



Firefighter Fatality Investigation

**Firefighter William Scott Tanksley
Dallas Fire-Rescue Department**

Investigation FFF FY 14-02

Dallas, Texas
February 10, 2014



The subsequent investigation of this incident provides valuable information to the fire service by examining the lessons learned, to prevent future loss of life and property.

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Acknowledgements

The Texas State Fire Marshal wishes to thank the following entities for their cooperation and assistance in the investigation of this incident and the preparation of this report:

Dallas Fire-Rescue Department
Dallas Police Department
Dallas Medical Examiner's Office
Schertz Fire Rescue, David Covington, Fire Chief

Executive Summary

On February 10, 2014, at approximately 8:30 p.m., Dallas Fire-Rescue Department Firefighter William Scott Tanksley, a 40-year-old member of the department, was struck by a motor vehicle while working the scene of a multiple vehicle accident. Firefighter Tanksley, along with other Dallas Fire-Rescue units, responded to a multiple vehicle accident on an icy overpass. While Firefighter Tanksley was assessing the conditions and checking for injured motorists, the driver of another vehicle lost control on the icy roadway and struck Firefighter Tanksley, causing him to fall off the bridge to the roadway below. Firefighter Tanksley was transported to Methodist Dallas Medical Center but succumbed to the injuries. An autopsy conducted by the Dallas County Medical Examiner's Office revealed the cause of death was blunt force trauma.

An investigation by the State Fire Marshal's Office offers the following recommendation to fire departments to incorporate into department policies and procedures.

"Fire Departments should provide training that reinforces the importance for all personnel to follow sound safety practices during emergency operations."

This report is to honor Firefighter William Scott Tanksley by taking the lessons learned from this tragic incident so that others may not perish.



Firefighter William Scott Tanksley, 40
Dallas Fire-Rescue Department

Introduction

The State Fire Marshal's Office was notified by the Dallas Fire-Rescue Department that Firefighter William Scott Tanksley was fatally injured while operating on a multiple motor vehicle accident scene on February 10, 2014.

The SFMO commenced the firefighter fatality investigation under the authority of Texas Government Code § 417.0075.

- (a) *In this section, the term "firefighter" includes an individual who performs fire suppression duties for a governmental entity or volunteer fire department.*
- (b) *If a firefighter dies in the line of duty or if the firefighter's death occurs in connection with an on-duty incident in this state, the state fire marshal shall investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of the firefighter, including any factors that may have contributed to the death of the firefighter.*
- (c) *In conducting an investigation under this section, the state fire marshal has the same powers as those granted to the state fire marshal under Section 417.007. The state fire marshal will coordinate the investigative efforts of local government officials and may enlist established fire service organizations and private entities to assist in the investigation.*
- (d) *The state fire marshal will release a report concerning an investigation conducted under this section on completion of the investigation.*
- (e) *Not later than October 31 of each year, the state fire marshal will deliver to the commissioner a detailed report about the findings of each investigation conducted under this section in the preceding year.*

- (f) *Information gathered in an investigation conducted under this section is subject to Section 552.108.*
- (g) *The authority granted to the state fire marshal under this section will not limit in any way the authority of the county or municipal fire marshal to conduct the county or municipal fire marshal's own investigation into the death of a firefighter within the county or municipal fire marshal's jurisdiction.*

Assistant Texas State Fire Marshal Kelly Kistner assigned Investigator Brian Fine to investigate the firefighter fatality. Dallas Fire-Rescue Department and Dallas Police Department staff assisted throughout the investigation.

Dallas Fire-Rescue Department (DFR)

Dallas' first firefighting unit, "Company Number One," was formed on July 4, 1872, as an all-volunteer department. In 1885 the department became fully paid. In 1972 the department assumed the responsibility for Emergency Ambulance Service. Today it remains a paid department with 1800 uniformed personnel. DFR has 57 fire stations, but currently, 56 stations are in operation, with one undergoing renovation. DFR operates 80 front line heavy apparatus, including 56 fire engines and 23 ladder trucks. DFR also has four airport crash trucks and the ability to respond USAR and Haz-Mat vehicles as needed. DFR has nine battalion districts, and covers an area of 356 square miles with a population of 1.3 million residents. In fiscal year 2013, DFR had 221,803 Fire/EMS incidents dispatched and monitored.

