SAFE POSITIONING WHILE OPERATING IN OR NEAR MOVING TRAFFIC

I. Overview

This procedure identifies recommended vehicle positioning practices for Fire Department apparatus and vehicles when operating in or near moving traffic. It also identifies several safety practices to keep firefighters safe while exposed to the hazardous environment created by moving traffic.

It shall be the policy of the McKinney Fire Department to position apparatus and other emergency vehicles at an incident on any street, road, highway, Toll road, or expressway in a manner that best protects the incident scene and the work area. Such positioning shall afford protection to fire department personnel, injured vehicle occupants/patients, law enforcement officers, and tow/recovery operators from the hazards of being in or near moving traffic.

All responders should understand and appreciate the high risk that personnel are exposed to when operating in or near moving vehicle traffic. Responders should always operate within a protected environment at any vehicle-related roadway incident.

Always consider any moving vehicle as being operated by a “D” Driver; Drunk, Drugged, Drowsy, Distracted, and/or Dumb.

II. Terminology

The following terms shall be used during incident operations, post-incident analysis, and training activities related to working in or near moving traffic.

1. Advance Warning- notification procedures that advise approaching motorists that an emergency scene is ahead of them on the roadway.

2. Block- positioning a fire department vehicle or apparatus on an angle to the lanes of traffic creating a physical barrier between approaching upstream traffic and the work area. Accomplished with a ‘block to the right’ or ‘block to the left’.

3. Buffer Zone- the distance or space between personnel in the protected work zone and nearby moving traffic.

4. Downstream- the direction that traffic is moving as it travels away from the incident scene.
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5. **Safety Spotter** - a fire department member assigned to monitor approaching traffic and activate an emergency signal if the actions of an approaching motorist may be a threat to the safety of personnel at the highway scene.

6. **Shadow** - the protected work area at a roadway incident that is shielded by the block from apparatus and other emergency vehicles.

7. **Merging Taper** - use of physical devices such as apparatus, vehicles, cones and/or flares to merge several lanes of upstream moving traffic into fewer moving lanes as they pass the protected work area.

8. **Temporary Traffic Control Zone** - the physical area of a roadway within which emergency personnel perform their fire, EMS and rescue tasks at a vehicle-related incident.

9. **Transition Zone** - the lanes of a roadway within which approaching motorists change their speed and merge lanes to comply with the traffic control measures established at an incident scene.

10. **Upstream** - the direction from which traffic is traveling from as the vehicles approach the incident scene.

11. **Right, Center and Left** shall be used to identify lanes of traffic or shoulders of the road when looking from the point of view of the motorist using those lanes of the roadway.

12. **Inside Shoulder** shall be used to identify the shoulder along the left side of the roadway; closest to the opposing lanes of traffic or closest to the center barrier on a divided highway.

13. **Outside Shoulder** shall be used to identify the shoulder along the right side of the roadway.

14. **Service Roads** shall be identified as to their direction of travel; i.e. Northbound service road, westbound service road, etc.

**III. First-Arriving Major Apparatus**

**Tactical Procedures:**
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Listed below are benchmarks for Safe Parking of apparatus and emergency vehicles when operating in or near moving traffic.

1. Utilize “Obstructed Lane + 1” blocking procedure to position first-arriving apparatus so to protect the scene, patients, and emergency personnel from moving traffic approaching in at least one direction.
   
a. Priority of blocking of approaching traffic should include factors such as the closest traffic, highest traffic volume, greatest approaching speed, approach with least approach visibility; i.e. hills, curves, bridges, and blind intersections.

2. Angle apparatus on the roadway with a “block to the left” or a “block to the right” to create a physical barrier between the crash scene and approaching traffic that slows approaching motorists and redirects them around the scene.

3. Operating personnel, equipment and patients should be kept within the “shadow” created by the blocking apparatus.

4. Where a charged hoseline may be needed, block so that the pump panel is “downstream”. This will protect the pump operator position.

