

# NEW TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TRAINING IS IMPROVING SAFETY,  
TRANSFORMING INCIDENT RESPONSE ACROSS MISSOURI

by Christine Becker and Sherry Appel

**O**n Dec. 13, 2013, a minor two-car accident on Interstate-44 turned into a deadly, multiple-vehicle incident, resulting in one fatality and numerous tractor-trailer pile ups, blocking the westbound lane for four hours. Just two days prior to the accident, traffic incident responders from across the Springfield, Joplin and Branson areas began training on the latest techniques in responding to such incidents – and this information really paid off. One trooper who helped at the scene said “I applied some of the training techniques and it made a difference.”

More than 500 incident responders are now on Missouri roads and highways using more effective ways to position their vehicles to protect the police, fire and others on the scene. Now, first responders can better manage the traffic flow around incidents, work more efficiently as a team, and put in place other key techniques to quickly and safely clear crash sites.

Master Sgt. Bill Johnson, a crash re-constructionist for the Kansas City Police Department, said the Department’s participation in the National Traffic Incident Management (TIM) training program has changed how responders approach traffic crashes. “We are using a different thought process that emphasizes quick, effective action to keep traffic moving which dramatically reduces the risk of secondary accidents,” Johnson said.

In the Kansas City area, exposure to the quick clearance philosophy began in 2007 at the Missouri Traffic Incident Management Summit sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration



(FHWA). Since then, the Kansas City Scout program has reported that incident responders in the Kansas City metro area have shaved 111 minutes off the average time it takes to clear major traffic accidents, including those involving multiple vehicles, overturned trucks, serious injuries and crime scene investigations. The Kansas City Scout is a joint traffic-management program of the Missouri and Kansas Departments of Transportation.

Secondary crashes like the one on Interstate-44 are often worse than the initial accident. Ten to 25 percent of all incidents are secondary crashes caused

by backups and inattentive drivers in the crash area. In fact, every minute spent clearing a traffic incident increases the chance of a secondary crash by 2.8 percent. Mortality rates for responders are staggering: on average, six to eight responders from local fire, rescue and emergency medical services; ten to 12 law enforcement officials; 50 towing or recovery providers; and 100+ highway workers are struck and killed each year while working in or near traffic incidents.

Missouri traffic incident responders understand the high risks involved in clearing accidents. In 2012, Clifton Scott, a Missouri Department of Transportation employee, was working a traffic incident scene in Independence. He was killed when a driver barreled through warning cones and flares and slammed into Scott’s truck. In another Kansas City area traffic incident, a police officer ended up on permanent medical disability when he was injured in a secondary crash that occurred in backed-up traffic.

Cpl. Ben Barbarick, a deputy assigned to the traffic unit of the Cass County Sheriff’s Office, said the training program opened his eyes to better ways of managing traffic incidents. “I always thought closing the highway was the best option for

**Top photo: A crew from Haz-Mat Response assists local responders in cleaning a hydrochloric acid spill after a tanker truck flipped over on Interstate 35 in Kansas City. Photo by Rusty James of Kansas City Scout.**

**Lower photo: Traffic incident responders work quickly to clear a multiple-vehicle accident that closed a section of US 71 during a snowstorm in Belton, Mo. Photo courtesy of Belton Police Department.**

working an accident," Barbarick said. "But the training program showed me that keeping as many lanes open as possible is safer because it gives drivers a place to go rather than wait and risk a pile up."

At a recent truck-car crash during an ice storm, Barbarick said he quickly pushed the damaged car off the road using his cruiser rather than risk having other cars slide into it creating a bigger pile up and serious injuries. "I wouldn't have done that before the training program," he added.

In addition to focusing on quick clearance, Barbarick said providing much earlier warning alerts to motorists of an incident ahead further enhances safety at the scene. "Our overall approach is to notify drivers early of what's ahead, use the right traffic control strategies, and keep it flowing," he added.

### A TEAM OF SKILLED RESPONDERS

The National Traffic Incident Management training (TIM) program is building teams of highly-skilled responders who work together efficiently and effectively from their initial arrival on the incident scene to its investigation and eventual clearance. Developed through the second Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP2), the training program is a collaborative effort of FHWA, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), and the Transportation Research Board (TRB). It has been endorsed by the International Association of Police Chiefs, International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Volunteer Fire Council, Towing and Recovery Association of America, and AASHTO.

As of mid-January 2014, more than 31,370 responders in 33 states have already completed the training program and are producing significant improvements in incident response across the country.

Three train-the-trainer sessions were held in Missouri in 2013, in Kansas City, Springfield and St. Louis. "We have a really strong group of instructors in Missouri already and strong partnerships in order to reach responders in communities throughout the state," said William "Rusty" James, incident management coordinator for Kansas City Scout, a joint traffic management program of the Missouri and Kansas Departments of Transportation.

## MOVING AHEAD IN MISSOURI

With more than 500 responders already trained, FHWA and state leaders are seeking broad local engagement to roll out the TIM training program. Trainers who took the initial FHWA-led courses are available in Missouri to take the training back to their agencies or regions. Shorter, four-hour classes are available and one-hour modules will soon be available online.

