



# Incident Management Response Plan

Hampton Roads Highway Incident Management Committee

## Multi-Jurisdictional Memorandum of Understanding

### Highway Incident Management Plan

This memorandum of understanding is made this 9th day of December, 1999, by and between all federal, state, county and city responders to a highway incident in the greater Hampton Roads area (represented by the signatures listed).

The purpose of this plan is to set forth guidance for response to a highway incident in this multi-jurisdictional area.

It is understood that each responding jurisdictional agency has its own set of operating guidelines and procedures. It is also agreed that each jurisdictional agency recognizes and will implement the Unified Command System should a situation occur that requires such action. This will be accomplished without any agency losing or abdicating authority, responsibility or accountability.

By way of signature, agency representatives agree to implement the plan through training of their personnel.

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Signature  
Title  
Agency/Department

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Date

## Definitions

Greater Hampton Roads area	<p>Includes the following counties:</p> <p>James City, Accomack, York, Isle of Wight</p> <p>Includes the following cities:</p> <p>Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, Williamsburg</p>
Incident	<p>Any situation that impedes the continual flow of traffic. Examples include but are not limited to crashes, hazardous materials, fire, medical emergency, etc.</p>
Incident Commander	<p>Role assigned to the first emergency responder arriving at the scene of any highway incident. This role will change as the incident changes.</p>
Responders	<p>Personnel on the scene of any incident.</p>
Traffic Control Devices	<p>Items that are used to warn and alert drivers of potential hazards and to guide or direct motorists safely past the hazard(s). May include cones, flares, and signal lights. Advance warning arrow panels (arrow boards) are intended to supplement other traffic control devices.</p>
Incident Safety Zone	<p>That portion of the roadway that is closed to traffic and set aside for responders, equipment and material.</p>

### **Online Video of HRHIM Plan @**

Center for Transportation Studies, University of Virginia

[http://cts.virginia.edu/incident\\_mgmt\\_training.htm](http://cts.virginia.edu/incident_mgmt_training.htm)

## Preface

The primary objectives for any operation at the scene of a highway incident are preserving life, preventing injury to any responding personnel, protecting property and the restoration of traffic flow.

Managing a highway incident and any related problems is a team effort. Incidents range from minor to major with many agencies involved. Each responding agency has an important role to play in the management of an effective incident operation. It is not a question of "Who is in charge?" but "Who is in charge of what?" Each agency present has a part to play. Although the responsibilities may vary from one incident to the next, following are normal practices for agencies in the Greater Hampton Roads area.

**Virginia State Police (VSP)** - The Virginia State Police are the responsible party for responding to traffic incidents on the interstate system. They work in tandem with the respective federal, county or city police departments, depending on the circumstances in each situation. The ranking VSP officer is responsible for the incident scene, unless a fire or hazardous material spill is involved; in which case the ranking fire official is responsible.

**Virginia Department of Transportation** - Will provide traffic management support, when needed, at an incident scene. VDOT is often relied upon for equipment and personnel for incident support and related activities.

**Federal, State, City and County Law Enforcement Agencies** - These agencies may respond to highway incidents in their jurisdiction, depending on the need, availability of personnel, and nature of the incident.

**Fire and Rescue Agencies (EMS)** - The determination of the need for fire and rescue services is normally made by the reporting party (call for service). Fire apparatus often respond as a protective measure and additional support.

**Towing and Recovery** - Will provide the necessary apparatus required for moving and/or removing disabled vehicles from the roadway.

Care of the injured, protection of the public, safety of emergency responders and clearance of traffic lanes should all be priority concerns of the incident commander operating at the scene of a highway incident. It is extremely important that all activities that block traffic lanes be concluded as quickly as possible and that the flow of traffic be allowed to resume promptly.

When traffic flow is heavy, small savings in incident scene clearance time can greatly reduce traffic backups and the probability secondary incidents. Restoring the roadway to normal or to as near normal as soon as possible creates a safer environment for the motorists and emergency responders. Additionally, it improves the public's perception

of the agencies involved and reduces the time and dollar loss resulting from the incident.

## Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to provide incident responders with a uniform guide for safe operations at incidents occurring on the highway system. It is intended to serve as a guideline for decision making and can be modified by the incident responders as necessary to address existing incident conditions.

The most common occurrence and the one that has the greatest potential for an unfavorable outcome to personnel are emergency operations at the scene of a vehicle accident. Each year, many significant incidents occur on roadways. Whether it is the interstate highway or a secondary road, the potential for injury or death to any responder is overwhelming.

## Response

Emergency responders need to operate safely, making every effort to minimize the risk of injury to themselves and those who use the highway system. Responders operating in the emergency mode need to operate warning devices and follow the guidelines specific to their standard operating procedures.

Warning Lights: Emergency-warning lights should remain operational while responding and, when necessary, while working at incidents.

Headlights: Apparatus headlights should be operational during all responses and incidents regardless of the time of the day. Caution should be used to avoid blinding oncoming traffic while on the scene.

Siren & Air horn: When responding as an emergency vehicle, appropriate warning devices will be utilized in accordance with state law.

Median strip crossovers marked "Authorized Vehicles Only" shall be used for turning around and crossing to the other travel lanes **ONLY** when emergency vehicles can complete the turn without obstructing the flow of traffic in either travel direction or all traffic movement has stopped. Under no circumstances shall crossovers be utilized for routine (non-emergency) changes in travel direction.

Use of U-turn access points in "jersey" barriers on limited access highways is extremely hazardous and shall be utilized only when the situation is necessary for immediate lifesaving measures.

Response on access ramps shall be in the normal direction of travel, unless the incident commander on the scene can confirm that oncoming traffic has been stopped and no civilian vehicles will be encountered on the ramp.

