

Don't let technology take your eyes off the big picture

Frank R. Myers

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Now more than ever, we must be more diligent about keeping our eyes on other drivers. This is obvious because, unfortunately, other drivers are on mobile devices and not looking at the road. Another factor is that sound systems some people put in their vehicles prevent hearing the sirens and air horns when we are responding on an alarm.

As drivers of fire apparatus, we need to be smarter than these people — not only for our safety, but also because the size of our vehicles can cause great harm and destruction.

I am an aviation buff, and I remember seeing a program about the Vietnam War and the F-4 Phantom pilots. They were experiencing many losses during their campaigns against an inferior, less technological fighter jet flown by the Viet Cong (MiG).

One reason was that the pilots were paying too much attention to their instruments and gauges in the cockpit due to the new missile technology the U.S. had acquired and started using. What they needed to do was get their heads up, start looking out the cockpit and go back to their dogfighting techniques and maneuvers they had trained for. Henceforth, "Top Gun" schools and the like evolved.

My point here is that we need to do the same and not worry about all the new technology, gauges, displays, etc., available now on fire apparatus. Yeah, it is OK to do an occasional

glance to look over the gauges. However, we cannot become "fixed" on them. A good time would be while the vehicle is stopped at a stop sign or traffic signal.

Have you ever looked inside a race car and seen the how the gauges are installed? Some of them are twisted or sideways when compared to the ones in your private vehicle. The reason is so that when the driver looks at them or "glances" over them when travelling at 200 mph, the indicators are all vertical when they are in their normal range.

It is a quick way to let them know that everything is OK, rather than read the exact numbers. The instant one of the needles moves off vertical, to the left or right, they know there is an issue. I am not saying you should do the same with your apparatus. But what I am saying is keep the instrument scan to a minimum.

Let the other crew members figure out the necessary details. The driver's responsibility is to arrive safely in the most expeditious manner possible. Don't get caught up in the all vehicle bells and whistles. That's what audible alarms are for. There are also visual alarms, however, they can be distracting when driving if they were to activate.

It is important if it is a safety issue or malfunction. Then, it would require stopping or pulling the vehicle out of the roadway to correct the problem. An example would be an open compartment warning.

Another thing comes to mind. With the advent of backup cameras, we should not become fixated at looking only at the LCD display in the cab. We still need to glance at our mirrors located on both sides, in conjunction with the camera.

Granted, you would probably have others assisting in the backing process, however, viewing the mirrors also covers the side of the apparatus that the camera does not see. Remember that technology can malfunction, and you may have to resort to strictly using the mirrors.

I have always been an advocate of not using any type of personal mobile device while inside the cab. Understandably, if absolutely necessary, there are such exceptions as family emergencies. The reason for discouraging mobile device use is that the more eyes we have looking out of the cab, windshield, side windows, etc., the greater advantage we have to catch something before it happens or warn the driver.

By practicing these simple rules, we become more "defensive" in our driving rather than "offensive." Believe it or not, we are probably helping those other distracted drivers, preventing further insult or injury, even though they are not paying attention.

No matter how hard we try, we must consider one thing told to me while taking a motorcycle endorsement class: "It is not necessarily what you do wrong, but what the other person does wrong." You can follow all the rules and practice all that has been taught to you, but you cannot control the other guy. Be safe, my friends.

About the Author



Frank R. Myers is a retired lieutenant with the City of Miami (Florida) Fire Rescue, where he served for 32 years. He works as a consultant for PSTrax.com, a technology service that helps fire departments across the country automate their apparatus, equipment and inventory checks.
