

DRAFT COPY

HIGH VISIBILITY VESTS

Over the years, injuries and fatalities continue to occur to workers on roads and highways. Although recent statistics reflect a slowing of the increase the reversal of this trend remains a focus for regulatory agencies and employers.

On November 24, 2008, a new federal regulation (**23 Code of Federal Regulations Part 634**) goes into effect mandating that anyone working (workers means people on foot whose duties place them within the right-of-way of a federal-aid highway (Freeway or public way) such as highway construction and maintenance forces, survey crews, utility crews, **responders to incidents within the highway right-of-way**, and law enforcement personnel when directing traffic, investigating crashes, and handling lane closures, obstructed roadways and disasters within the right-of-way of a Federal-aid highway) must be wearing high visibility safety vest. This apparel is intended to provide conspicuity during both daytime and nighttime usage, and meets the performance Class 2 or 3 requirements of the ANSI/SEA 107-2004 publication.

Wearing the High Visibility Safety Vest (HVV)

The (HVV) **may** be worn anytime a member feels it necessary to do so. However, the safety vest **shall** be worn prior to exiting the apparatus anytime a member is actively working on the *Highway/Roadway* incidents:

- Directing traffic around an accident scene or fire incident
- Aiding a stranded motorist
- Attending to injured and /or ill patients in vehicles directly adjacent to moving traffic (i.e. EMS incidents)
- Performing functions at a traffic diversion (i.e. blocking traffic with Heavy Apparatus)
- When ever a member is on the highway or roadway controlling traffic for backing operations of light or heavy apparatus.

Exceptions to wearing the High Visibility Safety Vest

However, the Fire service is faced with *competing hazards* on roadway incidents. The safety vest **shall** not be worn to the following incidents:

- Fire Suppression activities
- Physical Rescue/extrication
- Hazardous Materials mitigation measures
- Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health environments (IDLH)
- Incident specific competing hazards (**placing the firefighter at a personal risk level greater than the potential risk of exposure to traffic conditions.**)
- Incidents that require immediate action from responding personnel to effect life saving measures

The exceptions to wearing of the high visibility vest are based upon the need to adhere to other Fire Department regulations that are being practiced such as:

1. California Code of Regulations, Title 8 subchapter 7.
2. General Industry Safety Orders Article 10.1 Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment for Firefighters 3401 through 3410, including 5144 Respiratory Protection, and 5192 Hazard Waste Operations and Emergency Response.

These exceptions are subject to adjustment in the 2nd or 3rd quarter of the 2009 California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) revision.

It is recommended that firefighters involved in any of the above *suppression activities* should not wear the high visibility vest; however, when their work is downscaling or complete, they shall immediately don the vest while actively working on the roadway or highway.

A high visibility vest shall be worn in a fashion that allows it to be seen by oncoming traffic. The vest can be worn over the firefighting turnout coat, brush jacket or work uniform shirt. Personnel who are on-scene and are not directly exposed to fire, flame, excessive heat, hazardous materials or other competing hazards would be expected to wear high visibility vest. (i.e. pump operators, support personnel, command officers etc.)

Composition of Vest

The vest is made of 100% polyester material with 5-point breakaway design with tear-away features to minimize the risk of becoming entangled in equipment and allowing for greater mobility in critical situations. The tear-away features are located front-side both shoulders, two at the waist area and front torso area. Features 2" silver reflective material background. When not in use, the vest folds into a convenient storage pouch that is attached to the inside of the garment and shall be stored in the cab area of a light vehicle or heavy apparatus.

Cleaning and Maintenance

The vest may be washed in warm water, line dry only. Maximum wash cycles for this garment is 25. DO NOT USE BLEACH. DO NOT DRY CLEAN OR IRON.

Repairs

Damaged, defaced, faded, torn or if it is not visible at 1,000 feet, the high visibility vest shall be sent to the Supply & Maintenance Division for replacement. HVV that is worn on a daily basis has a service life expectancy of approx 6 months, although vests that are not worn on a daily basis may have a useful service life of 3 years.

Identification

The high visibility vests will be pre-identified per position assigned to light and heavy apparatus by the Supply and Maintenance Division prior to distribution.

Conclusion

High visibility is one of the most prominent needs for firefighters who must perform their tasks near moving vehicles or equipment. The need to be visible by those who drive or operate vehicles or equipment is recognized as a critical issue for firefighter safety. Firefighters responding to incidents must devote their attention to completing their assigned tasks and might not completely focus on the hazardous surroundings where they are working. The expeditious a firefighter in or near the path of travel is seen; the more time the driver has to avoid an accident.

Each year more than 100 workers are killed and over 20,000 are injured in the highway and street construction industry. The Federal Highway Association believes that the Federal rule will help reduce these numbers. Improved visibility of workers within the Federal-aid highway right-of-way would reduce these numbers.

The primary goal of the Federal rule, shared by the fire service is to decrease the potential of firefighter injuries or fatalities caused by being struck by vehicles.

Station Commanders **shall** conduct training for all members on these procedures and document the training session