5. At all intersections, or where the incident may be near the middle lane of the roadway, two or more sides of the incident will need to be protected. Provide specific directions to additional responding personnel and police officers as to exactly what your traffic control needs are.

6. Traffic cones can be deployed upstream of a blocking apparatus toward approaching traffic to increase the advance warning provided for approaching motorists. Cones identify and only suggest the transition and tapering actions that are required of the approaching motorist. They do not create a protected work area.
   
a. Personnel shall place cones and flares and retrieve cones while facing oncoming traffic.
   
b. Traffic cones typically are deployed at 15 foot intervals upstream of the blocking apparatus.
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with the furthest traffic cone approximately 75 feet upstream to allow adequate advance warning to drivers.

c. Additional traffic cones shall be retrieved from PD units to extend the advance warning area for approaching motorists if necessary.

7. Retro-reflective pink deployable EMERGENCY SCENE AHEAD sign can be positioned upstream of a blocking FD apparatus along the shoulder of the street or roadway.

8. Drivers of emergency vehicles are advised to turn off all lights that could impair approaching motorist’s vision at nighttime incidents including vehicle headlights and spotlights.

IV. Ambulance Vehicle Tactical Procedures

1. Ambulance should be positioned within the protected work area.

2. It is advisable for the driver of the ambulance to position in a slight “block to the right” or “block to the left” as it is parked at the scene to position the rear patient loading area away from the closest lane of moving traffic.

3. At residential medical emergencies, the ambulance is to park at the nearest curb to the residence for safe patient loading whenever possible. Responding major FD apparatus shall position to protect the patient loading area of the ambulance.

V. Second-due Apparatus & Battalion Chief Tactical Procedures

1. A second major FD apparatus shall be automatically dispatched to all vehicle-related incidents within the City.

2. The primary assignment of this second-due company apparatus and crew shall be to establish an upstream block and provide increased Advance Warning of the incident ahead.

3. Traffic cones, flares, and the retro-reflective pink EMERGENCY SCENE AHEAD sign can be placed upstream of the second-due ‘blocking’ apparatus at the direction of the company officer.
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a. Personnel shall face upstream traffic while placing flares or deploying or retrieving cones or the pink sign. If necessary, assign a safety spotter person to monitor the approaching.

b. Notify Command of any approaching traffic that is not responding to the speed changes, transition, tapering and merging directions; “D” drivers!

c. Driver/Operator of second-due blocking apparatus can sound a series of long blasts on the apparatus air horn to audibly warn all operating personnel of the concern for the actions of an approaching motorist if necessary.

4. The Battalion Chief vehicle and responding Police Department vehicles can be used to provide blocking of additional traffic lanes as needed

5. Police Department personnel may place traffic cones or flares at the scene to direct traffic. This action builds upon initial FD apparatus placement and can be expanded, if needed, as later arriving Police Officers arrive. Always place and retrieve cones while facing on-coming traffic.

6. Placing flares, where safe to do so, adjacent to and in combination with traffic cones for nighttime operations greatly enhances scene safety. Where safe and appropriate to do so, place warning flares to slow and direct approaching traffic.

VI. Incident Command Benchmarks

The initial-arriving company officer and/or the Incident Commander must complete critical benchmarks to assure that a safe and protected work environment for emergency scene personnel is established and maintained including;

1. Assure that the first-arriving apparatus establishes an initial block to create an initial safe work area

2. Assure that ambulance position is in protected area with patient loading zone angled away from nearest moving traffic.
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3. Assign an **upstream blocking location** for second-due FD apparatus and the Battalion Chief vehicle as necessary.

4. Establish lanes of traffic to remain open to moving traffic and establish measures to move motorists past the incident scene.

4. The initial company officer and/or Incident Commander serve as the **Scene Safety Officer** until this assignment is delegated.

5. When in the judgment of FD Command it becomes essential for the safety of operating personnel and the patients involved, any or all lanes, shoulders, and entry/exit ramps of roadways can be completely shut down. This, however, should rarely occur and when it is necessary, should be for as short a period of time as practical.

