# It all started on an August 8, 1980 many years ago when a tanker truck carrying liquid propane was traveling north on interstate 95 going over the George Washington Bridge. It was carrying approximately 9,000 gallons of liquid propane. For some unexplained reason, this tanker an MC-330 began to leak propane through its pressure relief device. The propane has an expansion ratio of 270 to 1 so as it leaked it was expanding rapidly. Unknown at the time leaking excess pressure through it pressure relief device was a normal function of this safety device. This was to prevent catastrophic failure of the container itself. As the pressure reduced this safety valve was supposed to re-seat itself after excess pressure was reduced. However this did not occur. It was frozen / jammed in the open position. These were some of the headlines after the event:

# NY TIMES Headline: “*A PROPANE GAS LEAK ON BRIDGE TO JERSEY CAUSES HUGE TIE-UP; 2,000 PEOPLE IN AREA REMOVED The George Washington Is Shut and Traffic Is Snarled in City and Along 30-Mile Strip Plumber's Plug Stops Leak Gridlock Begins to Set In Propane Gas Leak on Bridge To Jersey Snags City Traffic 100 Firemen Rush to Scene Four Taken to Hospitals Rubber Mallet Effort Fails”*

[**UPI ARCHIVES**](https://www.upi.com/Archives/) **SEPT. 11, 1983 Hazardous materials -- 'the problem of the '80s'**

By ALBERICO PALMIERI

NEW YORK -- For seven hours on Aug. 7, 1980, experts were at a loss as to how to stop a leak in a propane gas truck just off the George Washington Bridge, without touching off a massive explosion.

It was only when two innovative police officers suggested using an inexpensive plumber's plug that the drama, which had knotted up traffic for 30 miles and forced the evacuation of 2,000 area residents, ended.

WPIX 11 Report Both levels of the George Washington Bridge have been brought to a crawl Thursday after a tanker crash on the upper level around 3:15 p.m.

The accident caused the truck’s gas tank to rupture, dumping fuel onto the top level of the bridge, which then leaked down to the lower level as well, causing extensive delays on both.

Two Manhattan-bound lanes on the upper level were also closed as workers repaired a metal” finger joint” in the road that punctured the truck’s gas tank.

All lanes are now open, but delays should be expected.

*This is a developing story, stay tuned for updates.*

I-95 was a major corridor for interstate commerce and being closed down for long periods of time was not an option. The FDNY at the time, had no special unit trained to handle such events. Also unknown at the time, the Police Officers that were credited with stopping the leak were creating an unsafe act. Plugging a relief device that was doing its job was taking away the safety of the container. There were better ways to handle this situation, and they would become more apparent as FDNY personnel gained training and proficiency in dealing with defective relief devices. Getting back to the incident itself. This was unacceptable to the federal government who wanted the City of New York to come up with a solution to prevent further disruptions in the movement of commerce. As a result of this single event, Rescue 4 was tasked with getting trained and equipped to handle these events. It required them receiving training at the National Fire Academy, the EPA, and NYS Office of Fire Prevention & Control. In addition they were given a 2nd piece of apparatus for support to carry the additional Haz-Mat equipment. That single event tied up FDNY Resources (3rd Alarm assignment, personnel & equipment for many hours).

Haz-Mat 1 was started on 9/22/84 about 4 years after this incident. Haz-Mat 1 came into existence because of complaints of elected officials in particular the Queens Borough President at the time Donald Mannis. Rescue 4 was spending too much time out of the borough of Queens on Haz-Mat calls neglecting Fire Duty in Queens. The solution to this problem was a dedicated unit to respond city-wide to all hazardous materials incidents.

In contrast, 9 years to the day of this propane event on the GW Bridge, there was another propane leak. This leak occurred at the Sunnyside Railyards in Queens. Although this was the same product that leaked 9 years earlier, it was different in several respects:

* The container was a DOT 112J500W Rail Tank Car
* It Contained 34,500 gallons of liquid propane almost 4 times the amount in the George Washington Bridge incident.
* The incident this time was being handled by Haz-Mat 1 who had specific training in dealing with these types of situations.

This incident although it was a 2nd Alarm assignment initially, was handled in a minimum amount of time by the two man Entry Team of Haz-Mat 1 and its Back-up Team supported by two handlines from responding engine companies. Everything was back to normal in less than 2 hours. Haz-Mat 1 received a Unit Citation for this operation.