Recruitment and Training

Dallas Fire-Rescue recruiters are responsible for processing all uniformed trainee fire rescue officer (TFRO) and trainee fire prevention officer (TFPO) candidates for employment. Recruiters oversee an eight-week training and mentoring program that prepares TFRO applicants for the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT).

Upon successful completion of the applicant process, firefighter recruits attend training at the Dodd J. Miller Training Center, located at 5000 Dolphin Road. The Training Center was completed in 1987 and contains 17,000 square feet of classrooms, an apparatus room, and offices. In addition, there is a driving course, a flashover chamber, a railroad tank car, a seven-story commercial simulator, a three-story open drill tower, and residence simulator.

The Training Division is tasked with delivery of recruit training in accordance with the Texas Commission on Fire Protection's recommended curriculum. Dallas Fire-Rescue exceeds the minimum recommended hours for structural fire training because of the complexity of their large urban department. The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School partnered with DFR to provide EMS training so that new employees can function as firefighter/paramedics during emergency response work.

The Training Division is also responsible for in-service training of firefighters during training modules delivered at the Fire Training Center. Fire officers from various ranks within the department also receive fire officer certification training. This training is designed to assist the department's officers with development of leadership, fire tactics and other skills essential to their respective ranks.

Dallas Fire-Rescue has a Wellness Program designed to provide a complete physical evaluation of each member assigned to the Emergency Response Bureau. The physical evaluates each member's medical condition and physical fitness level. The purpose of the program is intended to reduce injuries, provide early detection of serious medical conditions, and to promote better overall health and fitness. The ultimate goal of the program is to ensure firefighters are prepared physically to do their jobs safely and effectively.

William Tanksley was hired May 26, 1999. Firefighter Tanksley began his assignment at Station 12 in December 2012. Firefighter Tanksley held an Advanced Firefighter Certification from the Texas Commission on Fire Protection and was to take the Driver Engineer exam in April 2014.

Incident Investigation/Timeline of Activities

The following information is provided by the State Fire Marshal's Office, Dallas Fire-Rescue Department, Dallas Police Department, City of Dallas and the Dallas Medical Examiner's Office. Times noted are approximated from interviews, statements, and incident reports.

February 10, 2014

Weather conditions are cloudy and misting with temperature of 30°, wind chill 21°, dew point 28°, and humidity of 92%.¹

- 19:44:02** Dallas 911 Dispatch receives a call of a motor vehicle accident on Spur 408 northbound at LBJ Freeway eastbound. No injuries are reported at this time.
- 19:59-20:10** Dallas 911 receives multiple calls reporting several accidents at this location. One caller reports as many as 10 vehicles involved in one of the accidents. One caller reports the conditions as very slick and icy. Dallas Fire-Rescue is dispatched.
- 20:11:08** DFR Engine 12 (EN12), Truck 33 (T33) and Engine 50 (EN50) are enroute to the call.

¹www.wunderground.com

20:17:12 EN12 arrives on scene and reports northbound Clark Road over bridge is shut down due to a multi-car accident and requests that the Dallas Police Department (DPD) shut down the bridge's northbound and southbound lanes. EN12 cancels T33.

EN12 Driver (Trevino) positions the apparatus to block the northbound lanes.

EN12 Officer (Bratton) assumes Command and remains with the apparatus to coordinate incoming resources.

EN12 Firefighter 1 (FF1), Tanksley, proceeds onto the northbound side of the bridge to assess and assist victims.

EN12 Firefighter 2 (FF2), Little, places flares on the roadway to the rear of EN12 to divert traffic from entering the bridge.

20:19:54 Rescue 50 (RE50) arrives on scene and takes a position in front of EN50. After the RE50 crew is advised that there are no injuries, RE50 relocates to the northbound side behind EN12 and T33.

20:24:55 Command requests a shutdown of southbound Clark Road over IH-20. T33 is canceled but arrives on scene to assist and is in a blocking position behind EN12.

Engine 50 (EN50) arrives and is positioned on the southbound side of Spur 408/Clark Road near the eastbound IH-20 off ramp. Per the crew of EN50, several vehicles have lost control in this area due to the ice on the roadway.

Unknown Firefighter Tanksley starts assessing the situation on the northbound side of the bridge. Tanksley nears the center of the bridge where a vehicle on the southbound side has lost control and has significant damage. Tanksley crosses the center divider wall into the open southbound lanes and advises the driver to stay in his vehicle. Tanksley does not communicate to command or other firefighters that he is crossing the center divider into open lanes of traffic. A

second motorist, traveling southbound on the bridge, loses control of their vehicle, spins around, and the rear of the vehicle strikes Tanksley. The vehicle continues moving while carrying Tanksley on the trunk lid until it impacts the side wall. The firefighter continues over the edge of the bridge and falls to the roadway below.

