

## No. 9: Safe Driving Techniques

### Introduction

The United States Fire Administration publishes annually, the statistics on firefighter fatalities. For the most current year (2006) an astonishing 115 firefighters lost their lives. From that number, 15 died while responding to or returning from emergency incidents. The fire service needs to bring down these numbers, and bring them down significantly!

What changes on the highway, when we are driving to an emergency incident? Nothing. The only thing that is different is that we have been given a piece of information about an emergency incident and have been asked to respond. That little bit of information changes our behavior behind the steering wheel.

This change can be better known as attitude.

### What are Some Things We Need to Control this Attitude?

- First, continue to drive cautiously and do not get overaggressive.
- Try to stay calm.
- Wait for the persons driving the other vehicles to give us the right-of-way; don't run them off the road.
- Remember, if we get into an accident while responding, we will be of no assistance to those who really need our help. Additionally, we will have caused another emergency.

As mentioned above, we need to try and anticipate the reactions of other drivers. If the drivers see us in time, they are supposed to pull over to the right side of the road and stop. This is not always the case. Many times we are almost on top of them before they hear or see us. This is due to several factors:

1. Many of the newer vehicles are exceptionally soundproof
2. Many younger people have their radios playing louder than our sirens
3. And then there are those who are deeply involved in a cellular phone conversation.

Once they do notice you, be aware of a sudden move on their behalf. One more reason we should always pass on the left of these vehicles and never between them and the curb.



Photo by Peter Matthews/Firehouse.com

Approach intersections with extreme caution and be ready to stop. Even when you have the green light there will be some drivers that will make the right turn on red into your path. Should you be approaching an intersection with a traffic light that is red, **stop**, be sure the other vehicles in the intersection have noticed you and are yielding to you before proceeding. Don't assume the other drivers will react in the proper manor. Keep scanning the intersection.

Additionally, there is a big difference between a fire truck and a car when it comes to stopping. The faster the apparatus is moving, the longer it will take to stop. This is primarily due to the weight of the fire truck. Other factors that come into play are the driver's reaction time, the reaction distance the apparatus will travel, and the conditions of the road's surface.

Keep the following safe driving tip in mind the next time you get behind the wheel:

- Always buckle your seatbelt and assure the same for those riding on the apparatus with you
- Speed is not as important as arriving at the incident safely
- Drive defensively and scan well ahead of you
- Approach all intersections with caution
- Slow down on wet or slick road surfaces
- Approach all intersections with caution
- Did I say buckle your seatbelt?

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