

**STARTING INCIDENT MANAGEMENT  
ON LONG ISLAND  
- AN UPDATE -**

Michael J. Cuddy  
New York State Department of Transportation

Today I would like to present an update on the New York State Department of Transportation's activities with regard to incident management and incident response on Long Island. The program has been difficult to organize primarily because of the multi-jurisdictional responsibilities for traffic and roads that is typical of densely populated suburban areas. On our most heavily travelled road, the Long Island Expressway, with average annual daily traffic volumes approaching 160,000, there are potentially dozens of separate jurisdictions and organizations to respond and assist with the management of incidents along the approximate 60 miles of expressway. They include: two county Highway Patrols responsible for law enforcement; the State Department of Transportation responsible for roadway maintenance and traffic operations; the State Department of Environmental Conservation responsible for the necessary cleanup resulting from accidents involving hazardous or toxic materials including spilled gasoline and diesel fuel; numerous volunteer fire and ambulance companies responsible for responding to accidents; private towing companies that respond on a rotational basis to accidents; and state police as well as other elements of the County Police Forces that are called upon when necessary. Each of these organizations has an important role in the response to incidents but none have seen it as "their job" or primary responsibility. Lack of a proprietary attitude in managing incidents had led to informal and ad hoc management of and response to incidents. There had been reluctance for any one organization to assume overall responsibility for directing the cleanup operation or the traffic control. Our efforts over the last few years have been toward coordinating, educating and training members of these organizations so they can work together in a cohesive, effective manner.

We have been urged on to this effort by the growing public concern with traffic congestion and the delays that result from incidents on Long Island's roadways. The local media give a great amount of coverage to the traffic jams that result from these incidents. Thus, our success or failure to respond and manage the incidents is constantly in the public's eye. The public and the media state quite clearly that these are serious occurrences, that they are a tremendous cost to the public, and must be given high priority by government. Most often heard is the comment that someone must take the first step to assume responsibility for addressing the problem in an organized planned manner.

These comments led us to raise other issues and ask ourselves other questions:

Who should be responsible? Which agency should be in charge? Does a highway maintenance supervisor tell a police officer what to do? Is a police officer expected to have the traffic engineering knowledge to help him determine how to divert traffic and develop detours? Is there any way the incidents can be cleaned up sooner? Should there be concurrence from a local

town or village before their roads are used as detours to an incident? How much of an inconvenience is it to the public? Is the public getting the service they expect? The questions are practically endless.

Our initial action was to contact the two highest level elected officials in the region, the County Executives, and suggest that the counties and the State Department of Transportation sit down and begin to answer some of these questions. The potential list of subjects and questions to be addressed at that first meeting was substantial, so it was decided that there were only two issues that need to be resolved immediately. The first was that there be total agreement that this is a serious matter and it would receive priority and attention at the highest level of state and local government. This simple statement and understanding gave the departments and bureaus of the counties and the state the license and direction to devote time and personnel to work on solutions. It served as a way to raise the consciousness of employees that is absolutely necessary before any progress in the matters can be made.

It should be noted that to get the attention of the elected officials we presented an analysis that showed it cost the public two million dollars for the first hour of a Long Island Expressway complete closure and one million dollars for the subsequent hours due to lost time, fuel and automobile operating costs. They were already aware of the public relations and political costs.

The second issue to be addressed was who would be primarily responsible for incident management and in charge during incident response. The resolution of this issue was that all parties are responsible, and all parties simply must work together. The Multi-Jurisdictional circumstances would not allow one agency to take the lead and direct other agencies of various levels of government. It was recognized that each governmental agency possessed expertise and knowledge that was unique. What was missing was the coordination of those resources in an open and mutually supportive manner. It was felt that coordination could be best achieved by heightened awareness of the importance of incident management within each agency, providing further incident management training within each agency, and by mutual understanding of each other's resources as well as the limitations to respond to incidents.

The two county executives and the Department of Transportation formed a task force with representatives from the various police departments, traffic departments, maintenance divisions, emergency service representatives, as well as environmental conservation representatives, all with an interest in incident management. The goals of the task force were to develop better coordination among organizations, become familiar with each organization's resources and personnel, and over a period of time develop standard operating procedures which would ensure that the groups work together well. In addition, each representative to the task force would bring back to his organization suggestions for additional training within his own organization that would augment and make more efficient their incident management capabilities.

The task force is now a committee that meets on a monthly basis to review incidents which have occurred and that constantly modifies agency coordination.

The Long Island incident management committee has become so institutionalized that they even had a Christmas party last year. They have become the central body that discusses general traffic management issues, - not just incident management and response.

Surprisingly, much of what has come out of those meetings since 1985 has been great improvements to incident management on Long Island at little or no cost. For example, in the Department of Transportation, we have directed that some maintenance crews start work at 4:30 a.m. and others work until 7:30 p.m. to be immediately available to assist the highway patrol in cleaning up after an incident. This has been accomplished primarily through shifting existing personnel. It results in a direct savings of approximately one hour in response time for incidents that could affect the morning or evening rush hours, because there are people standing by in the area of responsibility and it is not necessary to call them out from their homes. Also, since the complete crew is available, all the necessary resources arrive at the scene as quickly as possible.

In summary, the experience on Long Island has shown that it is very important to establish the policy that incident management is a critical activity, and have that policy announced by the highest level of local and state governments; that in a multi-jurisdictional situation a coordinated incident management effort must work if the efforts are to be successful; and that the efforts made to improve incident management are appreciated by the public and their elected representatives.

The Long Island incident management committee is presently enhancing and fine-tuning its activities primarily through the use of the integrated motorist information system capabilities that have recently come on line and are now operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.