

Traffic Incident Management Responders Struck and Killed by Oncoming Traffic

Case studies and prevention tips for employers and employees alike

Recommendations to Prevent Highway Struck-By Incidents:

- Always ensure that proper advance warning equipment has been displayed prior to working on the roadside
- Whenever possible, work away from the flow of traffic
- Reduce reliance on emergency lights and place more emphasis on traffic controls
- Always wear American National Standards Institute (ANSI) approved safety reflective gear such as vests and hardhats when working on the roadside
- Know that the adjacent lane or roadway may need to be closed in order to provide safe incident management
- Employees should receive regular traffic incident management safety training

“My son died an honorable death. He was out there trying to make a living to take care of his children”.

— mother of a victim

A tragedy that traffic incident management (TIM) responders know all too well: a worker loses a life after being struck by approaching traffic on the roadside, while assisting someone in need. Below is a review of two cases where TIM responders were struck and killed on Kentucky roadsides in 2014. Recommendations are offered to help prevent these types of tragic incidents from reoccurring.

Case #1: Just before midnight, a self-employed tow truck driver was about to end his day, when he decided to take one last call. A car was stalled on a roadside and needed assistance. The victim parked his tow truck in front of the stalled vehicle in the right-hand-side emergency lane. As he operated the driver’s-side winch controls, an approaching vehicle traveling in the same direction struck the stalled vehicle, then crashed into the tow truck, causing crushing injuries to the victim. It was determined that the driver of the approaching vehicle was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident. The driver did not stop.

Case # 2: A firefighter crew was putting out a vehicle fire on the roadside at 3 am on a late summer morning. The crew had parked the firetruck in the right-hand lane and engaged the emergency lights as a warning to approaching motorists. As the victim was retrieving equipment from the non-traffic-facing side of the firetruck, a semi truck veered into the emergency lane and smashed into the side of the firetruck. The victim died of severe blunt force injuries. Another firefighter was airlifted to a nearby hospital in serious condition.

ALWAYS ENSURE THAT PROPER ADVANCE WARNING EQUIPMENT HAS BEEN DISPLAYED PRIOR TO WORKING ON THE ROADSIDE

Parked vehicles or people on the side of the road can contribute to a secondary incident. It is essential that approaching motorists are given an advance warning of the situation and your presence. Be sure to always have cones in your vehicle and to place them on site before beginning a job.

WHENEVER POSSIBLE, WORK AWAY FROM THE FLOW OF TRAFFIC

Drivers have more distractions today when behind the wheel than ever before. The closer you are to passing traffic, the more likely you are to be hit by a vehicle that unknowingly drifts into your workspace. Store equipment so that it is accessible on the non-traffic-facing side of the vehicle. If operating a tow truck, always use the winches that are on the opposite side of approaching traffic.

REDUCE RELIANCE ON EMERGENCY LIGHTS ALONE AND PLACE MORE EMPHASIS ON TRAFFIC CONTROLS

Emergency lights can often be blinding to otherwise safe drivers, and can be a deadly attraction to drivers who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.¹ Greater emphasis should be placed on the proper use of advance warning devices such as cones and road signs.

For more information, please visit the Kentucky Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (KY FACE) website at: <http://www.mc.uky.edu/kiprc/projects/KOSHS/>

Move over laws by state: <http://drivinglaws.aaa.com/laws/move-over-law/>

ALWAYS WEAR ANSI-APPROVED HIGH-VISIBILITY SAFETY GEAR, SUCH AS VESTS AND HARDHATS WHEN WORKING ON THE ROADSIDE

With some limited exceptions, all traffic incident management responders are required to wear appropriate high-visibility safety apparel when working on the roadside. Consult your employer's ANSI standard guide to determine which types of reflective gear are appropriate for your line of work.

KNOW THAT THE ADJACENT LANE OR ROADWAY MAY NEED TO BE CLOSED IN ORDER TO PROVIDE SAFE INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

Trust your instincts. If you feel that the proximity of the passing traffic to the incident is making it difficult to perform a task safely, call for assistance from local law enforcement authorities to block off a lane of traffic. Some incidents may require that traffic be stopped altogether.

EMPLOYEES SHOULD RECEIVE REGULAR TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SAFETY TRAINING

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet in partnership with the University of Kentucky currently offers a free training course for traffic incident management responders to prevent struck-by incidents while on the roadside. For more information about this valuable safety resource, please visit: <http://www.kyt2.com/training/event/traffic-incident-management>

¹Ten Cones of Highway Safety. *National Traffic Incident Management Coalition*. Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9mFPTBMmBg>