T33 crew goes onto the bridge to assess the situation and assist motorists. T33 crew walks the length of the bridge but does not see Tanksley. T33 Captain Wise has T33 FF1 (Womack) go to the north end of the bridge and lay down flares to stop traffic on the southbound side of the bridge. T33 Captain finds a Dallas Fire-Rescue handheld radio on the roadway.

EN12 FF2 completes putting out flares and proceeds onto the bridge to assist Tanksley. FF2 does not locate Tanksley but makes face to face contact with the T33 Captain on the bridge near the middle. T33 Captain shows FF2 the radio and they see what appears to be blood on the radio.

20:30:26 A 911 caller reports a male firefighter in uniform is down at the accident scene.

20:31:02 A second 911 caller reports a male is lying on the ground and is injured.

20:32:32 Another 911 call is received reporting a firefighter has fallen and is injured.

Several more 911 calls are received over the next few minutes reporting a firefighter is down. The specific location is not given.

20:32:54 Command is advised by Dispatch of reports that a firefighter is down. Command states he will investigate. Command requests a PAR (Personnel Accountability Report) from all units on scene. There is no response from Tanksley.

Over the next several minutes, fire and police units on scene begin to search for the missing firefighter. One group goes down the embankment to IH-20 to conduct a search. While crossing IH-20 they are flagged down by a motorist on

the southbound Spur 408 ramp, which is elevated above IH-20. The motorist states she is with the down firefighter.

Unknown Truck 50 arrives on scene on the north side of the bridge and blocks traffic for southbound Spur 408 entering the bridge. The T50 officer hears the reports of a firefighter down and takes the two T50 firefighters to search. The T50 officer and firefighters go down the embankment on the north side of IH-20 to search.

20:35:02 Battalion Chief 6 (BC06) Dower is advised of a possible down firefighter and is assigned to the incident.

20:40:42 The location of the down firefighter is broadcast on the radio. Due to the location and road conditions, it takes several minutes for other firefighters to get to Tanksley. The searchers on IH-20 locate both of the down firefighter's boots on the west bound side of IH-20 near the median.

20:42:12 EN50 crew reports they have located the down firefighter. EN50 crew is able to identify the down firefighter as Tanksley.

20:43:33 EN50 requests the CareFlight helicopter for transport. At **20:46:20** they are advised CareFlight is unable to respond due to the weather conditions.

20:45:40 RE50 arrives and Tanksley is transported to Methodist Dallas Medical Center.

Tanksley was transported to Methodist Dallas Medical Center, where he was pronounced at 21:20, February 10, 2014. An autopsy conducted by the Dallas County Medical Examiner revealed the cause of death as blunt force trauma.

Information obtained during interviews with responders indicated that the weather caused road conditions to deteriorate rapidly. Icy roadway conditions were developing with the bridges and overpasses already covered with ice. Operators of the responding apparatus indicated road conditions were slippery and they had to respond at reduced speeds. Responders who walked onto the bridge reported footing as being poor due to the ice.

Diamond-shaped warning signs indicating “Watch for ice on bridge” were present on both the north and south sides of the bridge.

The first arriving apparatus, Engine 12, blocked traffic by using their apparatus and flares, providing a “protected area” for firefighters to operate on the northbound side of the bridge. As more resources arrived, both directions of the bridge were shut down to traffic. At the time Tanksley was struck, additional apparatus had not arrived to shut down the southbound traffic. Tanksley was operating alone and did not communicate his intent to cross the center divider wall to the Incident Commander.

The investigation conducted by the Dallas Police Department indicated a 2009 maroon Dodge Charger (Unit 2) struck the right concrete wall on the bridge and spun around, where it was facing north on the southbound outside shoulder. Tanksley crossed the center wall and told the driver to remain in the vehicle. A 2007 gold Cadillac CTS (Unit 1) was traveling south on the bridge and saw Unit 2 and hit the brakes. Unit 1 then lost control and spun, striking Tanksley. Unit 1 then continued moving, carrying Tanksley on the back of the vehicle until impacting the west side of the bridge. The momentum sent Tanksley over the side. Tanksley landed on the eastbound IH-20 on ramp, 56 feet below.

