

Posted on Wed, Sep. 08, 2004

## Heed the sirens

Flashing lights and sirens are serious business. Two deaths over the holiday weekend serve as tragic reminders that motorists must respond appropriately.

Veteran firefighter Gerald K. McGowan, 57, died when the pumper in which he was riding collided with a car attempting to make a left-hand turn, struck another car, then crashed into a tree.

Lee's Summit resident Jane Twogood, 57, was struck by an SUV and killed as she stood on the shoulder of Interstate 435 near Eastwood Trafficway after being involved in a minor accident. A police officer and a citizen standing near Twogood suffered minor injuries.

Motorists are required to yield to emergency vehicles. This means slowing down at the sound of a siren and moving to the right of the road. The initial vehicle struck by the fire pumper did not move to the right, police investigators said.

Drivers also have a duty to maintain control when they encounter accident scenes.

"People have a tendency to look to the side to see what's going on, and not to look in front of them, where they should be looking," said Police Sgt. Tony Sanders.

The tendency is more than unfortunate. Investigation of traffic accidents is one of the most hazardous aspects of police work.

Flashing lights are a signal to slow down and watch the road ahead. Officers and citizens will be much safer if drivers heed the warnings.