

# Raleigh Fire Department Apparatus Accidents

Version 6.1 – May 21, 2020

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## Contents

- Change Log
- Major Accidents
- Other Accidents
- Horse-Drawn Era

## Change Log

- May 2020 – Further revised the document format. Added sections, dividing decades to improve readability.
- October 2019 – Major revisions. Moved all accidents with injuries into the previously titled “serious accidents” section. Added and expanded a number of other incidents.

## Major Accidents

### 2000 to Present

2015, Jul 14 – Ladder 3 collided with a passenger car at the intersection of Glenwood Avenue and Pleasant Valley Road. The incident occurred about 7:01 p.m. Ladder 3 was responding to a reported structure fire. Four people in the automobile were transported with injuries, a 30 year-old mother and three children ages five, three, and one. The 2007 Pierce Arrow XT aerial ladder was received minimal damage. Mike Legeros photos.



2013, Sep 13 - Ladder 1 was struck by a motorcycle at the intersection of Sugar Bush and Creedmoor Road, at approximately 11:00 p.m. The apparatus was responding to an emergency call, and turning from Sugar Bush onto Creedmoor Road. The operator of the motorcycle was

transported with serious injuries. The apparatus, a 2001 Spartan/Quality aerial ladder, suffered minor damage.

2011, Aug 19 – Two firefighters from Engine 2 were struck by a passenger vehicle at the scene of a vehicle fire on eastbound Interstate 40/440, at the entrance ramp from Hammond Road. The automobile then struck other vehicles. The incident occurred at about 4:20 p.m. The two firefighters were transported to WakeMed with minor injuries. Three civilians were also transported, one in serious condition.



2009, Jul 10 (Fri) - Ladder 4 overturned at the intersection of Dawson and South streets at 10:50 a.m., while responding to a reported house fire on Mark Street. Three of four firefighters aboard were transported with minor injuries. The 2004 Pierce Arrow XT tiller was totaled, and planning was immediately started for a replacement.

The incident had a powerful impact on the Raleigh Fire Department and resulted in many improvements toward vehicle safety. An Emergency Vehicle Driver program was developed with classroom and driving course training attended annually by all personnel. This was a mandate from the Fire Chief and received the highest priority for implementation. A qualification process was also developed for tiller operators.

The Raleigh Fire Department also formed a partnership with the Seattle Fire Department, which was in the process of modifying its own tiller training program when they learned of the accident. The two departments exchanged information over the following year. In July 2010, a replacement tiller was delivered. In August, instructors from Seattle conducted training in Raleigh. They provided four days of train-the trainer instruction, which included basic and advanced tiller techniques. They also performed an analysis of the 2009 accident and filmed personal testimonies that were assembled into a national safety video about the incident. Mike Legeros (left) and Lee Wilson (right) photos.



2008, Dec 17 (Wed) - Engine 9 overturned on St. Albans Drive just west of Hardimont Road and just before 7:00 p.m., while responding to a reported structure fire on Navaho Drive. None of the four firefighters aboard were injured. The 2008 Pierce Enforcer pumper was driven from the scene, after being righted. It was repaired and returned to service some months later. Mike Legeros photos.



2002, Feb 4 (Sunday on/before) – Apparatus struck a pick-up truck in the 300 block of Poole Road at St. George Road. The 1999 Toyota Tacoma pick-up was in the westbound lane of Poole Road, preparing to turn left, when it was struck behind by a 1996 Nissan Maxima. The truck was pushed into the path of the fire truck, which was traveling in the opposite direction and had crested a hill. The apparatus skidded at least 100 feet before striking the truck. None of the four firefighters aboard were injured. The apparatus sustained bad damage to the bumper and left front corner, but was driven away. Four occupants of the other vehicles were injured, including three in the truck, one of who sustained two broken legs. All four were transported to WakeMed hospital. Source: News & Observer, Feb 4, 2002.