The Dallas Police Department referred the accident case to the Dallas County Grand Jury. On July 16, 2014, the grand jury heard the case against the driver who struck Tanksley with his vehicle. The Grand Jury returned a “no-bill” and found insufficient cause to indict the driver of any criminal charges.

Firefighter Tanksley was wearing a bunker jacket, bunker pants and bunker boots at the time of the incident. While the PPE itself was not a factor in this incident, the items were photographed and the condition documented at the DFR Training Center. Reflective striping was present on the bunker coat and in good condition. Tanksley left his helmet on EN12. Tanksley’s radio was inspected at the Training Center by the investigative team; it was powered on and determined to be on tactical channel 12, the assigned channel for this incident.



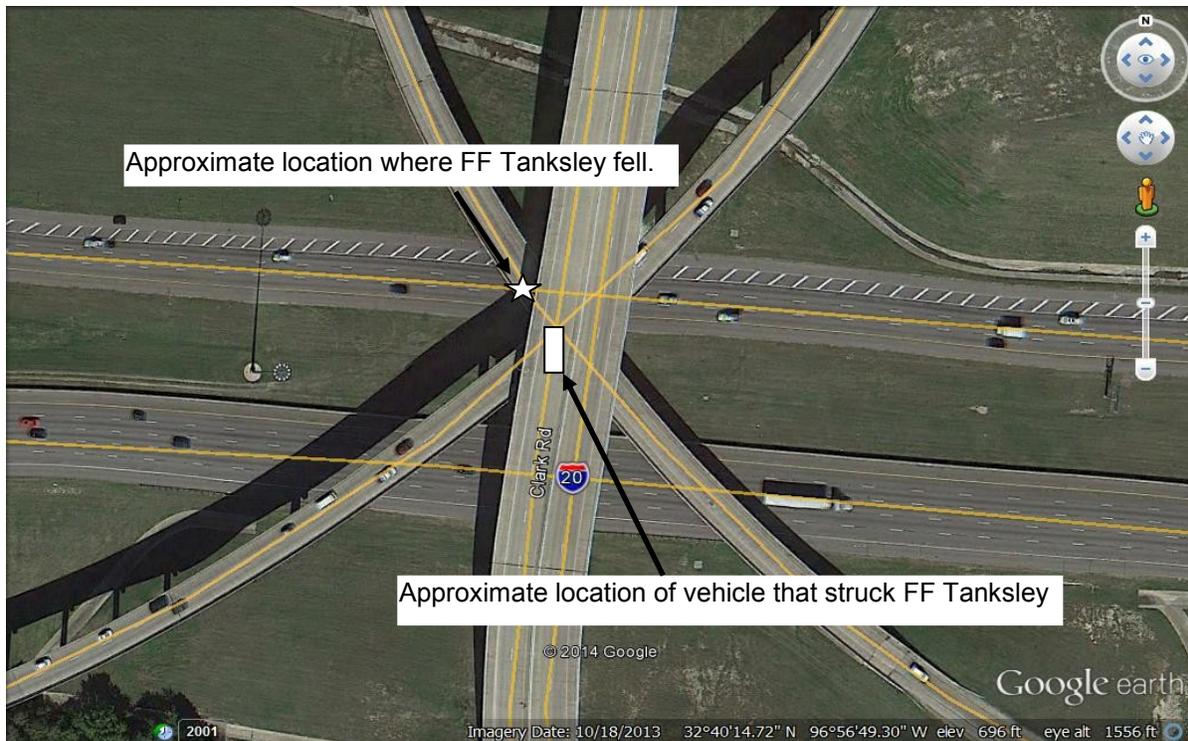
Unit 2 and location Firefighter Tanksley was struck.



View of area where Firefighter Tanksley was located.



Firefighter Tanksley's flashlight was found in rear seat.



Photograph of Spur 408 and IH-20 interchange. (Courtesy of Google Earth).



Photograph of southbound Spur 408 bridge. (Courtesy of Google Earth).



Photograph of southbound Spur 408 to eastbound IH-20. Location Tanksley found. (Courtesy of Google Earth).



*Photograph of southbound Spur 408 interchange from IH-20 looking east.
(Courtesy of Google Earth).*

Findings and Recommendations

Recommendations are based upon nationally recognized consensus standards and safety practices for the fire service. All fire department personnel should know and understand nationally recognized consensus standards, and all fire departments should create, update and follow SOGs and SOPs to ensure effective, efficient and safe firefighting operations.

