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MOFD Responds to Rainy Highway 24 Accident

By Nick Marnell

The rainy season arrived Sept. 21 in Lamorinda, and with it came an eerie flashback for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

At approximately 10:45 a.m. MOFD responded to a single vehicle accident on Highway 24 eastbound, just past the Caldecott Tunnel, before the Wilder exit. A car had crashed into the center divider. Two engines, an ambulance and battalion chief Jerry Lee arrived shortly on the scene.

Ten months ago, three MOFD firefighters were seriously injured when an out-of-control vehicle crashed into them at nearly the same location, under almost identical circumstances. "All of the guys on the call were thinking the same thing," said Lee, referring to that December accident. "We acted very cautiously."

An investigation of the earlier accident resulted in a recommendation that the district change its procedures in responding to highway accidents. Lee confirmed that the revised district policy, which he himself researched and updated, was followed.

"All of the apparatus was positioned at a 30 to 45 degree angle to divert traffic around the incident," said Lee. Unlike the situation in December, when emergency vehicles were positioned along the highway to suggest that drivers turn into the shoulder, "the new policy diverts traffic into lane number three," he said. He also praised the coordination of the effort between the district and the California Highway Patrol.

"During inclement weather, the eastbound stretch of Highway 24 from the tunnel to downtown Orinda is particularly dangerous due to water running off the steep hills that the roadway passes through," said Stephen Healy, interim fire chief. "We remain committed to improving roadway safety through the Highway 24 corridor."

The most fortunate dissimilarity between this incident and the one in December: there were no injuries to report.

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[back](#)

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