

HIGHWAY SAFETY (FIRE & EMS)

OBJECTIVES

- Staff will learn current highway safety practices
- Staff will learn department policy for scene placement

Emergency service organizations respond to a wide variety of incidents involving operations on or near a highway. These operations pose special risks to personnel performing fire, rescue, and EMS functions. Every year, a significant number of emergency service personnel are killed or injured while working to save others along our roadways. There may be a wide variety of reasons for these losses, but the point still remains; they should never happen! In many instances, an emergency responder responds to a “primary incident” along a highway, only to become the victim of a “secondary incident”- the nightmare in which a firefighter, EMS provider, or police officer is suddenly struck and killed by traffic.

HIGHWAY SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are some fundamental steps that may be taken to improve safety levels.

- **There is no substitute for training:** Incorporate proper equipment/apparatus placement and scene safety procedures into all training exercises. Every time we respond to a call or engage in a training exercise, we will practice on proper equipment/apparatus placement.
- **Multi-Agency coordination and communication are a must:** A unified Incident Command is essential. We will coordinate a common Incident Command System with all agencies that we generally work with.
- **Identify areas of known high incident rates:** Be prepared and establish pre-incident plans for areas in our district that have high traffic incidents and/or where we routinely respond to other locations where we park or stag along busy roadways.
- **Limit our exposure...Limit our time:** Do our jobs properly but do it with the minimum amount of equipment, personnel, and lane restrictions necessary without jeopardizing the operation or personnel safety. Once we finish, we will load our equipment and get off the roadway as soon as possible.
- **Give traffic plenty of warning:** Utilize signage, cones, flaggers, vehicles, anything to bring attention to our presence. Leave plenty of space as well.

The speed and volume of traffic as well as sight conditions will dictate how much space and warning is adequate.

- **Protect the scene with apparatus:** Proper placement of larger vehicles between moving traffic and your operation is key to providing a safety barrier for personnel.
- **Always work away from traffic:** Keep personnel away from moving traffic. When possible do not use apparatus for blocking that will be heavily used during the operation. In other words don't use the rescue truck to block if personnel will be pulling equipment out of compartments on the traffic side of the vehicle.
- **Be prepared to shut down the roadway:** If safety warrants it and there is no other way to provide a reasonable level of protection, don't hesitate to completely shut down the roadway. Always attempt to do this in conjunction with law enforcement. Keep the closure time to a minimum, keeping in mind you are creating other hazards by stopping or re-directing traffic, particularly on major roadways and interstates.
- **Be seen and not hurt:** Keep the scene well lit so that you may be seen. However, be aware that some of your scene lighting if improperly directed could reduce visibility of oncoming traffic. Turn off apparatus headlights and scene lighting that interferes with passing vehicle operators ability to see.
- **Dress for the occasion:** Be sure that all personnel have appropriate protective clothing on at all times, including highly visible colors and reflective material.
- **Accountability matters:** As with any emergency, know where all personnel are and what they are doing. Highway incidents are no different, except for one exception. Sometimes too many people on the scene will create additional exposure to injury. If too many people are just simply spectators and not actively involved in the incident, consider creating a staging area off of the roadway or releasing un-necessary personnel and equipment.
- **Scene safety officer:** Always have a safety officer at every scene.

POLICY

Discuss all organizational policies related to equipment/apparatus scene placement and scene safety.

CLOSING

Encourage discussion about past incidents and future plans when placing equipment/apparatus at a scene, and other personnel safety considerations on scene.