

Memorandum



Date: April 6, 2017

To: All Stations and Offices

From: Jeff Strickland, Division Chief
Training & Safety Division

Subject: Near Miss Report - Illegal Fuel Transporting Vehicles

Memo #: 04-17-239

The Training and Safety Division has added a new document to the "Near Miss Reports" about illegal fuel transporting vehicles. According to Miami Dade Police Department this is a growing problem in Miami-Dade County and spreading to other areas as well.

This report is intended to increase awareness of these vehicles and to remind our personnel that there is no such thing as a "routine" vehicle fire.

Thank you to Captain Bill Gustin and Miami Dade Police Department Detective Marcos Rodriguez for providing information and assisting with the creation of this report.

JS/hq

Attachment

SafetyZone
NEAR MISS REPORT
NEAR MISS – Illegal Fuel Transporting Vehicles

Miami-Dade Fire Rescue units responded to the report of and an unoccupied van fire in the parking lot of a multi-family building complex. The first arriving engine company arrived and positioned their apparatus in front of the van. Upon arrival the van was found with fire showing from the passenger window and the open driver door. The company officer made contact with a bystander on scene who advised that he was, the 911 caller but not the owner of the van and he also advised that he had no idea who the owner of the vehicle was. At this point the crew did not suspect anything more than a “typical van fire”. The unit officer ordered his crew to deploy the front bumper 1 ¾” preconnect hose line.

While the crew began stretching the hose the company officer began a counter clockwise 360 size up of the van. During his 360, he noticed that he could not see into the rear windows of the van because they appeared to be painted black. The officer rejoined his crew and they began to attack the fire showing from the front windows. Once the fire conditions began to improve, the crew attempted to open the side cargo doors with hand tools. Although there was no indication from the outside that the doors were fortified on the inside, they had no success forcing them conventionally with hand tools. Next they attempted to use a rotary saw with a metal cutting blade and about 30 seconds into using the saw the fire flashed. At that point the officer requested a second hand line to attack the fire from the rear. He also ordered a different crew on scene to force the rear doors with hand tools but they were unsuccessful. While they were attempting to force the rear doors the fire flashed again, nearly engulfing the two firefighters at the rear doors of the van. The crews continued to battle a fire that would show improved conditions but then would suddenly increase in size and intensity. They continued to attack the fire and protect exposures with foam and eventually extinguished the fire with dry chemical supplied by an airport foam truck.





Considerations:

There was nothing “typical” or “routine” about this van fire; it was carrying an unknown amount of gasoline in a “bladder”; in this case, a large plastic container designed to contain soap or other non-combustible liquids. According to Miami-Dade police, the transport of large quantities of stolen gasoline and diesel fuel in illegal bladder vehicles is increasing in our area. Please [click here](#) to watch a short video from Miami-Dade Detective Marcos Rodriguez about illegal fuel transporting vehicles.

There are incidents when firefighters operate at great risk because they are not fully aware of the dangers they are encountering. This was definitely the case with this van fire; firefighters had no way of knowing that the van contained hundreds of gallons of stolen gasoline.

If you suspect you are dealing with a vehicle which is illegally transporting fuel, some points to consider are:

- Ensure the Police Department is responding if they are not on scene yet
- If a vehicle owner is not on scene or is witnessed fleeing the scene be suspect that something is not right
- Be prepared for a potential of a three dimensional rolling fuel fire, that can suddenly grow in size and intensity
 - Position your apparatus UPGRADE of the suspected vehicle
 - Ensure your apparatus has an escape route for emergency retreat if necessary

- Isolate and deny entry to all areas DOWNGRADE of the suspected vehicle
- Evacuate all vehicles and buildings DOWNGRADE of the vehicle
- Remember that water will be ineffective in controlling all but a very small amount of burning gasoline or diesel fuel
- Water can also intensify and spread a rolling fuel fire
- If fire firefighters direct their hose line stream into the cargo area of a truck or passenger compartment of a minivan or SUV and the fire suddenly intensifies or grows, they should suspect the vehicle is carrying an additional fuel load and should stop applying water directly to the fire.
- Understand the capabilities of apparatus on-board foam systems and in—line foam eductors; 125 GPM flow of foam solution will be ineffective on spill fires larger than 1200 sq. ft.
- If there are structures close by request the appropriate building assignment, as well as a Hazmat unit and airport foam trailer and/or ARFF apparatus
- Use at least 150' of attack hose to ensure the fire apparatus is in a safe position as well as an adequate distance from the vehicle
- Attempt to collect as many dry chemical extinguishers from units on scene as possible to fight this potential three dimensional fire
- Be mindful of run off:
 - and where personnel are standing or operating (ignition could happen at any moment)
 - into storm drains and notify DERM and Water and Sewer Department

Below are some pictures of different vehicles Miami Dade Police has confiscated with illegal fuel bladders.

Cargo Van:



blacked out (painted windows) windows, reinforced rear and side doors



Rear access partition to limit view and access to rear



Plastic container was intended for soap or other non-flammable liquid. Note the hoses and wires leading to the transfer pump.

Flatbed Truck:



Tank concealed in bed of truck. Items on top of cargo bed to disguise the tank



Fill hose with pump in right side box

Pickup Truck:



Bed topper or other objects covering tank in bed of truck



Inverted boat fuel tank

Minivan:



Dark or painted rear windows to conceal bladder tank



Cover to limit visibility to rear



Hoses, pump, and equipment

SUV:



SUV with blacked out windows



Large illegal tank in the rear of the SUV



Tires stacked in front of partition



4 tanks hidden behind tires and partition

The theft of fuel and its transport in illegal bladder vehicles is a menace that threatens the lives of civilians and unsuspecting firefighters operating at what they think is a “routine” vehicle fire.

Thank you to Miami Dade Police Department for their assistance and information to put this document together.

Had a near miss? Step up and share it: [Miami-Dade Firefighter Near-Miss Reporting System](#)

All of us benefit and learn lessons which might one day save our lives....

**Miami-Dade Fire Rescue
Training and Safety Division**



