

## Traffic Control Program Safety

### BACKGROUND AND DAMAGES

The incident occurred in a rural area of the town on a two-lane, state-owned road. This road ran parallel to the interstate highway and had an access point for both directions of the highway just past the incident scene.

An 80-year-old volunteer fire police officer (FPO) was seriously injured when he was struck by a vehicle while performing traffic control at the scene of a structure fire. The FPO was unconscious and unresponsive while on scene the seriousness of his injuries required the responding paramedics to intubate him on scene to secure his airway. The FPO remained intubated and was placed on a ventilator after arriving at the hospital.

### INCIDENT

The fire services received a call at 1600 for a reported residential structure fire. The fire department was dispatched. The first engine arrived on scene and the engine officer confirmed that there was a well-involved structure fire on the first and second floors of a large, occupied farmhouse, located approximately a half mile off of the roadway.

Because of the lack of water in this rural area, the officer on scene assumed command and requested a second alarm and mutual aid request for tankers, and a 'dumpsite' was set up at the end of the driveway for ease of access and egress. A controlled lane patten was set up with orange cones so both lanes of traffic could continue to flow as the tankers would offload onto the soft-shoulder area. There were two FPOs along with their vehicles staged at either end of the patten. Neither of the FPOs activated their vehicle warning lights. Instead, they were in the roadway using their flashlights to warn oncoming traffic of the incident scene. Both fire FPOs were wearing ski caps, gloves and yellow winter jackets which were believed to be high-visibility clothing by the department.

Approximately one-hour into the incident, after several successful water drops were made, a tanker was on the right side shoulder off-loading its cargo when a speeding motorist approached the scene. Without warning, the motorist moved through the coned-off area at a high speed. The motorist's vehicle made contact with an FPO and projected him into the off-loading tanker and then onto the frozen, snow-packed shoulder. Firefighters on scene as well as the other FPO witnessed the incident and immediately began to administer care to the injured FPO. The vehicle failed to stop, proceeded down the road and entered the highway. The other observant FPO was able to identify a partial plate number, description of the car and establish the direction of travel to report to the trooper on scene. Armed with this intelligence state police were able to locate the vehicle on the highway and initiate a traffic stop. The driver of the passenger vehicle was cited for speeding, reckless driving, leaving the scene of an accident and failure to obey an authorized person directing traffic.

A paramedic unit was requested. Once the unit arrived on scene, advanced life support was initiated, securing the unconscious and unresponsive FPO's airway. The FPO was transported to a nearby trauma center and admitted with the following injuries: a closed-head injury, fractured ribs, fractured femur, fractured collar bone. He was also placed on a ventilator to assist in his breathing.

### INVESTIGATION

The supervisor's accident review identified the below contributing factors:

- Although the FPO was wearing a yellow winter jacket, the garment was not rated for, nor did it meet requirements for high-visibility clothing classification.
- Because the FPOs were operating as traffic attendants, their presence in or near the roadway posed significant risks—road-side signage should have been used in place of human markers.
- The FPOs were operating as traffic attendants. Furthermore, it was noted that the cone pattern was not set to standard for the speed of the roadway and did not meet the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) requirements for shifting lanes.
- It was noted that neither of the FPO's vehicle warning lights were activated, which would have provided a visual indicator that there was an emergency scene or variance to the flow of traffic.

– Continued next page



## CIRMA LIABILITY ASSESSMENT

CIRMA is 100% responsible for this work-related incident. The total direct cost of this claim, including medical expenses, totaled **\$150,000**.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION ITEMS

After reviewing facts pertaining to the case, CIRMA's Fire Service Task Force recommends the following:

- a. Ensure proper use of high-visibility personal protective clothing (hats, jackets, and vests) and equipment (signage, barriers, cones, wands, and vehicle lighting).
- b. Conduct annual refreshers on an official Traffic Control program.
- c. Ensure proper temporary lane setup according to MUTCD guidelines.
- d. Develop clear Standard Operational Procedures for all emergency scene set up actions performed by FPO personnel.
- e. Use department vehicles that are fully illuminated with appropriate lighting.
- f. Use department vehicles rather than personnel directing traffic.

For more information, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant at (203) 946-3700.

Questions on this topic? Ask your Supervisor or CIRMA Risk Management Consultant at (203) 946-3700.