




DIVISION OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD.

DIRECTIVE

NUMBER: 04-16

August 3, 2004

TO: All DFRS Personnel

FROM: Chief Tom Carr 

SUBJECT: **Safe Driving Action Plan**

As all of you are aware, MCFRS continues to experience serious vehicle incidents. Despite Pro-Active Driver Training and a strong emphasis on safe driving we continue to narrowly avoid catastrophes. The most recent was the rollover of Aerial Tower 8.

Nationwide, more firefighters died last year as a result of collisions than they did fighting fire. The only cause of firefighter deaths greater than driving was cardiovascular disease (this too should be a cause for alarm, hence the Wellness/Fitness Initiative). Earlier this month we nearly contributed to the above statistics, and for what? We must break this deadly chain. Enough is enough. In spite of our efforts over the past several years to reduce the collision rate - we have failed.

In addition to the risks to our own personnel, we must consider the impact of these incidents on our community. Not only is there a risk to the other people involved in these collisions, but we must also assure that our units arrive on the scene to mitigate the original emergency. In the case of the AT8 rollover, the first due engine, the ambulance, and the Battalion Chief, all responding behind AT8, were significantly delayed in arriving on the scene of a working fire.

I must provide leadership and expectations, as well as accept responsibility for the consequences. I have done this as outlined below. I expect every officer and crew member to do the same. I will support you with resources and I will hold you accountable for your actions.

This plan has been developed with tremendous input and interaction from you. We have considered all that you provided and included much of the input. No one will like every aspect of this action plan. Some parts will impact personnel differently. There is no magic pill that will change our culture painlessly. I expect everyone to abide by every part of this action plan. As we proceed over the next six months we will adjust the plan by Directive as necessary.

The following is a 25 point Safe Driving Action Plan to immediately address this situation. This is an urgent six month action plan which will allow us to evaluate and adjust as our experience indicates appropriate.

- As stated in Policy 808, drivers must continue to show due regard for traffic, road and weather conditions, visibility, and any other factor effecting driving conditions. While responding, DFRS drivers will not be permitted to exceed the posted speed limit by more than 15 miles per hour under any circumstances.
- Officers and personnel riding the officer position have, and should utilize, "Stop Driving Authority" which mandates immediate removal of any driver from the driving position for issues including, but not limited to: reckless or negligent driving behavior; disobeying traffic signals; ignoring pedestrians in crosswalks, or school bus warning devices; driving too fast for road, traffic or weather conditions; failure to ensure all vehicle occupants are wearing seat belts; failure to stop for railroad crossings; failure to drive with both hands on the steering wheel; failure to wear prescriptive lenses; failing to control speed so that the vehicle can be stopped, if necessary, at any intersection; failure to back a vehicle with an available spotter; failure to yield; failure to maintain a vehicle in marked lanes; other violations of motor vehicle laws or standard operating procedure; or any other action which places the unit, personnel or community at undue risk. This authority includes, but is not limited to: ordering the unit stopped while responding to a call; requesting a replacement unit for the call; removal of the driver and replacement with another qualified driver; or proceeding in a routine mode to the call and advising ECC of such. Officers will document such actions in writing and forward the documentation to the Safety Office.
- Continue the "zero tolerance" of seat belt violations (with consideration of patient care requirements). I expect the driver and officer to assure that every crew member is seated and belted before the unit moves regardless of the call type!
- By September 01, 2004 Designated Drivers, as well as two back-up drivers, will be established for each piece of heavy apparatus on each shift. The designated driver will drive their specific unit at all times unless he/she is off at which time one of the back-up drivers will be moved up. Designated drivers will provide us with better familiarity in the areas of apparatus handling and maintenance, driving skills, area knowledge, and scene operations.
- Develop an Approved Driver List, maintained by the Safety Office, which will identify personnel allowed to drive under the department's insurance policy. The Approved Driver list is different from the Designated Driver list.
- Starting in September, all primary designated drivers will be sent (on OTP) to an 8 hour driving class specific to the type and breed of apparatus to which they have been assigned. Primary drivers are expected to pass along what they have learned to the back-up drivers. This program will include a second mandatory 8 hour component to be presented in January, 2005.

- Unit officers who have arrived on the scene of an incident, made an assessment, and believe that the incident is not complex (minor vehicle collisions, single family or other small structures with “nothing evident”, etc) should consider having all other incoming units proceed routine.
- On full assignments and local alarms unit responsibility is determined by order of dispatch – not order of arrival. Units will take their assigned positions and responsibilities regardless of unit arrivals except in the direst circumstances. Such deviations from dispatched position and responsibility must be communicated by radio.
- We will continue to hold officers fully responsible for the actions of their drivers. No excuses!
- Effective September 01 all driver checkouts by the PSTA (currently Captain Bartlett) will be suspended. Driver training in the stations will stop as well with consideration given to personnel who posses Learner’s Permits or have already scheduled tests. Drivers eligible for checkout and FFIII promotion will be tested after January, 2005 and will promoted retroactively (with back pay). This will allow Captain Williamson and Captain Bartlett to devote full time effort to development and implementation of the full driver training and recertification program.
- We will begin a regional community education and awareness program as designed by F3P Deb Farkas titled “See me, Hear me, Clear for me” to educate citizens on the proper way to clear for our units.
- Critical safety messages and reminders will be transmitted over the radio and to the MDCs for display on the monitors.
- A designated group of chief officers will begin making unannounced station inspections that will focus on apparatus readiness and driving related issues.
- The Driver Observation program will be further developed, implemented and institutionalized.
- Current Policy 808, Safe Emergency Vehicle Operation will be reviewed and revised as appropriate.
- Adjust EMS responses.
 - Enforce routine patient transport according to the EMS Operations Manual, Section III “Patient Transport”.
 - Alpha calls: one unit only.
 - Bravo calls: two units only – one BLS and one 1st responder.
 - Charlie calls: three units – one BLS, one ALS, one 1st responder.

- Charlie calls: If the two closest Medic units are unavailable then one BLS and one AFRA will be dispatched with the AFRA upgrading the BLS unit if needed.
- Delta and Echo calls will remain the same.
- Effective July 26, 2004 the Rescue Squad Study response recommendations were implemented which, among other actions, reduced rescue squad responses.

In addition to these immediate actions the department will implement the following initiatives:

- Improve incentives for demonstrated safe driving.
- Expand the Pumps and Aerial Ops classes.
- Include the concept of Crew Resource Management in EMT/B recertification training.
- Develop an EVOC II class.
- FRC implementation of a service wide random drug testing policy.
- Explore new apparatus technologies such as seat belt alarms, vehicle data recorders, video recorders and air bag technologies.
- Push apparatus manufacturers and vendors to be responsive to our safety needs and leverage this demand at the national level.
- Develop, sponsor, and host a national forum on safe apparatus driving to exchange information and ideas.

Some of these measures are a significant change from the way we have done business. Personnel must understand that these measures are being taken to protect our own people by preventing disaster. Driving heavy apparatus is a privilege not a right. Each person who has been given that privilege has a responsibility to execute it in as safe a manner as humanly possible.

Some of you have asked about the application of this to volunteer personnel. First, we will take care of our own issues (you do most of the driving) and I have the authority to mandate our action plan. Second, the volunteer leadership recognizes the problem and has reacted to this plan in a very positive manner. I will work closely with them to make this a service wide plan.

I will continue to adjust this action plan as appropriate over the next six months. Your input remains valuable and I encourage you to continue providing suggestions and feedback.