

**Response...POV's**  
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Each year training officers struggle to develop training calendars for their organizations. There are never ending demands, and new ideas, for training topics with only a limited number of training hours available. Training officers are often faced with the challenge of making sure their members get the right training and the biggest bang for their buck. A good place to start is with the areas where we see the largest number of line of duty deaths. Unfortunately each year responding to and returning from calls consistently accounts for about 25% of our line of duty deaths. The vehicle with the largest share of these incidents is the members privately owned vehicle. When you look at these numbers it would appear that we could have the largest impact on line of duty deaths by training our fire fighters vehicle response safety.

The process should start with vehicle maintenance. Many of our emergency calls occur in less than ideal conditions. A member's vehicle must be well maintained with good tires, clean windows, properly adjusted mirrors etc. Most of us would rather spend several hundred dollars on a newest style helmet or flashlight, but we must remember the importance of our vehicle and how its condition relates to our response. The next most important item is our seatbelt. They MUST be worn by responders at all times. The chances of you being seriously injured in an accident is greatly reduced with proper seat belt use.

Next we need to remember that if we never get to the incident we can not offer our assistance. Obeying the speed limit, stopping at red lights and stop signs and changing road conditions must all be understood by the operator. We are all in a hurry to get to the scene and help. If we become involved in a secondary incident, not only do we not get there but we pull other resources away from the original response.

Driving on a regular basis is dangerous enough. Now add poor conditions, distractions from the call and adrenaline, and you can see how response to emergency calls becomes even more of a challenge. The National Safety Council teaches a formula for becoming a safer driver. They ask R-U-A Safe Driver? The "R" stands for recognizing the hazard. Scan ahead and ask yourself "what if" questions to help you locate the hazards. The "U" is to understand the defensive. Ask yourself "If that car ahead were to stop suddenly, can I stop in time or where would I go to avoid a crash?" The "A" is for act in time. You must be ready to take action and have a plan to avoid the crash.

There are several organizations that can help you put this type of training into your training schedule if you want outside help. ESIP has trained instructors that are willing to help as well. This training will also serve as a solid foundation to begin your emergency vehicle operations training program. As firefighters we are often drawn to the newest and most exciting courses to train on. In twenty years of firefighting, I have never been involved in an incident involving Weapons of Mass Destruction, but I have driven my

vehicle to each and every call that I go to. I am not saying these other training don't have a place or need our attention, but we need to be sure and focus on the dangerous activities that we are most likely to encounter. Personal vehicle response safety should be incorporated in to our organizations training program every year.