## 1980 to 1999

1999, Jun 6 – Engine 17 struck an automobile at the intersection of Ray and Barton's Landing roads. They were returning from a reported structure fire on/near Lookout Mountain Road. The car drove into the path of the engine. The collision occurred at 2:30 p.m. The driver of the car was pinned, and Rescue 6 responded and performed extrication. The driver was transported,



treated, and release. The four members of Engine 17 were transported to Rex Hospital, evaluated and released. One of the firefighters riding in the jump seats sustained an elbow injury and later required surgery. Engine 17 was operating Engine 36, a reserve pumper. Source: Log books, oral histories.

1999, Jul 20 - Engine 16 collided with an automobile at the intersection of Lead Mine and Millbrook roads. They were responding to a medical call on Plaza Place, and collided at 4:40 p.m. about a block from the fire station. Three firefighters were aboard. No apparent injuries in either vehicle, from records. The 1992 Pierce/1978 Mack pumper sustained bumper and cab damage. Lee Wilson photos. Source: Log books, oral histories.



1991, Dec 7 (Sat) – Engine 3 collided with an automobile and then struck a building at the intersection of Wilmington and Morgan streets at 3:32 a.m., after leaving the scene of a stabbing to answer a fire call at 552 ½ New Bern Avenue. The apparatus struck a car that reportedly didn't yield the right of way, and subsequently struck the North Carolina Department of Transportation building. The apparatus came to rest just inches from a metal grate covering an underground electrical transformer. Three firefighters were transported by Rescue 7 to Wake Medical Center for evaluation. L. E. Daniels, E. G. Ball, and T. D. Smith. The 1990 Pierce Lance pumper received about \$50,000 in damage. Raleigh Fire Department (left) and *News & Observer* (right) photos. Sources: *News & Observer*, Jan 30, 1992; oral histories; log books.



1990, Feb 25 (Sun) - Engine 5 overturned at the intersection of Wilmington and Smithfield streets, while headed to the maintenance shop at Station 2. The one firefighter aboard, Reggie

Hocutt, who was driving, received minor injuries. The apparatus overturned after striking a car that ran a red light at the intersection. The driver of the second vehicle was transported with minor injuries. The collision caused a third car to be “forced onto the curb”. Neither the passenger of the second car, nor the driver of the third car, was injured. The 1986 EEI/Pemfab was repaired with replacement body on new 1990 Pierce chassis. *News & Observer* photos. Source: *News & Observer*, Feb 26, 1990.



1987, Oct 8 (Weds) - Asst. Chief E. B. King and District Chief A. G. Stell were injured when their fire department automobile collided with a van on Highway 70 in Garner. Chief King and Chief Stell were headed to Agri-Supply, to pick up materials for the fire department. The van, which was towing a small trailer, struck the chief's car as it is crossing the roadway. The car was struck broadside at the back door, and spun the car around. The fire department vehicle came to a stop in the median. All occupants in both vehicles were wearing seat belts. Both chiefs were treated and released from Wake Medical Center. The chief's car was totaled, and the van sustained \$1,500 to \$2,000 of damage. *Raleigh Times* photo. Source: *Raleigh Times*, Oct. 8, 1987.



1986, Mar 18 – Engine 3 collided with a car at East and Lenoir streets, while responding to 804 Hadley Street. The call was dispatched at 2100. The collision occurred at 2102. The engine struck the right side of the car, which was headed west on Lenoir Street. The red light was against Engine 3. The apparatus had all warning devices activated: lights, siren, air horn. Two firefighters were transported to Wake Medical Center to be checked for injuries: S. D. Price and H. F. Warner. Source: E3 log.

1985, Nov 16 (Fri on/before) – Apparatus collided with a car at the intersection of West Martin and South McDowell streets. The fire engine was travelling east on Martin, and the automobile was travelling north on McDowell at the time of the collision. The crash occurred about 12:30 p.m. The driver of the car was slightly injured. He was treated and released at Raleigh Community Hospital. The four firefighters aboard were not injured. The apparatus was responding to an emergency call, and the lights and siren were activated. The driver of the apparatus was charged with failing to stop for a traffic signal. Source: News & Observer, November 16, 1985.

