



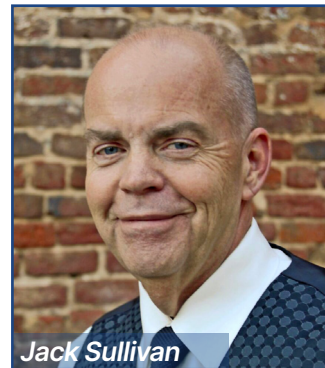
Q&A
with

Jack Sullivan

Director of Training for the Emergency Responder
Safety Institute (ERSI)

Q: What is the Emergency Responder Safety Institute?

A: I describe it as a group of emergency-response professionals from all over the country — fire service, EMS, law enforcement, DOT safety patrol, towing, and recovery. These are the people who typically respond to roadway incidents. We're a volunteer organization — we don't have paid staff — and we started back in 1998 after two tragic struck-by incidents. Since then, we've focused on developing training, strategies, and tactics to keep responders safe, especially when working near moving traffic.



Jack Sullivan

Q: What risks do emergency responders face when working at crash scenes?

A: Responders are exposed to huge danger from moving traffic. Vehicles at incident scenes or emergency vehicles themselves can be struck — sometimes with devastating consequences. We track line-of-duty deaths caused by struck-by incidents. Beyond fatalities, there are many injuries, close calls, and near misses that often go unreported. Distracted drivers, in particular, pose a huge risk.

Q: How are rural roads uniquely challenging for crash response?

A: In rural areas, many of the protective tactics that work on highways don't translate well. For instance, on a multi-lane highway you might use one emergency vehicle to block a lane of traffic; on a two-lane rural road, that strategy can backfire because there's only one lane left for all traffic. Response times are longer, resources are fewer, and geography can be difficult — hills, curves, limited sight distance, limited shoulder. Volunteer responders often come from farther away, in their personal vehicles, which makes coordination and safety more difficult.

Q: What should drivers do when they see emergency lights on a rural road?

A: First, slow down. If there's an incident ahead, recognize that vehicles and people may be on or near the road. Look for temporary traffic-control devices — cones, flares, traffic paddles — and obey them. Be ready to stop if needed, because sometimes the road is blocked. I also ask drivers to be patient, pay attention to directions given by responders, and not to rubberneck — focus on your driving, not the crash.

Q: How does your work at the Emergency Responder Safety Institute fit into the "Safe System" approach to road safety?

A: In the Safe System mindset, post-crash care is the final safety net: everything else failed in some way, and now responders are there to save lives and clear the scene safely. Our role — as part of that system — is to make sure the response is coordinated, efficient, and as safe as possible. That means training responders, improving communication, using proper protective

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