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Did you know?
Traffic backups result in 5.7 billion person-hours of delay annually in the United States. The average cost of the time lost in traffic congestion is $1,160 per person per year.

Training, training, training. I was impressed by everyone across our state when we received our TIM training numbers from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Texas is always near the top spot, if not in the top spot for conducting TIM training. I know more training is happening that is not being reported, so thank you.

As a reminder, our targeted audience for the TIM training includes every discipline that plays a part in incident response. One of those roles is our Public Safety Access Point (PSAP) and our dispatchers. They are usually the first ones to come in contact with the party(s) involved, either the motorist involved, a witness, or a passerby. The information given to them, or not given, plays an important role in the safety of all involved.

We have our “Steer it Clear it” law covered in the transportation code (550.022), which requires minor crashes with no injuries and vehicles that can be safely driven to be moved completely off the highway in a metropolitan area. Some of the questions that come up in our training include: What if the crash is due to weather and a problem area on the roadway due to ice or standing water? Does your agency PSAP advise crash victims to move their vehicles? What is the safest action when the crash is due to water/ice on the roadway? And what information in general are those involved in crashes being given?

As we continue to train around our state, I want to encourage you to invite your communications personnel to the TIM training. They play an important part in the process, and with the right training and conversations, will help us save lives.

I shared the photo to the right with you in our last newsletter. As we continue to have responders struck, I feel it is important to share this again; our mission is Everybody Goes Home. The highway is not just an unsafe place to work, it is also a very unsafe place for our traveling public to be stranded due to a crash or mechanical failure. Let’s get the word out to educate and train our personnel to protect those using our roadways!

San Antonio HERO Program Receives Award

On April 14th, 2022, Gina Gallegos, San Antonio District Engineer, was honored to accept the very first award for the HERO program. The award was presented at the 11th Annual Women’s Transportation Seminar (WTS) Awards Gala for the San Antonio Region Chapter. WTS is an international organization dedicated to shaping the future of transportation for the public good through the global advancement of women. The award is the 2021 Innovative Transportation Solutions Award, and it was competing against three other very worthy programs in San Antonio.

The HERO operators in San Antonio work very hard to help keep the people of San Antonio safe. The HERO operators are at risk day and night, no matter the weather, doing their job and making TxDOT look great. Keep up the great work and know your Texas TIM family is proud of your work every day!
In accordance with the Statewide TIM Coordinator’s development plan for 2022, training has been the primary focus for TIM teams across the state. The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) has long been at the forefront of innovative training, including developing the model for the Traffic Incident Management (TIM) for First Responders course used by the Federal Highway Administration (see page four for the NCTCOG training schedule).

In the tradition of presenting cutting-edge training, the NCTCOG hosted a training on April 20th, 2022, for Electric (EV) and Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Safety for First Responders. This seven-hour class included classroom presentations and EV/AV vehicles in the parking lot for attendees to get a close-up look at the vehicles. I attended the class, and honestly, it was one of the most exciting training sessions I have ever attended.

The class started with Mr. Rob Patrick, a First Responder Specialist for Waymo. Waymo, formerly known as the “Google Self-Driving Car Project,” develops and tests completely autonomous vehicle (AV) technology for commercial and private use. (See www.waymo.com for more information about the company). Mr. Patrick stated that despite advertising and marketing, there are no completely autonomous vehicles available to the public, all of the vehicles are driver-assist systems and require complete attention on the road.

Mr. Patrick described current projects using AV technology to pick up and deliver occupants in urban areas. An app alerts the vehicle of a pick-up request, the vehicle turns on and drives to the requester’s GPS location, picks them up, delivers them to the destination the requester input into the app, then goes to a predetermined place to await another call. The vehicle travels only at 35 MPH in the city and navigates using Lidar and Radar technology to create a 360-degree image of the vehicle’s surroundings. The system has had twenty-one minor crashes, all rear ends into the AV, NONE have been the AV’s fault.

Mr. Patrick also discussed the autonomous commercial vehicles currently being tested. These vehicles still require a safety driver in the seat to monitor performance, they are not driving in a fully autonomous capacity. Waymo is building a commercial AV (CAV) terminal in Lancaster, Texas that will be opened in June 2022. Currently, the vehicles are traveling from Dallas to Houston, to San Antonio, and back to Dallas. They are carrying commercial loads to help defray the R&D costs of the vehicles. There is no time frame for completely autonomous CAVs at this time.

