



## AMBULANCE CRASH ON INTERSTATE HIGHWAY – CASE STUDY

*The following information was taken from various news reports of the incident. The circumstances are given as points for discussion and should not be taken as factual.*

An Emergency Medical Technician with an ambulance service and a career firefighter/EMT crashed into the rear of a DOT truck on the shoulder of I-65 in Tennessee. Both he and his patient were killed. Police and newspaper reports give the following account:

- The EMT worked the previous night as a career firefighter, and then he reported directly to work as an EMT for a private ambulance company.
- The assignment was a non-emergency transport of an elderly patient.
- The ambulance left the travel lanes and struck the rear of a parked DOT service truck (yellow truck in the picture below) at about 50 mph without the brakes ever being applied.
- The EMT was texting just before the incident, but the police do not think he was texting during the event.
- The EMT has both narcolepsy (a neurological disorder marked by sudden, uncontrollable compulsions to sleep) and epilepsy (a disorder that may result in unconsciousness or seizures).
- The toxicology report showed an elevated level of amphetamines (prescribed for his narcolepsy), but no sign of his prescription medication for epilepsy.
- The EMT had on-duty seizure episodes in the past. Ten years ago, this individual struck a light pole during a seizure. His license was suspended, but less than a year later, it was reinstated when his personal physician cleared him to drive. He subsequently had a second on-duty episode.
- The ambulance company verified his valid driver's license without restrictions but did not (probably can not due to privacy laws) investigate his past medical history.

**Supervisors should discuss the many factors that contributed to this incident.**

This incident shows the importance of emergency drivers (EMS, and Fire) being medically fit to operate large vehicles. Supervisors and drivers have an obligation to the employer, their coworkers, their families, and the public to ensure they are physically ready to drive. The following points should be covered:

1. Responders must discuss with their physicians their duties as a driver of emergency vehicles.
2. Whether policies require firefighters and EMTs to disclose that they have a condition (not a specific condition) that may preclude them from operating vehicles or heavy equipment.
3. Whether firefighters and EMTs must disclose that they are taking a medication, prescription or over-the-counter, (not the specific medication) that may affect their ability to operate vehicles or equipment.

