



TN FF / EMT crashes Ambulance

5 minute Lesson Plan for Fire & EMS

The following information was taken from various news reports of the incident. The circumstances are given as points for discussion and should not be taken as 'factual'.

A Tennessee career Firefighter / Emergency Medical Technician, who also worked as an EMT with a private ambulance company, crashed into the rear of a DOT truck on the shoulder of I-65. Both he and his patient were killed. Police and newspaper reports give the following account:

- The victim worked the previous night as a career firefighter, and then reported directly to work as an EMT for a private ambulance company.
- The assignment was a non-emergency transport of an elderly patient.
- The ambulance left the travel lanes and struck the rear of a parked DOT service truck (yellow truck in picture below) at about 50 mph, without the brakes ever being applied.
- The victim was texting just before the incident, but police do not think he was texting during the event.
- The victim has both narcolepsy (a neurological disorder marked by sudden, uncontrollable compulsions to sleep) and epilepsy (a disorder that may result in unconsciousness or seizures).
- The toxicology report showed an elevated level of amphetamines (prescribed for his narcolepsy), but no sign of his prescription medication for epilepsy.
- As a FF / EMT, he had on-duty seizure episodes in the past. Ten years ago he struck a light pole during a seizure. His license was suspended, but less than a year later, it was reinstated when his personal physician cleared him to drive. He subsequently had a second on-duty episode.
- The ambulance company verified his valid driver's license, without restrictions, but did not (probably can not due to privacy laws) investigate his past medical history.

This incident shows the importance of professional drivers (CDL or otherwise) being medically fit to operate vehicles. Supervisors and employees have a higher obligation to the employer, the employee and their family and to the public, to ensure they are physically ready to drive. The following points should be covered:

1. Employees must discuss with their physicians their duties as a driver of emergency vehicles.
2. Employees must disclose to employers that they have a condition (within HIPPA guidelines) which may preclude them from operating vehicles or heavy equipment.
3. Employees must disclose medications, prescriptions or over-the-counter, (within HIPPA guidelines) that may affect their ability to operate vehicles or equipment.



Supervisors should also discuss the many factors that contributed to this incident.

This lesson plan is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization's policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this bulletin, please contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046.