



VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER CRASHES PERSONAL VEHICLE – 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'.

A 20-year-old volunteer firefighter with a Pennsylvania volunteer fire company crashed his personal vehicle while responding to a motor vehicle crash. Police and newspaper reports give the following account:

- Just before 1600, two vehicles were involved in a crash on Route 15. The victim's volunteer fire company and one mutual aid company were dispatched to the incident. The weather was sunny and hot. Roads were dry.
- The firefighter (victim) was traveling south on Route 15. As he approached the scene of the crash, his Dodge Ram pickup truck apparently struck the guardrail alongside the right shoulder. State troopers believe the volunteer firefighter may have over-steered, causing his truck to travel sideways across both southbound lanes and up onto a guardrail along the northbound lanes. After sliding along the guardrail, the pickup rolled once or twice and came to rest upright in the middle of the southbound lanes. The truck's resting place was approximately 300 yards from the original crash site.
- Firefighters from the victim's volunteer fire company were redirected to their fire station. A third fire company had to be dispatched to the original incident.
- The volunteer firefighter was reportedly NOT wearing his seatbelt. He was ejected from the vehicle, landing about 15 feet away. He died at the scene.
- State Police believe speed was a factor in the crash.

"This is something none of us should have to deal with," the victim's Fire Chief said as he wrestled with his emotions. He quickly left to notify the young firefighter's family of the tragedy. Both parents were active members of the fire company. The young firefighter has been a member since joining the company as a junior firefighter about 6 years previously. Firefighters met privately with the company's chaplain and other counselors. According to the NFPA, about 6% of firefighter injuries and 25% of firefighters' fatalities occur during response/returning. Volunteers responding in their personal vehicles are especially at risk.

Officers and firefighters are encouraged to discuss the following points:

1. **What additional risks are faced when responding in a POV? What are our policies concerning POVs?**
2. **What are our policies regarding the speed of responding POVs? Beyond the state law, do you feel this fire company adequately encourages or enforces seatbelt use?**
3. **A Line of Duty Death (LODD) is a tragic event that is the chief's biggest fear. What policies are in place to guide the department's response to such an event?**
4. **Are Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Teams available? Does the fire company encourage or require participation by members? A volunteer fire company is often likened to a family. Will counseling be offered to the extended fire company family?**