

PA FIRE POLICE CONTROLLING TRAFFIC

By Tony Riccardi - PA State Fire Academy Approved Fire Police Instructor

We recently had an opportunity to observe a fire police officer controlling traffic at an accident scene and noted a few problems that should be addressed.

The fire police officer had traffic stopped in both a through lane as well as a left-turn lane. The officer then motioned for the driver to make a left turn but either the driver did not realize he was to proceed or was not paying attention. By the time the driver realized he was being instructed to turn left, the fire police officer immediately stepped in front of the driver in the left-turn lane and motioned for the other driver to proceed in the through lane.

This now confused the driver who was in the left-turn lane who didn't know what to do. First, it would appear that the fire police officer got irritated because the driver did not immediately respond to his signal and decided to let him sit until he was ready to let him proceed. Obviously, this was not a good public relations move. Fire police complain about their treatment from the public but don't seem to realize this type of conduct does not help matters.

What do you gain by getting angry at motorists? Does that make the motorist act differently? Probably not, it only serves to help the fire police officer develop stress which can lead to medical problems such as ulcers, heart attack, etc. It also helps the motorists become angry and bitter toward fire police officers.

In a previous article we discussed the two principal responsibilities of fire police officers when they respond to duty. One of them is to get the traveling public safely and expediently around the emergency scene. When some fire police respond to a call, they arrive at the scene with a "chip on their shoulder" because, in their own words, they have to deal with a bunch of idiots. People, in general are not idiots, they are, like most people including

emergency responders, anxious to get to where they are going, slaves of habit who prefer to do things the same way they always do. Getting angry does not change that.

People are just like you the fire police officer. They are attracted to the emergency and want to see what is going on. In these incidents, a little patience on the part of the fire police officer can go a long way towards resolving some of the conflicts that take place at emergency scenes. Does this mean allowing the motorist to interfere with the movement of traffic? Absolutely not, but since shouting, use of profanity, and other rude treatment will not work, why not try a little patience, you might be surprised at the results.

One of the most disturbing factors with fire police officers is their failure to use a whistle when controlling traffic. Vehicles today are built tighter; people are pre-occupied, talking to someone in the vehicle, listening to the radio, or other forms of distractions. It is this display of irritation and anger that causes motorists to view fire police officers in a negative light.

In the Basic Fire Police program, the use of a whistle when controlling traffic is strongly encouraged, yet, fire police officers still insist on not using this device. Perhaps had the fire police officer we referenced early in this article used a whistle to get the attention of the driver in the left-turn lane he might not have gotten irritated, confused the driver, and created a happier result to the incident.

I'm sure some fire police officers will become a little annoyed when reading this article, feeling that they are to blame for the problem. Unfortunately the problem lies with both the motorist and some fire police officers but since someone has to take the lead in trying to correct the problem, we offer this information.

Stay Safe!