

# Highway Response Units

by Battalion Chief John A. Calderone

The New York City Fire Department often faces situations and conditions that challenge delivery of services via standard operating procedures. Currently, this is the case on the Belt Parkway--between the Flatbush Avenue and Rockaway Parkway exits, in Brooklyn--where the damaged Paerdegat Basin drawbridge needs extensive repairs and a weight restriction has been imposed. This weight restriction prevents the response of Ladder Company apparatus over the bridge. Engine Company apparatus are below the restricted weight limit and can respond over this bridge, but at a slow rate of speed and straddling two traffic lanes. No definitive weight was given to the FDNY, but for comparison purposes, a typical loaded FDNY Seagrave pumper weighs 41,500 pounds, Tower Ladders and rear-mounts weigh 68,000 pounds and tillers weigh 62,000 pounds.

In order to provide the Ladder Company services needed at fires or extrication operations along this stretch of the highway, the Department has outfitted and placed into service two Highway Response Units. These apparatus are quartered with and staffed by Ladder Companies 159 and 170, the nearest Ladder Companies east and west of the damaged bridge. These vehicles are both 2000 GMC chassis with utility truck bodies.

When an alarm is received for the section of the Belt Parkway that includes the Paerdegat Basin Bridge, Ladder Companies 159 and 170 respond with their assigned Tower Ladders and Highway Response vehicles. While the Highway Response vehicles--each with two Firefighters and the Ladder Company Officer--enter the highway, the Tower Ladders--with the balance of the Ladder Company members--await orders at the respective

**These Highway Response vehicles respond with Ladder Companies 159 and 170 for alarms that involve travel over the Paerdegat Basin Bridge.**

highway entrances. Additionally, two Engine Companies are assigned to respond from Flatbush Avenue, while another two Engine Companies enter the highway from the opposite direction at Rockaway Parkway. This assignment provides sufficient personnel and apparatus to safely conduct operations from either direction.

The Highway Response vehicles carry an array of equipment to enable these Units to perform a variety of functions at fires or emergencies on the highway. Extrication equipment includes a complete Hurst Tool setup (power unit, jaws, cutter, rams and hydraulic cables), lifting bags and pneumatic setup, Sawzall, air hammer, window punch, windshield saw, seat belt cutter, Partner saw with metal-cutting blade, step-chocks and cribbing. Other equipment carried includes Purple-K and foam extinguishers, absorbent materials, a Stokes basket, generator, floodlight and electrical cords, axe, Halligan, six-foot Halligan hook, bolt cutters, life preservers and utility ropes. Flares, rolls of caution tape, tanks of extra fuel for the power tools and duct tape round out the equipment onboard.



These apparatus are an example of the Department's ability to adjust rapidly to specific conditions in the field, while maintaining delivery of basic functions and services.

### About the Author...

Battalion Chief John A. Calderone has served the FDNY since 1973. Currently, he is working in Battalion 22. He holds a degree in Fire Protection from New York City Community College and has written extensively on the subject of fire apparatus. He is a regular contributor to WNYF.



photos by Battalion Chief John A. Calderone