6. Command should establish a Joint Command with the Police Department supervisor on-scene as soon as possible to jointly coordinate a safe work zone and to determine how to efficiently resolve the incident, quickly clear the scene and establish normal traffic flows.

7. Command must manage the termination of the incident with the same aggressiveness as initial actions; quick clearance of less than 30 minutes is a guiding principle. Crews, apparatus, FD traffic control equipment, debris, and damaged vehicles must be removed from the highway promptly to reduce exposure to moving traffic and minimize traffic congestion.

VII. Responder Safety Benchmarks

All emergency personnel are at great risk of injury or death while operating in or near moving traffic. Specific **tactical procedures** that should be taken by responders at the incident scene include;

1. Always maintain an acute **awareness** of the high risk of working in or near moving traffic. The “D” drivers are out to get you!

2. Avoid turning your back to moving traffic.

3. Personnel arriving in crew cabs of fire apparatus should exit and enter the apparatus from the protected ‘shadow’ side, away from moving traffic whenever possible. Officers, apparatus operators, crew members in apparatus with individual jump seat configurations and all ambulance
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personnel must exit and enter their units with extreme caution remaining alert to moving traffic at all times.

4. Always look before opening doors and stepping out of apparatus or emergency vehicle into any moving traffic areas.

5. Class II safety vest and FD helmet must be donned prior to exiting the emergency vehicle. “If your feet are on the street, the vest must be on your chest”.
   a. All staff personnel, civilian riders, and assigned student EMS trainee personnel arriving on an apparatus or emergency vehicle must don assigned helmet and Class II vest prior to exiting their vehicle.

6. When walking around fire apparatus or emergency vehicle, be alert to your proximity to moving traffic. Stop at the corner of the unit, check for traffic, and then proceed along the unit remaining as close to the emergency vehicle as possible. Maintain a ‘reduced profile’ when moving through any area where a minimum ‘buffer zone’ condition exists.
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Officer’s Safe Parking

“Cue Card”

“Block” with first-arriving apparatus to protect the scene, patients, and emergency personnel.

- Block “Obstructed lane + 1”
- Block closest traffic, highest volume, highest speed, limited sight distance
- Direct second-due FD apparatus to blocking position
- Direct Battalion Chief vehicle to blocking position
- Consider requesting additional PD assistance

Crews wear proper PPE w/Helmet

- Class II vests at all times
- Helmet at all times

Direct placement of ambulance

- Assure ambulance parks within ‘shadow’ of larger apparatus as directed
- Direct ambulance to “block to the right” or “block to the left” to protect loading doors
  - Place ambulance patient loading area facing away from closest lane of moving traffic

Increase advance warning upstream of incident

- Deploy retro-reflective pink sign upstream
- Traffic cones at 15’ intervals
- Cones only “Suggest” they don’t Block!

You are the Scene Safety Officer

- Consider assigning FF as upstream “Safety Spotter”
  - monitor approaching traffic
  - provide emergency warning as necessary

Night, Reduced Light, or Bad Weather Conditions

- Turn OFF vehicle headlights
- Turn OFF Opticom
- Provide overall scene lighting
- All personnel in Class II vests w/helmets
- Illuminate cones with flares
- Utilize second-due apparatus and Battalion Chief for additional upstream “Block” and advance warning

Limited access, high-volume highway incidents

- Establish initial block: “Lane + 1”
- Second-due company establishes upstream block
  - Block multiple lanes plus paved shoulder
- Deploy retro-reflective Emergency Scene Ahead pink sign upstream along shoulder
- Place cones and/or cones illuminated by flares upstream of blocking apparatus
- Driver/Operator of second-due apparatus
  - sound a series of long blasts on apparatus air horn as necessary for “D” driver
- Use police department vehicles for additional blocking
- Establish liaison with Police Department
- Terminate incident aggressively; Quick Clearance