Shoulder lanes will be used **only** by emergency vehicles/apparatus. Emergency support vehicles are authorized to use the shoulder lanes only when directed or authorized to do so by the incident commander.

## **Arrival**

The first emergency responder arriving to the scene of any highway incident will assume the role of incident commander. The individual assuming that role is subject to change as additional responders arrive at the scene.

If traffic control assistance is required at an incident scene, the incident commander will request that contact be made to TMS Control (Smart Traffic Center) at 757 424-9903. By providing a brief description of the situation, VDOT personnel may be dispatched, if not already en route to assist.

Standard practice will be to position response vehicles in such a manner as to ensure a safe work area. This may be difficult to accomplish at incidents on secondary and one-lane roads. Position emergency response vehicles in such a manner as to provide the safest area possible.

## **Parking of Response Vehicles**

Providing a safe incident scene for emergency responders is a priority at every emergency incident. However, consideration must be given to keeping as many traffic lanes open as possible. Except for those vehicles needed in the operation and those used as a shield for the incident scene, other response vehicles should be parked together ("staging area"). As a matter of routine, the parking of response vehicles should be on one side of the roadway. Parking should be on either the shoulder or median area, if one exists, but not both. Parking response vehicles completely out of available travel lanes greatly assists in the movement of traffic. If not needed to illuminate the scene, drivers should remember to turn vehicle headlights off when parked at incidents.

Recovery personnel are to report to the incident commander who will then direct them to a safe or "staging" area.

## **On Scene Actions**

The proper spotting and placement of emergency apparatus is the joint responsibility of the driver and incident commander. The proper positioning of emergency response vehicles at the scene of an incident assures other responding resources of easy access, a safe working area and helps to contribute to an effective overall operation. The safety of everyone on the scene is foremost while they are operating, both in emergency and non-emergency situations.

An incident safety zone shall be established, allowing fire and rescue units to position in close proximity of the incident. The responding fire apparatus should be placed back some distance from the incident, making use of it as a safety shield blocking only those travel lanes necessary. In the event that a motorist enters the incident safety zone, the fire apparatus will act as a barrier; and, in the unlikely event that the fire apparatus is moved upon impact, it will travel away from the incident safety zone.

Before exiting any emergency response vehicle at an incident, personnel should check to ensure that traffic has stopped to avoid the possibility of being stuck by a passing vehicle. Personnel should remember, to look down to ensure that debris on the roadway will not become an obstacle, resulting in a personal injury. All members shall be in appropriate clothing or traffic vests as the situation indicates.

As soon as possible, the initial responding unit should position traffic control devices. Traffic cones assist in channeling traffic away from an incident. Traffic control devices shall be used whenever responding vehicles are parked on or near any road surface. Placement of traffic control devices shall begin closest to the incident, working toward oncoming traffic. Taking into consideration the possibility of hazardous materials, traffic control devices shall be placed diagonally across the roadway and around the incident. This assists in establishing an incident safety zone. When placing traffic control devices, care should be exercised to avoid being struck by oncoming traffic.

The speed of traffic and travel distance must be considered when establishing an incident safety zone. The following chart provides an example of how traffic control devices are to be placed.

Posted Speed Limit	Distance
35 MPH	100 ft.
45 MPH	150 ft.
55 MPH	200 ft.
> 55 MPH	250 ft.>

When channeling traffic around an incident, traffic control devices shall also be used in front of the incident if those devices and the manpower are available.

It is possible to channel traffic around a curve; hill or ramp provided the first device is placed such that the oncoming driver is made aware of imminent danger.

## **Emergency Vehicle Visibility at Night**

Glare vision and recovery is the amount of time required to recover from the effects of glare once a light source passes through the eye. It takes at least six seconds, going from light to dark and three seconds from dark to light for vision to recover.

At 50 miles per hour, the distance traveled during a second is approximately 75 feet. Thus, in six seconds, the vehicle has traveled 450 feet before the driver has fully regained night vision. This is extremely important to remember when operating on roadways at night.

The headlights on stopped vehicles can temporarily blind motorists that are approaching an incident scene. Drivers of oncoming vehicles will experience the problem of glare recovery. This essentially means individuals are driving by the emergency scene - blind. The wearing of protective clothing and/or traffic vests will not help this "blinded" motorist see emergency responders standing in the roadway. Studies show that at two and a half car lengths away from a vehicle with its headlights on, the opposing driver is completely blinded.

Low beam headlights can be used to light an emergency scene using care as to light only the immediate area. Complacency at an incident scene can be hazardous.

## **Clearing Traffic Lanes**

When outside of a vehicle on a major roadway, both civilian and emergency responders are in an extremely dangerous environment. Therefore, it is imperative to take every precaution to protect all responders and those involved at incident scenes. Although positioning emergency response vehicles to serve as a shield for work areas is a prudent practice, we must remember that reducing and/or shutting down traffic lanes creates other problems and safety concerns. Therefore, it is critical when operational phases are completed that emergency response vehicles be repositioned to allow traffic to flow on as many open lanes as possible.

Remember that unnecessarily closing or keeping traffic lanes closed greatly increases the risk of a secondary incident occurring in the resulting traffic backup. Five minutes of stopped traffic will cause a 15-minute delay in travel time.

Management of incidents on the interstate system and local roadways requires the expertise and resources of emergency responders, as defined. While the safety of emergency services personnel is of paramount concern for the incident commander, the flow of traffic must be taken into consideration at all times. The closing of roadways disrupts traffic throughout the area as well as having a significant impact on businesses throughout the region.

Keeping the safety of all personnel in mind, and coordinating the needs with other emergency services, the incident commander should begin to open any closed lanes as soon as practical.