The State Fire Marshal's Office offers these findings and recommendations to reduce the risk of injuries related to operating on the scene of a motor vehicle accident or other operations near the roadway.

Finding 1

Firefighter Tanksley was operating alone while checking the status of the occupants of the involved vehicles. Firefighter Tanksley then crossed from the northbound lanes of traffic into the southbound lanes to a location outside the protected work area without a Lookout to warn of approaching traffic.

Recommendation 1a

Firefighter Tanksley crossed over the median barrier after he apparently witnessed a single-car accident. Use of a Lookout might have alerted Tanksley to the danger in time for him to react. All department personnel should emphasize the importance of personnel safety. Additional training for department personnel on operating within established SOPs and nationally accepted safety practices is recommended.

Dallas Fire Rescue Standard Operating Procedure 123.000 Traffic Incident Management Section D 4: Establishing and maintaining at least one Lookout to closely monitor approaching traffic and stand by with a portable radio microphone in hand to immediately warn other members of impending danger.

Firefighters are customarily programmed to “move to act” when an emergency occurs. The instinct to assist a motorist immediately following an accident is difficult to suppress. However, working in an unprotected environment puts firefighters at risk and must be accompanied by acute situation awareness to include lookouts and escape paths. Crossing over a barrier to work an incident in an unprotected work area should be highly discouraged.

It is not known why Tanksley crossed the barrier to an unprotected area. What should be emphasized here is the fact that *“the safety of responders operating at an emergency scene is a key concern and one of the primary skills that the fire fighter must develop” (NFPA 1001, Standard for Firefighter Professional Qualifications, 2013 Edition, Appendix A 5.3.3).*

The responding units appeared to establish a safe work area at the primary incident site. When responding to traffic incidents, establishing a safe work area is of primary concern. Firefighters shall *“establish and operate in work areas at emergency scenes, given protective equipment, traffic and scene control devices, structure fire and roadway emergency scenes, traffic hazards and downed electrical wires, an assignment, and SOPs, so that procedures are followed, protective equipment is worn, protected work areas are established as directed using traffic and scene control devices, and the fire fighter performs assigned tasks only in established, protected work areas” (NFPA 1001, Standard for Firefighter Professional Qualifications, 2013 Edition 5.3.3).*

Recommendation 1b

When operating at traffic incidents, the Strategic Highways Safety Program 2 (SHRP2) of the National Incident Management Training Program has the following best practices:

- Never trust approaching traffic in either direction.
- Never turn your back to approaching traffic.
- Look before you move.
- Plan an escape route.
- Don't allow yourself to get tunnel vision, maintain a view of the "big picture."
- Maintain knowledge of current weather conditions and how they may affect driving and/or visibility.

When operating on the roadway, federal law requires that fire department standard operating procedures be in compliance with the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, or an accepted state alternative. According to the *Texas Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, a traffic incident management area is an area of a highway where temporary traffic controls are installed, as authorized by a public authority or the official having jurisdiction of the roadway, in response to a road user incident or other unplanned incident. It is a type of Temporary Traffic Control (TTC) zone and extends from the first warning device (such as a sign, light, or cone) to the last TTC device or to a point where vehicles return to the original lane alignment. The primary function of TTC is to provide for the reasonably safe and effective movement of road users through or around TTC zones while reasonably protecting road users, workers, responders to traffic incidents, and equipment. Of equal importance to the public traveling through the TTC zone is the safety of workers performing the many varied tasks within the work space (TMUTCD 6A.01).

Finding 2

Firefighter Tanksley did not communicate to the Incident Commander his intention to cross the median barrier into open lanes of traffic.

Recommendation 2

Use of NIMS/ICS requires communication by responders to the Incident Commander to allow for effective coordination of resources and situational awareness. Fire departments should provide training that reinforces the importance for all personnel to follow sound safety practices and the incorporation of NIMS/ICS during emergency operations.

The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazards incident management approach that:

- Allows for the integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure.
- Enables a coordinated response among various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private.
- Establishes common processes for planning and managing resources.

Incident Command Considerations

Command Structure - The goals of ICS are safety of responders and others, achievement of tactical objectives, and the efficient use of resources. A single command was established to mitigate the multiple accidents that had occurred in both the northbound and southbound lanes of Spur 408. While in many circumstances this would be reasonable and not beyond the span of control, given the icy conditions, decreased visibility, and growing footprint of the incident scene due to secondary accidents, one should consider establishing divisions in such circumstances.

