



Traffic Control at Emergency Incidents

A Pennsylvania Fire Chief was killed on I-83 around 12:30 a.m. on Saturday, April 27, 2013, when he was directing traffic for a crash that occurred nearby. The Pennsylvania State Police charged the driver with homicide by vehicle and driving under the influence.

Traffic control at roadway emergencies exposes emergency responders to motor vehicles and the drivers behind the wheel. Drivers are too often distracted, impaired, inexperienced, or physically challenged, and unfortunately, a drunk driver on a Saturday night cannot be considered an unexpected hazard. Agencies should recognize that drivers are not always alert and may not make good decisions as they approach your incident. Responders must be trained on traffic control measures and how additional measures can be used to account for low visibility conditions, difficult locations, and poor reactions of drivers.

New Jersey has adopted the 2009 edition of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Chapter 6I gives the minimum standard for traffic control for incidents on any public roadway. Traffic incidents are classified as Major (expected to last more than 2 hours), Intermediate (30 minutes to 2 hours), or Minor (under 30 minutes). This Bulletin concentrates on Intermediate Incidents, when traffic control typically requires diverting road users past a blockage. Full road closures may or may not be needed. Or they may be needed for a brief time to allow responders to accomplish a task.

Traffic control devices should be available. Prepare by looking at roadways in your response area. Where are your trouble spots? Where are multiple lane intersections? Decide how these frequent or complex locations will be controlled. What signs will be needed? How many cones? Would a written plan be beneficial? Where and how can these devices be positioned on apparatus?

Manual traffic control should be provided by qualified flaggers. Train and equip firefighters to direct traffic. Consider STOP / SLOW octagon hand paddles. These should be mandatory equipment for Fire-Police. Any firefighter not exposed, or potentially exposed, to heat should be wearing ANSI 207-2004 high visibility vests. Break-away vests add a measure of safety for responders operating near moving traffic. Training should emphasize protecting yourself at all times, expecting drivers to be distracted, impaired, or even just irate. All of these drivers pose additional, reasonably anticipated, and significant hazards.

Emergency vehicles should be safe-positioned (MUTCD Section 1A.13). Subsequently arriving vehicles should be positioned to not interfere with established traffic control plan. Train apparatus operators on the effects of multiple stopped emergency vehicles on a roadway. Discuss the effects of too many warning lights on approaching drivers. Review every incident to discuss decision-making when positioning their vehicles.

Additional resources on this subject include:

- MSI class titled, Traffic Control for Emergency Responders
- The MUTCD is available at www.mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov
- Rutgers' Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Technology at <http://cait.rutgers.edu>
- The Responder Safety Website, www.respondersafety.com

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