The next speaker, Mr. Ron Moore, a fire academy instructor at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth, is considered by many the premier authority on electric vehicle (EV) safety for first responders. Mr. Moore spoke extensively on the battery and electrical systems in the cars and how first responders must approach and disarm these systems. He also stated that most EVs are different in their design and construction, and there is no one-size-fits-all system for disabling the vehicle’s electrical systems. However, most manufacturers have safety sheets for first responders available online. It describes where the main electrical lines are in the vehicle and where the Boron (high-strength steel is located for incidents that require occupant extrication.

Mr. Moore had a local dealer bring two electric vehicles to the parking lot for closer investigation. He pointed out several unique features: first, there are no keyholes to open the doors. Having access to the key fob is crucial to turning the vehicle on and off and unlocking doors. He also pointed out that placing the vehicles in different operating modes (D, R, P) is a lever on the steering column.

A major point that Mr. Moore emphasized is the need for agencies to begin to adjust their TIM protocols to accommodate EV incidents and crashes. At this time, first responders do not have the necessary on-scene information to properly respond to EV crashes.

Attending a class such as this is crucial to understanding the complexity and unique nomenclature of these vehicles. As they continue to proliferate throughout the United States, first responder knowledge of these systems must become another tool in the already enormous rescue toolbox.

For more information on Electric Vehicle Safety Classes contact::
Ron Moore at RMoore@Fastmail.us
Hugh-Tension Cable Barrier First Responder Safety and Extrication

Jim Comfort, AECOM

The Statewide Texas TIM Team has developed a new training class that addresses safety and vehicle extrication involving high tension cable barrier (HTCB) systems. Unlike the current TxDOT HTCB training geared towards maintenance and repair, this class specifically addresses information vital to first responders to ensure safety and efficiency during emergency operations.

The two-part class starts with a brief overview of the history of cable barrier systems in the United States, and why they have become such a vital part of the US highway system. It includes videos of cross-median crashes and the effectiveness of the HTCB system to prevent such crashes. To combat cross-median crashes, TxDOT began installing high-tension cable barrier systems on roadways. A DOT study in Tennessee found that when HTCB systems were installed, fatal crashes were reduced by 86% and head-on crashes decreased by 92%.

The next section discusses the four systems authorized for use in Texas by TxDOT (Gibraltar, Trinity CASS, Brifen, and Nucor). It examines the parts of each system, the simplicity of design for easy dismantling and tension release, and procedures for efficient vehicle disentanglement.

The class discusses several different methods of system de-tensioning for vehicle disentanglement: (1) releasing the cables from posts and the methods used for each system, (2) removing the posts from the ground, (3) terminal end system disengagement, and (4) safe methods of cutting the cable in extreme life-safety situations and only as a last resort.

The final part also discusses non-entanglement manipulation of the system for first responder access. Law enforcement can release the tension on the system to allow traffic to cross the median in the event of long-term road closures. It also allows system release for emergency vehicle access to incidents on the opposite side of the roadway. It also discusses reassembling the system after de-tensioning for access to return it to its pre-incident status.

One of the unique aspects of this training is the opportunity for hands-on examination of the different systems. The Tim Team has acquired demonstration posts from the two predominant systems in Texas, Gibraltar, and the Trinity CASS. This allows first responders to have practical knowledge of parts of the systems that they are most likely to encounter.

To date, 60 fire department personnel have taken the HTCB training class: Parker County ESD (28 personnel), and the Saginaw Fire Department (28 personnel). Because of the close working relationship between the Saginaw and the Fort Worth Fire Departments in North Tarrant County, four members of FTW FD were invited to the Saginaw training to familiarize them with the systems.

For information about hosting this class, contact Jim Comfort at Jim.Comfort@aecom.com.

Houston Tow and Go Operator Saves a Life!

Meet Daniel Myers, Tow Truck Operator for the Houston area Tow and Go Program. His quick thinking and calm demeanor saved someone’s life!

Daniel stopped to assist a driver that had broken down on the shoulder of a Houston roadway. When he approached the vehicle, he noticed the driver was unconscious behind the steering wheel. He immediately called 911, and the Houston Fire Department responded right away. The fire department medics quickly determined that the man was having a diabetic emergency and rendered emergency aid on-scene and transported him to the hospital. The medics told Daniel that if he had not acted as quickly as he did, the man would have lost his life.

