

2024 BLUE CARD HAZARD-ZONE CONFERENCE SPEAKER PREVIEW



Roadways are some of our most perilous hazard zones. Read on for essential traffic safety tips.

BY ASST. FIRE CHIEF SCOTT WILLIAMS

B SHIFTER *Buckslip*, Aug. 20, 2024

First responders and their vehicles are struck weekly on our highways and roadways while responding to incidents such as motor vehicle crashes, grass fires, and medical emergencies, and these risks continue to rise. I am convinced that working on the roadway is the most dangerous thing firefighters do. Given that we cannot control drivers, how can we keep our firefighters safe on the road? How should we set our priorities at these scenes, and what PPE should we use to protect ourselves?

Traffic Incident Management (TIM) involves coordinating resources to detect, respond to, and clear traffic incidents as safely and quickly as possible to minimize the impacts of crashes and congestion. Firefighters, EMS personnel, law enforcement, towing and recovery professionals, and state transportation staff must work together effectively when responding to roadway incidents. The objective is to ensure safe and efficient traffic flow during emergencies while preventing further damage, injury, or unnecessary delays for the motoring public. Here are six ways to enhance the safety of your personnel when operating at these high-hazard incidents.

Utilize TIM Training

Effective training is the first step to keeping firefighters and supporting agencies safer on the roadway. TIM training ensures firefighters have a basic knowledge and understanding of the hazards associated with roadway operations. Free TIM courses are available to all firefighters through the Responder Safety Learning Network (Responder Safety) and the U.S. Department of Transportation- Federal Highway Administration (US DOT-FHA).

Optimize the First 5 Minutes

The first five minutes are crucial. When IC No. 1 arrives at a crash scene, they should:

- ▶ Give an IRR and assume command.
- ▶ Direct incoming units to their best route/access to the scene.
- ▶ Establish an initial block with their unit to create a temporary traffic control (TTC) zone.
- ▶ Perform a 360 assessment and gather the following information:
 1. Physical size and length of the incident, including number of lanes.
 2. Number/type of vehicles involved.
 3. Estimated number of victims.
- ▶ Locate areas for incoming units to park/establish a TTC zone.
- ▶ Develop an incident action plan (IAP).
- ▶ Request any required additional resources.

Position Vehicles for Safer Work Areas

Always angle apparatus on the roadway to create a block (left or right) that maximizes the safe activity area and minimizes responders' exposure to approaching traffic. Block the incident lane and at least one additional lane on multi-lane roadways. Whenever possible, position apparatus to minimize the interference of headlights and scene lights with the vision of motorists.

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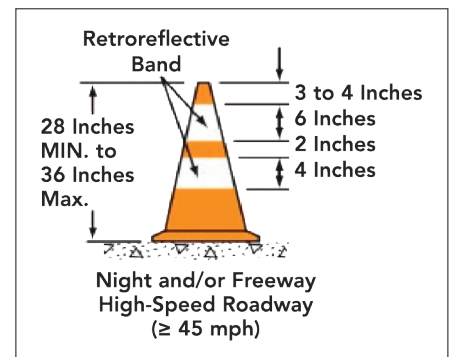


Firefighters should exercise extreme caution when opening passenger doors or exiting/entering apparatus, staying alert to oncoming traffic. Dis-mount the apparatus on the side opposite from the road. Everyone should maintain situational awareness and avoid turning their backs on traffic. Fire-fighters must always operate within the protected zone/shadow at any vehi-cle-related roadway incident. When loading patients into ambulances, ensure that the compartment doors are angled away from moving traffic to protect personnel and patients from approaching motorists.

Deploy Traffic Control Devices

Alerting approaching motorists, slowing them down, and deploying temporary traffic control devices (TCDs) are essen-tial for increasing firefighter safety. Always deploy TCDs from the rear of the apparatus, creating transition areas and safe zones for responders while alerting motorists to the emer-gency operation.

Portable traffic-control devices should also be used to buffer the activity area from traffic passing through the inci-dent and termination areas. TCDs include traffic cones (see diagram, right), road flares, and warning lights.



Wear the Correct Gear

Every firefighter should wear a high-visibility garment that meets the ANSI 107 standard when working on the roadway. The only exception is when fire-fighters are directly exposed to fire, flame, excessive heat or hazardous materials, which requires the appropriate structural firefighting gear.

What is your head worth? Have you considered how much protection your fire helmet would provide if you were struck by a vehicle? The web-bing suspension system in fire helmets and hard hats is good at protecting from impacts on the top of the head but not so good at protecting from side impacts. Additionally, fire helmets become cumbersome and often end up on top of the cars involved in the crash instead of on top of our heads.

On July 12, 2024, ASTM International published a new standard speci-fication for protective helmets designed for pedestrian roadway workers. This standard outlines the performance requirements and testing methods for head-gear used by individuals working on roadways. The critical issue now is whether helmet manufacturers will produce helmets that meet this new standard. Mean-while, our firefighters lack adequate protection while working on roadways.

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In my department, each firefighter receives a Hi-Viz Green rescue helmet equipped with a reflective kit. Our personnel must wear this helmet when working in or near moving traffic, except when they are engaged in firefighting activities. The Hi-Viz Green rescue helmet offers more comprehensive head protection than a traditional fire helmet.

Stay Alert

Firefighters should consider all approaching drivers are “D” drivers—distracted, drunk, drugged or drowsy. Additionally, they must never assume a traffic scene is entirely safe from oncoming traffic. A company officer’s top priority must be the safety of their firefighters. If it is unsafe for them to exit the apparatus, they should wait until sufficient resources are on the scene before providing care. If we are struck, we cannot help anyone.

Conclusion

As firefighters, we must remain vigilant about the dangers we face when responding to roadway incidents. We need to learn from near-miss events and line-of-duty deaths (LODD) involving struck-by incidents. We honor our fallen colleagues by understanding what happened to them and improving our practices. **BS**



Meet Scott Williams & learn more about traffic safety at the 2024 Blue Card Hazard-Zone Conference, Oct. 3 & 4 in Cincinnati.

Scott Williams has been in the fire service for 30 years and is a certified Ohio State Fire and Emergency Service Instructor II and a Live Fire Instructor. He is a Blue Card instructor, a national registered paramedic and a trained IAFF Peer Supporter. He has served the Springdale (Ohio) Fire Department for 22 years, holding the ranks of firefighter/paramedic, chief fire inspector and fire captain before his current position as the assistant fire chief. Chief Williams oversees fire department operations and develops the department’s SOGs. He is always looking to better himself and the fire service, supporting continuous improvement of fireground skills and operations through regular and consistent training. He is known for his honest approach and for teaching others through his first-hand experiences.