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FORUM HIGHLIGHT

"My question is if your department uses [building construction placards] and if so what is the design of your placard and policy for its use?"

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Driver entrapped in tractor-trailer

BY JOHN P. REYNOLDS

On January 29, 2001, at 0942 hours, the Elmsford (NY) Fire Department was dispatched to the intersection of Routes 287 and 87 for a reported overturned tractor-trailer truck with entrapment. Response was one rescue pumper equipped with a spreader, air bags, air tools, cribbing, and a variety of basic rescue hand tools; a crew of five firefighters; and one BLS ambulance with a crew of three EMTs.

On arrival, we found the driver fully entrapped in the tractor, which had overturned into a snow bank. I immediately called for mutual aid, requesting the Fairview Fire Department Heavy Rescue. Also responding to the scene were the Greenburgh Police paramedics.

The truck had been carrying bundles of steel wire mesh; as it rounded a curve on the ramp from 287 to 87, the load shifted, causing the truck to overturn. The driver's side of the cab was into the snow-covered embankment at approximately a 30-degree angle. Access to the driver was through the passenger door, which was basically now on top. The only parts of the driver visible were his head, shoulder, and one arm. The rest of his body was blocked by the passenger seat, parts of the dashboard, the steering wheel, debris from inside the cab (toolbox, lunch box, and so on), and snow from the snowbank.



Photo by Seth Harrison/The Journal News, January 29, 2001.

The driver was conscious and somewhat alert but appeared to be suffering from shock and was having some difficulty breathing because of the compression of his chest. EMTs administered oxygen to him throughout most of the rescue, stopping only during cutting operations or when the oxygen tube was in the way. EMTs decided not to start an IV line immediately for fear it would make victim removal more difficult.

All the departments worked together using a variety of tools to gain access to and then to remove the driver. We cut away the passenger seat and part of the steering wheel. We tied ropes to the passenger seat to keep it from falling onto the driver and to move the seat out through the window. We used various hand tools and air tools to remove parts of the truck from around the driver and shovels to remove some of the snowbank. We used a glass saw to remove the rear window of the cab, which gave rescuers

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FIREFIGHTER FATALITIES

Notice of Firefighter Fatality: Gretna, LA

Ralph Arabie of the David Crockett Steam Fire Co. No. 1 in Gretna, LA has died as the result of an on-duty incident that occurred on 2008-09-29.

[More Firefighter Fatalities](#)

access to the driver's back. We also had a charged and staffed 1 3/4-inch handline standing by during the entire operation.

After we removed all the debris and several pieces of the truck from around the driver, we determined that he was actually trapped between his seat and the roof of the cab (which was resting against the snowbank). We then decided to use a tow truck that was standing by at the scene to partially lift the tractor off the snow bank. The operator wrapped chains around the cab's floorboards and underside. While personnel closely monitored the driver and other personnel inserted cribbing between the snowbank and the truck, the tow truck slowly and carefully lifted the cab off the embankment, moving the cab about eight to 10 inches. This caused the seat, which was still attached to the floorboards, to lift away from the roof (the cab basically "unfolded").

At this point, the driver gave out a loud sigh of relief and stated that he no longer felt trapped. He immediately tried to climb out of the cab himself. However, because of the severe angle of the cab, and the fact that he had severely fractured lower legs, he was not able to move.

The other benefit of moving the cab with the tow truck was the fact that the rear window opening became larger. With better access through the window, the driver's seat could be folded back away from the driver. After approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, the members were able to remove the driver through the rear window of the cab onto a backboard.

The driver, in critical condition with multiple injuries, was then airlifted from the scene to the Westchester Medical Center. The Stat Flight helicopter had been standing by at the scene for much of the rescue. Because of the nature of the entrapment, an emergency room doctor accompanied the helicopter to the scene, which is not the usual response. In this case, it enabled the doctor to evaluate the victim throughout and helped determine the proper course of action.

LESSONS LEARNED

The importance of size-up cannot be overstated. We called for mutual aid immediately after sizing up the situation, which brought the extra resources and personnel we needed to the scene quickly.

Departments should have in their tool arsenal a complement of hand and air tools along with their standard power tools. We used a wide variety of tools at this incident in addition to the spreader.

We had to exercise a great deal of patience at this incident. It was a lengthy and exhausting operation.

Such rescue incidents are a test not only of skill but also of creativity. We were forced to operate differently under the circumstances, particularly concerning the use of the tow truck. This was a very difficult extrication, which also required much resourcefulness concerning the manner in which we finally removed the victim.

This operation proved that three distinctly different agencies could work together as one harmonious unit to achieve a successful outcome.

JOHN P. REYNOLDS is chief of the Elmsford Fire Department in Westchester County, New York. He previously served as an apparatus driver, EMT, engine company lieutenant, captain, and assistant chief.

November 1, 2001



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