

Hey, Look, It's Autumn
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It seems like yesterday that the clock struck midnight and we all wished each other a Happy New Year 2009.....but here it is November! Of course, that means Thanksgiving, and football and the other things we normally enjoy during the fall months, but for most of the country, it means a higher awareness for safety while operating our emergency vehicles.

First, and most important, school is in session. The National Association for Pupil Transportation reports that more than 800 students are killed annually going to and from school. Indeed a sobering statistic and as emergency vehicle operators we should all be more aware of this. The National Safety Council has some excellent recommendations to make everyone safer:

- "Watch for children who dart out from between parked cars." This is very important to emergency vehicle operators since children are curious and lights and sirens will attract their attention.
- "At twilight and later in the evening watch for children in dark clothing." Emergency vehicle operators have a great deal of issues to deal with while responding to an incident or to the hospital. You must raise your awareness even higher.
- "Enter and exit driveways and alleys carefully." Of course time matters when it comes to an emergency, however the safety of our children must prevail when it comes to response safety.

In addition I-pods and other similar devices used by children while walking lessen their awareness of what is happening around them.

Another issue is avoiding wildlife. Fewer daylight hours make this problem even more difficult. Motor vehicle collisions with deer are 3 times more likely in November than in April and about 200 people die each year in collisions with deer. From the standpoint of an emergency vehicle operator, a collision with a deer is not only dangerous to you and your crew, but may also slow or even end your response to the original incident call.

There are some things you can do to help prevent such accidents:

- Be especially attentive from sunset to midnight and during the hours shortly before sunrise as most deer/vehicle collisions are reported during these hours.
- Drive with caution when moving through deer crossing areas.
- Deer seldom run alone. If you spot one, be on the lookout for others
- At night, use high beams when possible as they better illuminate the eyes of the deer near the roadway.
- When you spot a deer, slow down and use one long blast on your horn to frighten the deer away.
- Sirens do not seem to scare deer away, so don't depend on your siren to clear the way.
- If there is a deer in your lane of traffic, brake firmly, but avoid swerving into other lanes which may be occupied. Vehicles avoiding deer collisions cause many much more serious accidents with other vehicles.

Fall weather itself can also be an issue. With the fall season along comes a variety of weather conditions depending on your location including rain, snow, and fog. These situations along with wet and slippery leaves on the road create serious problems for emergency responders. It goes without saying that you should drive for the weather conditions. Slow down, leave some extra space between you and the vehicles in front and be very careful when passing. Other cars may not see you or react too quickly on wet or frozen pavement to spin out of control.

Finally, those of us in farming areas need to be ready for slow moving farm vehicles during harvest time. These loud vehicles may block the sound of your siren making the operator unaware of your approach.

All of these items make emergency vehicle operation more difficult at this time of the year. So be careful, follow your policies and let's all enjoy autumn!