



## **Minimum Age for Fire / EMS Drivers**

Ambulance and fire apparatus crashes are the second leading cause of injuries for emergency responders. Driver error plays a major role in many of these incidents. Properly selecting and training drivers can have a significant impact on the lives of the crews, the reputation of the agency, and the bottom line of the municipality or district.

While establishing a minimum age is a convenient manner to begin training as an emergency vehicle operator, we believe a minimum level of experience is a better measure of when a member is ready to begin driver training. It takes experience to learn to position a fire pumper or ladder truck at a fire, or an ambulance at an EMS call. Consider the many factors that must be evaluated in seconds as a pumper or ladder truck approaches a bread-and-butter structure fire:

- Hydrant location or tanker supply and laying in hose
- Overhead obstructions
- Curb, street, driveway conditions
- Best access to structure
- Room for later arriving vehicles, and many more

The same types of considerations affect arriving ambulances. Where will paramedics position? Is there an exit route as later arriving units assemble? Traffic hazards? Smoke hazards? And more...

Experience also provides lessons to driver candidates on human tendencies such as 'adrenalin rush', 'wake-effect', and 'siren hypnosis'. Witnessing these effects in ourselves and others, and learning to recognize and control them, is a critical component in the maturing process of driver candidates.

For these reasons the **Safety Director's office strongly supports driver candidates have a minimum of three years driving experience and three years of EMS / firefighting experience. We also recommend at least one year experience with the fire or EMS agency, to become familiar with specifics of the local roads and operations.**

This is just the beginning, however. Agency leaders must ensure driver candidates are carefully evaluated for driving skills, operational knowledge, and behind-the-wheel behaviors for emotional maturity. The evaluation of drivers should be a detailed and well-documented process.

Agency trainers must be aware to properly prepare the candidate before the evaluation. Trainers must be watchful of the candidate's skill, demeanor, and knowledge of driving large vehicles under extremely stressful conditions. This takes time.

Safety Consultants are available to assist emergency agencies in or strengthening training programs. The MEL, on their website, provides a model Vehicle Driving Policy for consideration. The model policy includes training best practices and forms. View the policy at <https://njmel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FD-Vehicle-Driving.docx>