

SAN DIEGO FIRE-RESCUE DEPARTMENT

BULLETIN

NO: 14-090
DATE: May 27, 2014
TO: All Personnel
FROM: Brian Fennessy, Assistant Chief, Emergency Operations
SUBJECT: Freeway Emergency Responses

Emergency responses to freeway incidents can prove challenging. Difficulties in accurately determining the incident location and severity often result in the need to dispatch multiple units; ensuring the safety of victims and response personnel while on or near the roadway can result in the need to impede traffic flows and increase upstream traffic collision potential; and coordinating activities with other fire service, EMS and law enforcement responders can be problematic if not operating with compatible radios.

Recent incidents where these challenges have impacted the safe, timely and collaborative mitigation of the emergency have resulted in negative media attention and frustration on the part of first responders from fire, EMS and CHP. As a result, there have been a number of meetings between agency chiefs to explore how best to resolve these challenges to improve field operations.

One outcome of these meetings is an acknowledgement that unfamiliarity with each others' policies, procedures and objectives has led to unnecessary conflict and mistrust. To address this concern, a joint training will soon be developed by County fire service and CHP representatives and then provided to all first responder agencies. In the interim, it is important that we are all familiar with the below considerations that impact freeway operations.

Scene Safety

- All first responders (Fire and Law) must ensure the safety of civilians and themselves while operating on or near the roadway.
 - Use angle parking to shield the scene if you operate in or near traffic
 - Coordinate lane closures with the CHP to ensure maximum safety to on scene personnel and the motoring public.
 - Do not unnecessarily impede a traffic lane if operations can be conducted on the shoulder and/or center median and personnel do not need to enter the traffic lanes.
 - Release any unneeded units as soon as possible to eliminate traffic hazards.

Authority Having Jurisdiction

- CHP has both Incident Command and primary investigative authority on freeways, state routes, state highways and unincorporated county roads. As such, the CHP is designated as the Authority Having Jurisdiction.
- CHP has the authority to direct you to move your apparatus and/or leave the freeway.
- CHP does not have the authority to have you abandon patient treatment once patient contact has been made and it is determined medical assistance is needed. However, should an immediate safety need arise where CHP in their Incident Commander capacity directs you to relocate, they have the authority to do so.
- CHP or any public safety organization does not have the authority to direct medical care unless they have equal or greater medical qualifications and are accepting responsibility for treatment and transport of the patient.

Incident Command

- Incident Command (IC) is to be established by the first arriving unit (Fire or Law) on a multi-unit response.
- CHP will always assume IC upon arrival as directed in the California Vehicle Code, Penal Code and Health and Safety Code. The highest ranking CHP member (as the Authority Having Jurisdiction) will be the IC in a Unified Command, regardless of the incident size and complexity. Issues that cannot be resolved by agreement of the UC representatives will be decided by the CHP IC.
- While preferred, transfer of Incident Command may not always take place via a face to face briefing. Upon arrival CHP assumes the IC role.
- Specialized units such as HazMat and Bomb Squad serve in an advisory capacity to the IC and recommendations can be accepted or dismissed by the IC.

Law Enforcement Considerations

- Traffic collisions are to be considered potential crime scenes.
- Evidence preservation requires that only those operations necessary to treat and extricate patients and mitigate any fires or hazardous materials spills be conducted with the concurrence of the IC.
- Re-entry to the cab/trunk of a citizens' car to retrieve personal effects (e.g.; purse, CDL) once a patient has been extricated must be coordinated through CHP to ensure potential evidence chains of custody are not broken/violated.
- Photographs taken at accident scenes are considered evidence and must be documented in CHP reports.

Conflict Resolution

- Operational issues at scene should be respectfully addressed with the IC.

- If an issue impacting operations (e.g.; safety, patient care, traffic flow) cannot be favorably resolved, fire resources should request the no-code response of a battalion chief and CHP may request the response of a CHP supervisor.
- Operational issues are to be timely reported up the chain of command for tracking and management review.

By keeping in mind these operating principles and being respectful in communications with all responders, any differences of opinion can and should be quietly resolved with no impact to emergency operations. In the end, we must all keep in mind our legal responsibilities and limitations while striving to complete mission objectives at these incidents and work in an effective, safe and collaborative manner to the benefit of the community.

If you have any questions or concerns, please forward through your chain-of-command.