1985, Jan 20 (Sun) - Engine 13 collided with an automobile and a building at the intersection of South McDowell and Lenoir streets, while responding to a vehicle overturned in the 1100 block of Western Boulevard about 4:20 p.m. The apparatus was traveling west on Lenoir Street, turned right onto South McDowell Street, and apparently skidded on an icy road. It struck a passenger vehicle parked on the sidewalk, crashed through two plate glass windows on the south side of Sir Walter Chevrolet, and struck a vehicle parked inside in the showroom. The collision shattered a third window, and caused the struck vehicle, a 1985 Celebrity Eurosport, to collide with a 1985 Camaro, parked beside it. One firefighter, driver Firefighter First Class Leigh Merchant, was transported with minor injuries: abrasions on his forehead and a possible neck injury. The two other firefighters riding in the cab were not injured. Damage to the 1958 American LaFrance reserve pumper was estimated at \$10,000. Damage to the three cars and buildings was also estimated at \$10,000. *News & Observer* photos. Source: News & Observer, Jan. 21, 1985.



1984, Jan 23 (Saturday on/before) – Apparatus struck by an automobile at Hill Street and Oakwood Avenue. The apparatus was responding to a fire alarm at 902 Lane Street. The 1979 Thunderbird was traveling north on Hill Street when it struck the apparatus traveling eastbound on Oakwood Avenue at about 6:10 p.m. [Note, this story was corrected in the next issue of the newspaper. Corrections TBD.] One firefighter, Phyllis Web, was injured, and transported, treated, and released at Wake Medical Center. The apparatus had slowed for the red light at the intersection, and was accelerating when it struck the car. The driver was not injured, but his car sustained an estimated \$5,000 damage. The apparatus sustained an estimated \$1,000 of damage,

with a broken headlight and dented left front fender. The driver of the automobile was charged with failure to yield to emergency equipment. Source: *News & Observer*, January 23, 1984.

1982, Jul 4 - Engine 5 struck a utility pole and trees on Pullen Drive near Cates Avenue. While responding to a fire alarm at the Tammy Lynn Center, the apparatus left the roadway and struck a utility pole and trees. The call was dispatched about 7:15 p.m. The accident occurred during the heavy rain of a severe storm, that also toppled eight large trees at Meredith College and triggered several false fire alarms. The driver reportedly lost control of the apparatus. Two of the four firefighters, Captain Francis Conyers and firefighter Joseph Morgan, were treated at the hospital for minor injuries. The 1973 Mack pumper received an estimated \$15,000 to \$20,000 of damage and was repaired. Source: *News & Observer*, July 5, 1982.

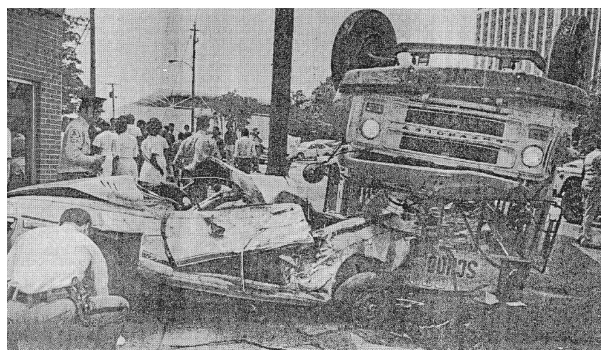


1982, Jan 7 (Thu) - Engine collided with school bus at the intersection of Lenoir and East streets, while responding to a reported smoking furnace on Branch Street. The 18-year-old driver of the bus received minor injuries and was charged with failure to yield the right of way to an emergency vehicle. The bus had previously discharged its passengers and was unoccupied. The Mack pumper sustained an estimated \$5,000 worth of damage, including a bent frame. Repairs were expected to take two to three months. *News & Observer* photo. Source: *News & Observer*, Jan 8, 1982.



