

# The Fight for the Traffic Unit

Part 1 of 3 in the Series

Mike DalPezzo

**Paradigms Rule!** A *paradigm* is a rule, a model, or a way of doing things. The Fire Commissioner has often referred to Pennsylvania's Fire Service as "Tradition Unimpeded by Progress". The case of Traffic Units is a perfect illustration.

It doesn't matter whether you're going to a fire or to a vehicle crash. It could be a false alarm or a medical assist. Every time you go out on a call you have an impact on traffic. Yet, only a small percentage of FDs have Traffic Units. Why?

Well, it's time for a paradigm shift. Every FD should have at least one Traffic Unit. At *least* one. It actually takes **three** vehicles to do the job right, but let's crawl before we walk. Pick a reason – there are several:

- ✓ Motorists' attitudes are less of a "you're here to help me" and more of a "who the hell are you?" A marked vehicle eliminates that.
- ✓ The courts have ruled we must use proper signs and proper sized cones, and that we must follow the rules for Temporary Traffic Control from the Manual of Uniform Traffic-Control Devices (MUTCD), Part VI. A vehicle allows us to have sufficient storage space to bring the material.
- ✓ By using a Traffic Unit instead of Fred's personal vehicle, we can ensure the material is brought to the scene.

We don't tell cops to patrol in their own vehicles, we don't have our EMTs or 'medics respond to sick people calls and take sick people to the hospital in their own cars. We don't expect the municipal worker to put up a sign along the road using his own truck, and we don't require our own firefighters to bring their own ladders, water, pumps, or other material to fire calls. Why are we requiring Fire Police use their old rusty beat-up gas-guzzlin' pickup trucks to do Fire Police work?

Some Fire Chiefs have been really progressive on this issue. One stopped the zealous discussions of getting a new tanker cold, stating they'd have a Traffic Unit before getting a new tanker. Others have stated they'd be glad to buy the equipment, but needed a certain way of getting it to the scenes – putting it into personal vehicles is out, as "Fred" may be out of town. Also, they state there's no room on the trucks for more equipment.

The bottom line is safety. Every year firefighters, Fire Police, other responders, and the public get injured or killed because of traffic – because it's not being properly controlled. Would a Fire Chief allow his firefighters to conduct an interior attack without SCBAs? Of course not. Would an ambulance respond without oxygen, bandages, or a litter? Of course not. Why then allow Fire Police to direct traffic without reflective attire, helmets, flashlights with wands, proper size reflective cones, proper advance warning signs, and other necessary equipment?

Since Fire Police function to provide safety to the responders – all of us – maybe we should give this issue the priority it deserves!