

# Motorists should **respect road-side emergency personnel**

By Brian Smiley, Media Relations Coordinator, Manitoba Public Insurance

On any given day in Manitoba, dedicated members of rural fire departments attend to motor vehicle crashes, providing emergency roadside assistance. These highly trained individuals are called upon to work under extremely stressful situations which can become even more dangerous due to the actions of curious motorists.

"It's paramount for passing motorists to take caution when passing an accident scene," says **Dan Thorsteinson**, long-time chief of the Selkirk Fire Department. "Some passing motorists become very distracted and rubber neck to see what's going on."

Motorists coming upon an accident scene should immediately slow down and obey instructions provided by attending emergency personnel, says **Clif Eden**, Manager of Road Safety with Manitoba Public Insurance.

Even in a minor crash with no injuries, motorists need to exercise care and caution.

"It's recommended that both drivers exchange their particulars off the road and in a safe area away from other traffic," says Eden. "Exchanging information on the roadway creates a very real potential for

injury to all parties. Safety needs to be observed at any traffic scene."

An accident scene can be very dangerous with attending police and fire vehicles on site, in addition to the men and women who are trying to save lives.

"The firefighters on the scene are completely focused on doing their jobs," says Thorsteinson, who has been a firefighter in Selkirk for more than 25 years. "The firefighters are working on life-saving equipment (jaws of life), getting equipment from the trucks or attending to injured people. In many ways the crash scene is organized chaos."


The AMM works very closely with the province's volunteer fire departments. Adhering to road-side safety is a priority for not only the firefighters, but police and other motorists.

"Municipalities have become increasingly concerned for the safety of firefighters while they are attending accident scenes," says **Doug Dobrowski**, President of the AMM.

"These situations are stressful enough for our staff without being compromised by curious motorists. We sincerely hope drivers will take care when passing a crash scene, for everyone's safety."

## Some safety tips for motorists to remember:

- When you hear an emergency siren behind you, move your vehicle to the right-side of the road and stop. Remain stopped until the emergency vehicle passes you
  - Always yield the right of way to emergency vehicles
  - If you're the first to arrive on a crash scene, park your vehicle in a safe area, ensuring it cannot be hit by passing vehicles. Immediately call 911 and be prepared to provide specific location details.
  - When passing a crash scene, obey all traffic enforcement directions. Detours around the scene will be conducted by police.
  - The law requires motorists to slow down and proceed with caution when passing emergency vehicles. When traveling on a multiple-lane road, motorists must change lanes when passing emergency vehicles.
- "An accident scene is very dangerous," says Thorsteinson. "All steps are taken to minimize traffic around the scene and ensure emergency responders can work safely."

For more information about traffic safety at a crash scene Manitobans are encouraged to go to <http://www.mpi.mb.ca/>. 

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Another issue AMM is working on is ensuring proper training and compensation is available for traffic control at accident scenes. It has become the norm for municipal firefighters to be expected to do traffic control at accident scenes, yet they are not always properly trained. At the 2009 AMM Annual Convention the membership overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution allowing municipal volunteer firefighters to legally be designated as 'flagmen' for the purpose of traffic control. Paramount to this responsibility is compensation for providing this service.

The AMM has received support for ensuring proper training is offered, however the issue of compensation remains contentious.