Tow operators risk their lives every day on freeways responding to incidents. Daniel’s calm reaction and quick action saved a man’s life. On behalf of the Texas Statewide TIM Coordinator and the entire staff, we wish to congratulate Daniel for his heroism. A big thank you for everything you do to keep drivers safe on the roadways. Texas is lucky to have you!
When Statewide TIM Coordinator David McDonald created a recognition program for the TIM community in Texas to reward innovation and ingenuity, the team created the Texas TIM Challenge Coin, a unique award, given only to select individuals that have distinguished themselves in the TIM programs. The first coin ever awarded was to Austin FD Rescue 14 Fire Specialist Mike Heeney (Pictured on right, David McDonald on the left). As a former US Marine, Heeney had experience as a tow operator and had used the GoJaks (a set of caster wheels placed under tires of disabled vehicles for easy movement). After discussing the system with his AFD crew, they bought the equipment on their own, and placed them on the truck. They have been using the GoJaks to move vehicles from the roadways for quick clearance with great success.

The AFD administration is currently examining the process for use on all AFD emergency vehicles. It is this type of creative thinking and innovation that saves first responder and motorist lives at crash and roadway incident scenes. Congratulations to Mike Heeney, the first name on the Texas TIM Wall of Fame!
These “heroes of highways” do much more than change tires! They are an integral part of everyday traffic management and safety for the motoring public AND for emergency, TxDOT and public utility workers on Texas roadways! Their dedication and hard work save hundreds of lives each year and save millions of dollars in commercial, private and municipal revenue by keeping our highways open and moving safely.

These statistics were pulled from the January-March 2022 Texas Totals:

Total Lane Miles – 1,646
Incidents – 30,720
Services to Public – 93,094

There are currently 22 million registered vehicles in the State of Texas.

According to AAA.com there are approximately 69 million vehicle breakdowns in the US each year.
Members of the statewide TIM team traveled to Abilene on Wednesday, May 25th, to teach TIM for First Responders. The class was held at the Abilene Public Library on 202 Cedar Street in Abilene taught by David McDonald, the Statewide TIM Coordinator, and Nicole Tyler, the Traffic Safety Specialist from the TxDOT Childress district. Thirty-two students attended the class from TxDOT, law enforcement, DPS, tow operators, and EMS disciplines. The class was requested due to several secondary crashes that have occurred recently in the Abilene area and the need to have safe, quick clearance methods in place to prevent these types of crashes from happening in the future.

Burgers, Brats, and Brotherhood!

Nicole Tyler, TxDOT

A K3 Towing and Recovery operator, Mark Harper from Childress, was injured while helping a stranded motorist. He was attempting to free a drive shaft that was damaged when the shaft suddenly broke free and hit him, full force in the abdomen and chest. Mr. Harper suffered three broken ribs and a punctured liver. He was flown by helicopter to an Amarillo hospital and spent a week in ICU before being released.

Once the news of the injured first responder reached the Childress community, calls immediately began to pour in from local first responder agencies to the towing company dispatcher, asking what they could do to help and what the injured operator needed. Once he was released from the hospital, K3 Towing and Recovery decided to hold a benefit cookout to help him and his family.

On April 30th, many of the area first responding agencies participated and donated time and money to help their injured brother. Law enforcement agencies, Fire and EMS departments, TxDOT, local judges, and many members of the Childress community came to support the injured operator. Even competing towing and recovery companies rallied together and made a huge impact by helping to raise funds. “This was such a humbling and rewarding thing to witness,” said Nicole Tyler of the Childress TIM Team.

The Childress TIM community is an excellent example of the camaraderie that TIM Teams create when first responders meet regularly and get to know the people in the responding agencies of their areas. TIM teams are more than just managing traffic at incident scenes on roadways; they are the relationships that are built when first responder agencies come together to work for the community! They develop a tightly knit team of men and women that can rely on each other when emergencies strike.

And yes, we are our brother’s (and sister’s) keepers!

Faces of the Fallen - Remembering Our Comrades

We are fortunate that we have had no first responders struck and killed in Texas in the first quarter of 2022. The last newsletter release without a first responder death in Texas was the fourth quarter of 2021.

We share the grief of our sister agencies around the country and mourn the 23 first responders that have lost their lives on United States highways so far this year.