

Effective Emergency Vehicle Driver Operations & Training

Q&A WITH PHIL MOSER OF ADVANCED DRIVER TRAINING SERVICES INC.

Phil Moser is a former suburban Philadelphia police officer who now works for Advanced Driver Training Services Inc. (ADTS) as a driver safety instructor and motor vehicle crash reconstructionist. In this interview, Moser discusses the components of an effective emergency vehicle driver operations and training program.



Fireline: Please provide a brief description of your professional background and of your position with ADTS.

PM: I was a police officer with a suburban Philadelphia police department for 11 years prior to working full-time for ADTS. While with the

police department, I received training in the field of motor vehicle crash reconstruction. I have investigated approximately 3,500 motor vehicle collisions in my lifetime.

Fireline: How did you become involved in the field of driver safety, and specifically, emergency vehicle operations?

PM: As a police officer, you participate in emergency vehicle operations training. As far as becoming involved in the field of driver safety, after you investigate a number of collisions, your awareness of the factors that cause crashes becomes much more acute. You become aware of the mistakes that drivers make that cause them to crash.

When I first started working with ADTS, I was hired on as a driver

safety instructor and a motor vehicle crash reconstructionist.

Fireline: What are the elements of a good emergency vehicle driver operations and training program?

PM: A good emergency vehicle operations program provides training with regard to the operations of the vehicles during emergency response situations. However, emergency drivers need to also receive training that deals with non-emergency vehicle operations. Many crashes involving emergency vehicles occur during non-emergency driving. Crashes, such as strike from behind and reverse collisions, are common.

Also, today's emergency response training needs to make emergency drivers aware of the fact that driver inattention is at an all time high. With motorists talking on phones, texting and sending e-mails, it is not difficult to understand that emergency drivers need to be especially cautious these days. The challenges of clearing a route of travel during an emergency response were difficult enough during the days when the only audible distraction drivers faced was the car radio. Now, with drivers engaged in phone conversations while using devices that are plugged into their ears, the task of getting the attention of a distracted driver is challenging.

Fireline: How does an emergency vehicle safety operations program differ from a typical fleet safety program?

PM: Emphasis needs to be placed on emergency response driving. Business drivers face challenges that are not relevant to emergency vehicle operations, such as scheduling appointments and long-distance driving. The obvious challenge for emergency response driving is the urgency of getting to the scene. While business drivers may be pressured to get to an appointment on time or to drive long distances on a regular basis, this in no way compares to the pressure that an emergency driver feels when trying to get to a fire or crash scene where somebody's life may very well depend on the amount of time it takes to get there. The reality is there are times where the pressures to arrive quickly to scenes are self-imposed. Training must be given that helps emergency drivers recognize legitimate emergency response verses non-emergency response.

Fireline: How can safety managers implement such a program in their own organization?

PM: A safety manager must first create policies that address his/her organization's specific needs. These include, driver qualifications, driver record checks, driver background checks, training requirements, retraining and policies that address specific emergency response, techniques and tactics. This should include training for all personnel in the emergency vehicle, not just the driver.

Fireline: *What are the duties of a safety manager who is responsible for an emergency driver response program?*

PM: Create the policy, provide the training, and document, document, document. Do not sway from the policy once it is implemented. If you make an exception based on a friendship or an immediate need, you may as well scrap the entire policy. If you set a precedent that contradicts your policy, you just made your policy null and void.

Fireline: *What selection criteria should be used to ensure that the best person is selected as an emergency response vehicle operator?*

PM: This is one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish. You want to select someone who is able to control his/her emotions during extreme circumstances. You may wish to implement what equates to a driver apprenticeship. Work the drivers into the position while under the direction of an established driver. Also, there needs to be a period of probation for emergency drivers after they take on the role of emergency response operators. Six months to a year is not unreasonable. If for whatever reason a driver is not working out, it is much easier to remove the driver from that position while s/he is on probation.