Local officials can support the program by:

- Ensuring key people in the responder community are engaged and informed.
- Becoming a leader in the state or regional implementation effort.
- Partnering with other agencies involved in incident response to raise awareness.
- Encouraging training opportunities for staff.
- Seeking agency support for the TIM training program.



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Fourteen additional training sessions have been scheduled for the Springfield, Joplin and Branson areas. Bruce Pettus, Incident Management Coordinator for MoDOT's Southwest District, is targeting 21 counties in southwest Missouri, focusing on Interstate-44, Interstate-65 and Interstate-49, with emphasis on Interstate-44 due to its high traffic volumes and significant truck traffic. "It is important that we responders work together so motorists across the state will see consistency in how responders

react to accidents," said Pettus.

The program was designed by responders for responders. It uses a train-the-trainer model to broaden the impact, create stronger connections among responders, and draw on shared real-life experiences in the region or state. Training modules are flexible and can be modified to fit state and local regulations or practices. The training includes case studies, tabletop role-playing sessions and field instruction to simulate real-life situations and maximize participant engagement.

"The key to building stronger incident response teams is to train instructors with representatives from all responder agencies in the same room," said Paul Jodoin, Traffic Incident Management Program manager in the FHWA's Office of Operations. "Then these trained responders train other responders, expanding the reach of the program across their region or state."

### SAVING LIVES, MONEY AND TIME

Johnson said that because responders from many disciplines take the training together, a "crash-team" approach develops. Everyone knows what he or she should be doing, potentially saving lives, time and money at every accident scene. "When we arrive on an accident scene, we no longer assume that we'll automatically close the road and proceed from there," Johnson said. "Instead, we show up with a mission and a plan to clear the accident and keep traffic moving. If we can take action that prevents someone else from being hurt or killed, that's what our job is all about."

An added savings is that expensive equipment - from fire engines and police cars to towing vehicles - can be moved out of harm's way more quickly and safely, making them available to respond to the next emergency in a more timely fashion. This also reduces the potential damage to expensive public safety vehicles that can lead to real budget savings for a community. In addition, with fewer crashes and delays,

both local and cross-country freight moves in a more predictable manner, providing an economic stimulus.

For James, the benefit of the training is clear. "The chances of all responder personnel going home at the end of the incident is greatly increased as a result of the training," he said. "So there is no down side to this program."

## Benefits Of Traffic Incident Management Training

### Save Lives

- Safer and more effective on-scene techniques
- Less responder exposure, reducing injuries and fatalities
- Fewer secondary incidents

### Save Money

- Less freight and travel time spent in backups
- Fewer secondary crashes
- Fewer insurance claims
- Fewer responder vehicles hit by traffic
- Cost savings for responder agencies

### Save Time

- Faster incident clearance time, reducing traffic congestion
- Mitigates the movement of goods and services

### WHY THE TRAINING WORKS

Barbarick said the training process improves collaboration on site and encourages regular communication in between incidents to maximize effectiveness. "If we are all on the same page, all working from the same philosophy, we will get the accident cleared more successful and make the situation safer for everyone."

Both in Springfield and in the Kansas City metropolitan area, traffic incident responders are meeting regularly to review their actions and plan for the next time. Anticipating possible traffic incident scenarios further contributes to improved incident response. "When you know it will be a long-duration incident, there are specific steps to take to ensure safety and prepare to open the highway as quickly as possible," Johnson said.

### INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TRAINING PRODUCES MEASUREABLE RESULTS

The training has already produced significant results in communities across the country. In Washington state, a team using the quick clearance philosophy opened a freeway blocked by an overturned tractor-trailer nearly five hours faster by dragging the truck off the road rather than uprighting it first.



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After seeing significant reductions in clearance times and improved safety, several states, including Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina and Arizona, are now requiring their highway patrol or state police to take the training.

An Indiana crash involving a tractor trailer on Interstate 70 that generated a hazardous waste spill was handled faster than expected with minimal environmental damage by a recently trained group of responders. The successful outcome drew a positive editorial in the Terre Haute *Tribune-Star*. "Last week's I-70 incident certainly qualifies for the 'could have been worse' category," the newspaper wrote. "You can thank the traffic incident group for that. The cooperation of

multiple disciplines is a direct result of the National TIM First Responder Training Course..."

After seeing significant reductions in clearance times and improved safety, several states, including Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina and Arizona, are now requiring their highway patrol or state police to take the training. Arizona also is requiring all DOT-related managers, responders and construction

contractors to take the training as well. Pettus said that 150 MoDOT employees in his district will take the training. □

**Christine Becker**, Christine Becker Associates, and **Sherry Appel**, CH2M HILL. Becker is the former deputy executive director of the National League of Cities and Appel is the former NLC director of media relations. They are currently assisting the Federal Highway Administration's Office of Operations on the National Traffic Incident Management Responder Training program.

For more information about the Missouri strategy and opportunities to participate in the National Traffic Incident Management Responder Training, contact Rusty James at [william.james@modot.mo.gov](mailto:william.james@modot.mo.gov); Bruce Pettus at [bruce.pettus@modot.mo.gov](mailto:bruce.pettus@modot.mo.gov); or Marc Thornsberry, at [marc.thornsberry@dot.gov](mailto:marc.thornsberry@dot.gov); or email [TIMTraining@dot.gov](mailto:TIMTraining@dot.gov) at FHWA.



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