearmiss.com today and prevent the occurrence from ruining someone else's day.

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.