

Hazardous Materials Company 1

by Battalion Chief John A. Calderone

Traditionally in New York City, the Rescue Companies handled hazardous-materials incidents. Specialized haz-mat equipment was lacking, rubberized protective suits didn't provide adequate protection and the level of training was poor compared to today. But, somehow, the job got done. Most haz-mat incidents involved fuel spills and ammonia leaks, with an occasional acid spill.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the amount of hazardous materials being used and transported through the city increased tremendously. A growing number of haz-mat incidents and a greater awareness of the hazards involved--along with increased regulatory involvement--led the Department to focus on an intensive haz-mat program.

A decision was made to have Rescue Company 4 specialize in haz-mat operations. Rescue 3 was to be trained as a back-up haz-mat unit. As this program was getting started, a leaking propane tanker on the Manhattan side of the George Washington Bridge on a hot summer Friday afternoon virtually shut down the city and caused unbelievable traffic jams throughout the entire metropolitan region. (See "Propane Tank Truck Incident...Courage on the George Washington Bridge," by then-Deputy Chief Joseph A. Casaburi, *WNYF*, 3rd issue, 1982.) This single incident was a wake-up call and went a long way to push the Department's new haz-mat program along.

Additional specialized tools, plugging and leak-sealing devices and other haz-mat equipment were acquired. An extensive research program was conducted into haz-mat protective suit technology. Members of Rescue 4 were sent to the National Fire Academy to attend haz-mat courses. So much additional equipment was acquired that it was necessary to assign a second vehicle to Rescue 4. During 1981, a 1975 GMC mechanic's truck was outfitted to carry the haz-mat equipment.

Simultaneously, Rescue 4 was designated as the Department's Hazardous Materials Unit and staffing was increased to an officer and seven firefighters. Additional equipment continued to be acquired and within a year, the small mechanic's truck had outgrown its usefulness. At that time, a 1980 GMC/ComCoach salvage truck was converted to operate as the Haz-Mat Unit and plans were made to purchase a new, larger vehicle.

During the early years of the Haz-Mat Unit's operation, the level of training required, coupled with an ever-increasing number of haz-mat responses, led to conflicts in Rescue 4's mission. Rescue 4 often was operating at haz-mat incidents in other boroughs for prolonged periods. A movement was started to create a separate Haz-Mat Unit so that Rescue 4 could return to providing rescue company services exclusively to Queens.

This movement resulted in the organization of Hazardous Materials Company 1, located at the quarters of then-Engine 288 (now Squad 288) at 56-29 68th Street in Woodside, Queens. This location was close to the geographic center of the city and provided easy highway access. Equipped with a new 1983 American LaFrance/Saulsbury haz-mat vehicle and a converted 1979 Mack pumper, which carried bulk supplies of absorbent material, specialized extinguishing agents and recovery drums, Haz-Mat 1 took over haz-mat functions from Rescue 4 on October 15, 1984.

Today, Haz-Mat 1 operates from the same quarters, equipped with two apparatus--a 1989 Mack/Saulsbury and a 1996 International/Saulsbury. Both vehicles respond together as a two-



(Top) Haz-Mat 1's primary apparatus is this 1989 Mack/Saulsbury, which is slated for replacement soon. This apparatus has a full Command Post area within its box. (Above) The second piece of Haz-Mat 1 is this 1996 International/Saulsbury. Both vehicles respond together as a two-piece company. (Left) A small utility crane is mounted on the rear of the 1996 International.

all photos by Battalion Chief John A. Calderone

piece company. The Mack, which is slated for replacement soon, has a full Command Post area within its box. The International is equipped with a rear-mounted crane, capable

of picking up loaded drums and other material. The Unit's current staffing consists of an officer and five firefighters who are trained to the haz-mat specialist level and two additional firefighters trained as SOC technicians. Equipment carried includes a selection of chemical protective suits, grounding and bonding cables, non-sparking tools, various meters and testing equipment, a gas chromatograph/mass spectrometer, wedges, pails, tape, an assortment of portable extinguishers, sampling tubes, brooms, squeegees, shovels, binoculars, a reference library, computer hook-up to a chemical data bank, a microfiche file of material safety data sheets, neutralizing and absorbing materials, diking materials, low-pressure, high-lift air bags, chlorine kits, leak-stopping and -plugging equipment, over-pack drums, thermal imaging camera, a flammable liquid transfer pump and a host of other assorted mitigation equipment. Also carried are supplies of speedy dry, bio-solve, soda ash and G-1 powder for metal fires.

Haz-Mat 1 responds on receipt of 10-60, 10-80 Code 2, confirmed explosions and collapses, second alarms involving the transit system, incidents involving commitment of personnel to confined spaces, accidents or fires involving bulk transportation or storage of gasoline, oil or other hazardous material and whenever special-called.

About the Author...

Battalion Chief John A. Calderone is a 25-year veteran of the FDNY. Currently, he is assigned to 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*.