Unified command with law enforcement is a recommended practice in the SHRP2 National Incident Management Training Program. In this incident, the Fire Incident Commander requested, upon arrival at the scene, that the southbound lanes of Spur 408 be closed. Unified Command with Law Enforcement could have helped verify that this task had been accomplished.

Safety Officer - The Incident Commander is typically the initial Safety Officer at roadway incidents, as appeared to be the case in this incident. As the incident becomes more complex, it is beneficial to assign a Safety Officer to maintain lookout and situational awareness, while informing Incident Command of changing circumstances.

Radio Procedures - Law enforcement appeared to have knowledge that the firefighter was down prior to the Fire Incident Commander's knowledge of such. Unified Command enhances communication among agencies. In addition, firefighters should always update the Incident Commander whenever conditions change, such as when new accidents are witnessed, or when relocating from a previously assigned position. Interoperable communication, along with Unified Command, can greatly enhance awareness of changing situations as well as provide updates on requested lane closures.

Finding 3

Firefighter Tanksley was wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) with the exception of a helmet, and he was utilizing a handheld flashlight.

Recommendation 3a

Firefighters must wear their full complement of personal protective equipment including the helmet. *DFR Standard Operating Procedure 123.000 Traffic Incident Management. Section F #6 and #9* states a vest and helmet **must** be worn. *Section F #7 and #8* allow a firefighting coat to be worn instead of the vest.

Dallas Fire Rescue Standard Operating Procedure 123.000 Traffic Incident Management Personnel Safety - Benchmarks Section F

- 6. When operating in or near moving traffic, protective clothing, safety vest and helmet must be donned prior to exiting the apparatus.*
- 7. During normal daylight lighting conditions, don helmet and the safety vest or firefighting coat.*
- 8. During dusk to dawn operations or when ambient light is reduced, don structural Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The safety vest may be worn in lieu of the firefighting coat.*
- 9. Rescue, staff and assigned trainee personnel must don a safety vest.*

The 2009 Federal Highway Administration's *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD) states NFPA-compliant turnout gear is acceptable when exposed to flame, fire and or hazardous materials. Clarification of the SOP to define the appropriate reflective safety apparel for responses is recommended.

In November 2008, 23 CFR part 634 regulation was incorporated into the 2009 edition of the Federal Highway Administration's *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*. The MUTCD requires all workers on or near the roadway right-of-way to wear high-visibility safety apparel that meets performance Class 2 or 3 of ANSI 107-2004 or equivalent revisions.

ANSI/ISEA 107 (American National Standards Institute/International Safety Equipment Association)

The MUTCD cites two special cases.

1. In addition to ANSI 107, law enforcement personnel and other emergency responders may comply by using ANSI 207-2006 garments.
2. Firefighters may use retro-reflective turnout gear compliant to NFPA standards when exposed to flame, fire, heat and/or hazardous materials during emergency operations.

Recommendation 3b

All firefighters and personnel operating on the fireground should be empowered to prevent unsafe actions.

16 Life Safety Initiatives

Four of the 16 Life Safety Initiatives state:

1. *Define and advocate the need for a cultural change within the fire service relating to safety; incorporating leadership, management, supervision, accountability and personal responsibility.*
2. *Enhance the personal and organizational accountability for health and safety throughout the fire service.*
3. *Focus greater attention on the integration of risk management with incident management at all levels, including strategic, tactical, and planning responsibilities.*
4. *All firefighters must be empowered to stop unsafe practices.*

The full 16 Life Safety Initiatives can be found at <http://www.lifesafetyinitiatives.com/initiatives.html>.

Participate in the “Courage to be Safe” (CTBS) program that emphasizes the message “Everyone Goes Home®.” Information on the CTBS program is available online at <http://www.everyonegoeshome.com>.

Fire departments should promote and emphasize personnel safety and personal accountability at all times, even when not on duty.

Appendix: Document Log

Document Number	Source	Description/Assignments
1	DPD	Incident Dispatch records
2	DPD	Dallas Police Accident Investigation Report
3	DFR	DFR SOP 123.00 Traffic Incident Management
4	ME	Dallas Co. Medical Examiner Report
5	DFR	Firefighter Interviews
6	WEB	ANSI/ISEA
7	NFFF	16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives
8	WEB	Weather Information