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## Driving toward Zero Deaths—Highway Safety is the Heart of NJDOT's Mission



Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti

The holidays are a special time of gathering with family, friends and loved ones. It's a time when college students, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins pack up the car and drive many miles to be with those they care about. As we approach the holiday season, our hope at the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) is that everyone gets where they need to be safely. But more than hope, creating safer conditions on our Interstate and

State Highways is something we work towards every day of the year.

We have a saying at the NJDOT, "**Everyone goes home, every night.**" Making sure the motorists who use our roads—who are also aunts, uncles, grandfathers, grandmothers—and the men and women who work on our infrastructure—our sons, daughters, cousins, friends—are safe is a daily commitment at the NJDOT. We are determined to find new and innovative methods to increase safety. Our mission is to always be proactive about implementing new safety measures, and we will never stop raising the bar until we see **zero traffic related deaths.**

I would like to highlight a few of our programs that have been and continue to be very successful in increasing safety on our Interstate and State Highways—the first being our Safety Service Patrol (SSP). Just a few weeks ago, the Department proudly **celebrated 25 years** of this exceptional program. In 1994, the NJDOT launched what was then called the "Emergency Service Patrol" unit. Emergency Service Patrol (now SSP) Operators



Pictured: NJDOT's Safety Service Patrol (SSP), New Jersey State Police, Local Fire and EMS work together to clear an overturned tractor trailer incident on a New Jersey Interstate.

were tasked with patrolling the roads, aiding disabled motorists, removing debris and responding to crashes. This is still their mission today. However, their efforts don't stop there. SSP also improves safety for first responders by providing traffic control to support a **safe incident work area** for first responders and victims—reducing the likelihood of a secondary crash due to the incident.

SSP Operators patrol 225 linear miles of Interstate and State Highways throughout New Jersey, extending to more than 394 miles during the winter season. They are often called the "angels on the highway." Being stranded on the road after a motor vehicle crash or car

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trouble is a nightmare scenario for many motorists. When motorists see the flashing lights of an SSP truck pulling up behind them, they can breathe a sigh of relief because they know that they are in good hands and our drivers are there to help.

Over the past 25 years, our Safety Service Patrol Operators have assisted more than 1.5 million motorists and first responders. These exceptional men and women are out on our roadways every day, rain or shine, working to make our roadways safer—proudly assisting their customers. Whether it's changing a tire or simply giving directions, our SSP Operators provide the highest level of customer service at the most critical time—**free of charge** to the motorist.

Another part of NJDOT that I am proud to highlight is our Traffic Incident Management (TIM) unit. TIM is a program that, according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), consists of a planned and coordinated multi-disciplinary process to **detect, respond to, and clear traffic incidents** so that traffic flow may be restored as safely as possible. A traffic incident can be a very dangerous situation not only for those involved, but for the first responders also. People don't always think about the dangers first responders face when working to clear an incident. Cars are whizzing by at 60 or 70 miles per hour. It's very dangerous work.

Our class instructors travel throughout the state with the goal of teaching first responders how to safely secure potentially dangerous or hazardous crash sites by collaborating with partner agencies, quickly clearing the roadway and communicating effectively. To date, more than 17,000 first responders have been trained in New Jersey, and we're hoping to grow that number so that more men and women who answer emergency calls on our roadways have the tools they need to stay safe and go home.

Traffic Incident Management classes are federally funded and are **available to all first responders in all disciplines free of charge**. *If you would like members of your municipality to become trained in TIM Responder Training, you can visit [www.NJTIM.org](http://www.NJTIM.org) for more information.*

Finally, I would like to mention the 2020 Strategic Highway Safety Plan Summit (SHSPS) recently held at The College of New Jersey. This summit was coordinated by our Planning, Multimodal and Grants Administration (PMGA) division and brought together nearly 250 leaders in transportation with a mission of reducing roadway incidents and traffic related fatalities. **Driving Toward Zero Deaths** is the number one goal for the Strategic Highway Safety Plan, which will come into effect statewide by the end of 2020.

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**Pictured: NJDOT and our partners from the New Jersey State Police, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, Gloucester Township Fire Department, Haine's Towing and Reihl's Towing recently worked together to host a first responder training exercise in Traffic Incident Management (TIM) at the Camden County College Fire Academy.**

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**Pictured: Experts across the response discipline train and work together in preparation to quickly and safely resolve emergency situations. Team members pictured left to right: NJSP IMU SFC Chris Fowler; NJSP IMU SFC Guy Hendrickson; PennDOT Traffic Control Specialist Matt Elliott; NJDOT IMU Sr. Trans Analyst Dennis Caltagirone; Penn Turnpike Traffic IMU Coordinator Todd Leiss; Incident Management and TMC Operations Specialist Drive Engineering Dave Wolf; NJDOT Senior Director of Transportation Mobility Sal Cowan; NJDOT Incident Management Response Team Kelly McVeigh; NJIT IMU Coordinator Bob Pomykala (Retired NJSP IMU); NJSP IMU SFC Frank Soos.**

We were pleased to hear from our partners at the Division of Highway Traffic Safety, Department of Education, Department of Health, Delaware Department of Transportation and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) who each gave valuable insight into how collaboration and partnership will move us toward our goal of seeing zero traffic related deaths. The purpose of this summit, along with two more to follow, is to create a blueprint for strategic action and provide the opportunity to create partnerships and collaborative efforts toward improving safety and reducing injuries and fatalities on our highways.

So, as we approach the holiday season, please take a moment to think about what **you can do** to make driving in New Jersey safer. **We all have a part to play.** Whether it's a commitment to not driving distracted or simply obeying the posted speed limits, our choices make a difference. Even something small, such as having a conversation with a family member about the importance of driving sober or moving over for stopped emergency vehicles, can save a life.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to read this and please feel free to share it with your colleagues. If you have any questions about any of the information in the newsletter please feel free to contact NJDOT's Office of Constituent Relations at 609-963-1982.

On behalf of everyone at the New Jersey Department of Transportation, we wish you and your loved ones a very happy holiday season.

**Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti**  
Commissioner



**Pictured: Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti speaking at the Strategic Highway Safety Plan Summit at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ).**