

Case Study E
Tallahassee, Florida
March 24, 2005

At approximately 13:56 hours on March 24, 2005, Rescue 13 (an ambulance) and Tanker 13 of the Tallahassee Fire Department were responding to a reported large brush fire outside the city limits. Tanker 13 was a 1999 commercial chassis pumper tanker carrying 2,500 gallons of water. Both vehicles were traveling southbound on Woodville Highway. As they approached the intersection with Natural Well Road, Rescue 13 slowed to turn onto the cross street. According to police reports, the driver of Tanker 13 (who was alone on the apparatus) reported that he had been looking at some controls he was operating on the dashboard and when he looked up he saw the stopped/slowed ambulance in front of him and knew he would be unable to avoid hitting it without taking evasive maneuvers.

In order to avoid striking the ambulance Tanker 13 swerved left across the centerline of the road. Upon taking this action the tanker driver noticed a civilian vehicle on the northbound (opposite) shoulder that had stopped for the approaching fire apparatus. To avoid striking the civilian vehicle the tanker driver steered the vehicle back towards the right, causing the tanker to roll over. As the tanker rolled and slid it struck the rear of the stopped civilian vehicle before coming to a rest (**Figure E.1**).

The driver of Tanker 13 was trapped in the vehicle and required extrication. He received minor injuries and was treated and released from the hospital. The civilian driver was uninjured. The fire apparatus was totally destroyed (**Figure E.2**).

Lessons Learned From This Incident

In reviewing the details of this incident, the student should recognize the following important points:

1. Fire apparatus traveling together to an emergency incident should maintain a safe following distance between the vehicles. Most sources, including NFPA, IFSTA, and the United States Fire Administration recommend that emergency vehicles traveling together maintain a distance of 300 to 500 feet between the vehicles. This reduces the chance of emergency vehicles running into each other and also allows room for evasive maneuvers should a civilian vehicle pull back into the lane of travel after being passed by the first emergency vehicle.

2. Fire department tankers should have a minimum of two personnel riding on the apparatus. In their report titled *Safe Operation of Fire Tankers*, the United States Fire Administration recommends that at least one other person should accompany the driver of a fire department tanker. The second person should be responsible for operating warning devices, communications equipment, and any other devices that would require the driver to take their attention away from watching the road in front of the vehicle. In this incident the driver was alone and operating dashboard controls when he noticed (too late) that the ambulance in front of him had slowed/stopped. The combination of this deflected attention and insufficient following distance caused this serious collision.

3. Wearing a seatbelt can prevent serious injuries when the apparatus is involved in a collision. In this incident the driver of Tanker 13 was wearing his seatbelt. Despite the fact that the apparatus rolled one complete revolution and was totally destroyed, the driver received minor injuries that did not require hospitalization.



Figure E.1



Figure E.2