

U.S. Firefighter Deaths as a Result of Being Struck by Vehicles

2003-2007

From 2003 through 2007, 21 firefighters were struck and killed by vehicles while on-duty. A brief description of the fatalities in each year follows.

2007: One firefighter was struck by a vehicle and killed. He was at the scene of a vehicle fire shortly after 4:00 am, loading hose back onto fire apparatus in the right hand lane on an interstate highway when he was struck by a bus traveling approximately 65 mph. The driver of the bus had not noticed the emergency lights of fire apparatus parked on the shoulder and in the right-hand travel lane or traffic cones set up near the fire scene, and was traveling in the right-hand lane. When he belatedly tried to change lanes, he sideswiped the first apparatus and struck the firefighter. The fire department had declined traffic control on the highway during their operations at the vehicle fire because there was no traffic on the road.

2006: Three firefighters were struck by vehicles and killed. In the first incident, the victim had responded to a pre-dawn multi-car crash that occurred when moisture on the highway froze suddenly. Vehicles traveling 65-70 mph on the highway could not see the pileup until they came around a curve in the road. The driver of the truck that struck the firefighter was trying to avoid another vehicle in front of him, and slid sideways across all traffic lanes. The victim, who was wearing personal protective equipment, lost her helmet when she was struck and suffered fatal head injuries. At the time of the fatal crash, a police officer was trying to place flares along the roadway to warn oncoming traffic. In the second incident, the victim was spray painting markings on a highway to indicate the location of hydrants. He stopped his brush truck in the passing lane of the roadway, leaving the hazard lights operating, and worked in front of the truck. A vehicle approaching at close to the speed limit in the same lane rear-ended the truck, which crushed the firefighter. In the third incident, a firefighter was struck by a vehicle backing out of a space in the parking lot of a bank while he was headed to deposit the fire department's bingo money. Careless driving and deficiencies in the vehicle's braking system were cited as factors in the incident.

2005: Three firefighters were struck by vehicles and killed. The first was directing traffic at a chemical spill at a high school when he was struck by a drunk driver. He was wearing his reflective safety vest and using a flashlight when he was struck. The other two firefighters were struck by driverless vehicles. The first was working as a safety officer at a racetrack. He was run over on the track by a service vehicle that

Source: National Fire Protection Association, July 2008.

he was trying to stop as it was rolling backwards toward a crowd of spectators. (A crash had occurred moments before on the track, and the driver of the service vehicle had left his vehicle's engine running while he spoke to one of the race drivers stopped on the track. The race car driver backed into the service vehicle while trying to get out of its way, causing it to begin rolling.) The other firefighter, who was driving a vehicle shuttling water to the scene of a structure fire, had arrived with his fourth load of water. When he got out of his truck to wait to unload the water tank, the truck rolled forward into a ditch, pinning him underneath.

2004: Eight firefighters were struck by vehicles and killed. Two of the eight were killed by backing apparatus. The first of the two was standing on the tailboard, acting as tailboard safety member, when she fell or stepped off the slow-moving vehicle and was run over. The other firefighter was standing behind a new piece of apparatus after a training session when the driver, thinking he had gone into the station, began to back up and struck him. In separate incidents, three firefighters working at incident scenes were struck and killed by passing vehicles. In the first of the three incidents, the victim was directing traffic at a crash scene on a highway when a motorist changed lanes to avoid hitting a slowing vehicle, and struck him. The victim was standing in the right lane, holding a flashlight and stop/slow sign and wearing an orange mesh safety vest. In the second incident, a firefighter was struck on a highway at the scene of a fire involving an abandoned van. The responding engine was parked in front of the burning vehicle. In neither of these two cases were details available on if, or how, traffic around the incident scene was controlled. The third victim was helping a fire truck back up at a crash scene when he was struck by a passing vehicle. There were no other details available on that incident at this time. While assisting at a portable water tank at a fire scene, a firefighter was pinned between two fire apparatus when the driver of one vehicle inadvertently released the emergency vehicle and it rolled back into the other. A firefighter returning from duty on a wildland fire was struck and killed by a semi-trailer truck while crossing an interstate near his motel late in the evening. A firefighter working on the fire/rescue crew at a speedway was killed by a race car while retrieving debris from the track. The sun's glare was cited as a factor in that incident.

2003 Six firefighters were struck by vehicles and killed. One firefighter was struck by a speeding driver who swerved around barriers at the site of a hazmat spill. Another firefighter arriving at the scene of a motor vehicle crash stepped onto the highway into the path of an oncoming tractor trailer. The driver of the truck had no time to react. The victim had left his reflective safety vest in his vehicle. A firefighter directing traffic in heavy fog was struck by a vehicle. He was wearing his safety vest; no other details were reported. A firefighter rolling hose at the station with another firefighter after an incident was run

over by a fire truck that was backing into the station, in spite of the operating backup lights and alarm. A firefighter replacing road barriers at a construction site was struck by a passing vehicle that failed to negotiate the detour. And a firefighter returning from a training exercise got out of his vehicle to retrieve an object that fell from the truck and stepped into the other travel lane and was struck by a passing vehicle. He was not wearing a safety vest.