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Report of the Week

"Buffer zones and blocking pay dividends."

09/22/2011

Report Number: 11-0000292

Report Date: 09/01/2011 18:05

Synopsis

Scene safety measures prove effective.

Demographics

Department type: Volunteer

Job or rank: Assistant Chief

Department shift: Respond from home

Age: 25 - 33

Years of fire service experience: 17 - 20

Region: FEMA Region III

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: 09/01/2011 13:00

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Human Error

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Property damage
- Lost time injury
- Life threatening injury

Event Description

Late this morning, the rescue truck from our fire company was requested to assist a neighboring fire company on a substantial oil leak on a main, four-lane highway with a maximum speed limit of 50 mph. A delivery truck's engine malfunctioned and spilled oil in one lane of the highway for approximately one and a half miles. There was already a large coned buffer zone established by units on location, as well as a deflecting lane block to the slow lane of traffic when our rescue truck arrived. Our rescue truck added an additional lane block and also deployed "Emergency Scene Ahead" signs approximately a quarter mile

ahead of the buffer zone to signal motorists of what was ahead. At approximately 1300 hours, while crews were staging on scene awaiting the tow and cleanup agency, an elderly female, travelling 45-50 mph disregarded the "Emergency Scene Ahead" signs and struck several of the cones that were being used to close the affected lane. All personnel were wearing ANSI class II traffic vests and were staged well off the roadway in an open field. The female eventually stopped, coming to rest about 15 feet short of the rescue truck acting as a secondary lane blocker. It was noticed that the elderly female driver had a small dog jumping about in the cabin of the vehicle, which could have added to her disregard of the traffic control devices. Local PD officers, who were on the scene, were summoned to the vehicle and issued a citation. Proper incident command, unit placement, individual training, traffic control devices, PPE, and staging of personnel were utilized appropriately. Given different circumstances, several crewmembers along with the driver of the vehicle could have been severely injured or killed. All fire departments involved are 100% volunteer agencies.

Lessons Learned

The lesson learned was to never be complacent with safety. Act as if the motorist is out to harm you, there is no way to correct a bad driver. Proper unit placement and use of all safety equipment is paramount in all situations, no matter how small the task. My suggestion would be to completely shut the road down when crews are working, especially if there is not enough equipment to provide more than adequate lane blocks. Never quit training and always be aware of your surroundings.

Report of the Week

Roadway incidents require special levels of awareness due to the variety of hazards that accompany the initial reason for the response. Every vehicle on the road, from those encountered during response, to those driven by the rubbernecks passing the scene, is capable of interrupting your efforts to arrive in one piece and mitigate the incident. The crews in [11-292](#) followed all of the right protocols, and as a result walked away from a potentially fatal encounter with a distracted driver.

"Late this morning, the rescue truck from our fire company was requested to assist a neighboring fire company on a substantial oil leak on a main, four-lane highway with a maximum speed limit of 50 mph. A delivery truck's engine malfunctioned and spilled oil in one lane of the highway for approximately one and a half miles. There was already a large coned buffer zone established by units on location, as well as a deflecting lane block to the slow lane of traffic when our rescue truck arrived. Our rescue truck added an additional lane block and also deployed "Emergency Scene Ahead" signs approximately a quarter mile ahead of the buffer zone to signal motorists of what was ahead. At approximately 1300 hours, while crews were staging on scene awaiting the tow and cleanup agency, an elderly female, travelling 45-50 mph disregarded the "Emergency Scene Ahead" signs and struck several of the cones that were being used to close the affected lane. All personnel were wearing ANSI class II traffic vests and were staged well off the roadway in an open field. The female

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What separates this near miss from an actual hit? The answer to this question ignites spirited discussion. Incidents like the one described in [11-292](#) fall on both sides of line dividing survival and tragedy. What has been statistically proven over time and industry practice is following established standards, regulations, as well as best practices positively contribute to a favorable outcome for the first responders. Once you have read the entire account of [11-292](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. How many roadway incidents did you and your crew run last year? Did any near misses occur during those incidents? If yes, review the event and consider filing a near-miss report. If no, what factors would you consider important to the event being handled without incident?
2. The spill described in [11-292](#) is approximately 7,920 feet long. What resources would you need to muster to handle a similar incident in your response area? Go to the Near-Miss Facebook page and post your answer.
3. Consider your last roadway incident. Did crews congregate at the scene in the "safety zone" after the incident was mitigated? Or did crews pack up immediately and leave the scene?
4. During your next response, have a crewmember note how many drivers are in a "distracted" mode (i.e., talking on the cell phone, texting, eating, reading the paper, etc.).
5. What would you estimate your department's compliance is with the federal regulation for workers to wear ANSI approved retro-reflective safety vests when operating in the roadway?

Even when every measure is taken to provide protection, something can go wrong. It is the predisposition for human failure that strives to defeat safety measures put in place to prevent calamity. Skimping on safety provides a wider opening for human failure to contribute to a disaster, better safe than sorry now becomes more than a timeworn maxim.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Roadway Safety

[05-493](#)

[06-513](#)

[07-941](#)

[08-216](#)

[09-419](#)

[10-025](#)

Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today so everyone goes home tomorrow.

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.