Fireline: *What are the duties of the driver and crew of an emergency response vehicle to ensure safe operations?*

PM: To arrive at the scene safely. Every emergency response driver knows that s/he should not become an emergency while responding to one. The crew must also assist the driver by not creating distractions during a response. This includes getting equipment on prior to getting into the emergency vehicle after arriving at the scene. If a crewmember is getting on equipment while responding, they are in all likelihood unbuckled. If a crewmember is not properly buckled, s/he creates a distraction for the driver; and these crewmembers also place themselves and fellow crewmembers in jeopardy.

Fireline: *During an emergency response, much information may be provided to the driver as s/he is responding. What can be done to help minimize the hazards during the response?*

PM: Clear guidelines must be established that dictate crewmember responsibilities. This includes radio protocols and crewmember assistance with the management of surrounding traffic. In other words, a specific crewmember should be responsible to answer the radio, inform the driver of updates and assist the driver with being aware of traffic in the vicinity. This is especially true when traversing intersections.

Fireline: *In the event of a mishap, how should the situation be handled, and what are the key procedural elements needed in the safety program?*

PM: An external, unbiased organization should conduct the incident investigation. This minimizes any accusations of false reporting. Guidelines regarding disciplinary actions, retraining or removal from duties must be spelled out in your driver safety policies. A proactive training response is important when retaining a driver. It shows that you completed your due diligence with regard to correcting a situation, and it minimizes the risk associated with a reoccurrence.

Fireline: *In the event disciplinary action is needed, how should it be handled?*

PM: This varies. For organizations where drivers and crewmembers are represented by unions, these disciplinary actions will be spelled out. Whether drivers and crewmembers are paid or volunteer, it is always good to have a review board look at all of the facts associated with an incident to make sure the discipline is fair and not arbitrary.

Fireline: *How does the safety program interface with the vehicle selection, care and maintenance aspect of maintaining an emergency vehicle fleet?*

PM: Vehicle selection is typical-

ly dictated by the needs of the community served. Your safety training should include proper vehicle maintenance standards. These should include general maintenance and care of the emergency equipment and specific care mandated by the manufacturer. Staff assignments for vehicle maintenance and care should be spelled out in your driver safety policies.

Fireline: *As a former police officer, you did traffic accident reconstruction. How has this experience helped you in your current position with ADTS?*

PM: As stated, after you investigate a few thousand motor vehicle collisions, you begin to detect patterns. The majority of crashes are caused by driver inattention. I am a huge proponent of doing whatever it takes to get drivers to pay attention to the task at hand—driving. As a result of my training and experiences, I am able to assist organizations with implementing training that is appropriate to their specific needs.

Fireline: *How can the standard, “Safe Practices for Motor Vehicle Operations” (ANSI/ASSE Z15.1-2006), be incorporated into an emergency vehicle safety operations program?*

PM: The Z15.1 standard is pretty much all-inclusive. I urge all driver safety managers to get a copy, read it and apply those parts of the standard that apply to their organizations. This standard contains information that will assist all organizations.

Fireline: *What advice do you have for those who wish to improve or completely overhaul their emergency vehicle driver operations and training program and do not know where to start?*

PM: Start with the Z15.1 standard. I would also urge them to talk to their peers and counterparts. Make sure to get input from the people within your own organizations. The people within your organization may have insights that no other people have. ☺

Phil Moser is vice president of Advanced Driver Training Services (ADTS). He lectures regularly on driver safety-related issues and has been featured as a driver safety expert on numerous broadcast programs, including Good Day Philadelphia (Fox-29) and CBS affiliate KYW-TV. He has assisted many Fortune 500 organizations with implementing successful driver safety initiatives that have helped them realize significant reductions in their vehicle crash rates.

Prior to joining ADTS, Moser was a motor vehicle crash investigation and reconstruction specialist with a suburban Philadelphia

police department for 11 years. During his tenure, he investigated approximately 3,500 motor vehicle crashes. Certified in Pennsylvania courts in the field of motor vehicle crash investigation and reconstruction, Moser has completed numerous driving-related training programs, including forensic accident reconstruction, accident reconstruction/homicide by motor vehicle prosecution, advanced accident reconstruction, DWI/DUI detection and enforcement and standardized field sobriety testing. He may be contacted at (800) 486-2387, ext. 105 or philm@adtsweb.com.

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