1980, May 12 – Engine 3 was struck by an empty school bus being righted by wreckers, in secondary accident after an earlier fatal collision with a car. The original accident resulted in the school bus overturning on top of a compact car at the intersection of Blount and Lenoir streets at about 2:30 p.m. The driver of the car was killed, and 32 students received minor injuries. All available ambulances in the city were called to the scene. Total of 22 students were treated and released from Wake Medical Center. Ten others were treated at Rex Hospital, and one was admitted with back pain and possible fracture. The 18-year-old bus driver was later charged with involuntary manslaughter and failure to stop for a red light. About an hour later, while the bus

was being righted by a Wake County School System wrecker, it rolled down Lenoir Street and struck the side of the engine, and caused minor damage. Sources: News & Observer May 13, 1980; Raleigh Times, May 13, 1980.



## 1960-1979

1979, May 31 (Thu) - Truck 7 collided with an automobile at the intersection of Raleigh Boulevard and Milburnie Road, while responding to a fire alarm at Holly Hill Hospital on Falstaff Road. The apparatus followed Engine 7 through the intersection, and reportedly through a red light. Their speed was 35 MPH, and with lights and siren activated. The automobile entered the intersection at about 10 MPH, before the collision occurred at about 6:25 p.m. on a Thursday night.

The drive of the apparatus reported slowed down to 35 MPH and “checked the intersection and that it appeared clear.” The driver said that “when he saw the traffic had stopped and the intersection was clear he proceeded through.” As the ladder truck started through the light, the car entered the intersection and into the path of the fire truck. The car was struck on the left side, beside the driver.

Two of the three firefighters aboard were transported for observation, John Breeden, driver, and John W. Jackson. The lone occupant of the car received serious injuries, Lawrence A. Lightner, 31. He was the son of former mayor Clarence Lightner and underwent surgery for internal injuries at Wake Medical Center. The 1963 Ford service truck was returned to service with a replacement 1980 Ford chassis.

Three years later, the victim sued the city for over \$250,000, for his injuries, which included severe cuts on his face, fractured ribs, and a perforated diaphragm. The suit claimed he was hospitalized for several weeks and absent from his job at Lightner Funeral Home for eight weeks, due to his injuries. He sought \$250,000 in damages and \$2,500 in lost wages. *News & Observer* photos. Sources: News & Observer, Jun 1, 1979, Apr 15, 1982, Raleigh Times Jun 1, 1979.





1976, Nov 28 (Saturday on/before) – Apparatus collided with automobile at intersection of Hillsborough and Dawson streets. The fire engine was responding to a reported fire alarm at North Carolina State University. It collided with a 1976 Capri shortly after 1:00 p.m. A passenger in the car was treated at Rex Hospital. Damage to the car was listed in police records at about \$1,500, with \$500 of damage to the apparatus. Source: News & Observer, November 28, 1976.

### 1940-1959

1955, Oct 25 – Apparatus collided with a police patrol car at the intersection of Person and Edenton streets. The crash occurred about 12:30 a.m. The driver of the patrol car told investigators that he didn't see the apparatus until "it was almost upon him." He reported that his car traveled 69 feet after the impact. The apparatus reportedly skidded 39 feet before striking the car. They were answering a fire alarm, that proved to be false. Patrolman W. T. Blackwood, a passenger in the patrol car, was injured with a bruised right elbow and sprained back. No charges were brought. Source: News & Observer, Oct 26, 1955.

1952, Nov 14 (Fri) - Engine 6, operating a reserve unit, overturned while returning from a call, at the sharp curve where Brooks Avenue becomes Lewis Farm Road. The apparatus was headed north on Brooks and turned east onto Lewis Farm, where it jumped a ditch, landed in a patch of woods, and overturned. Driver Vernon J. Smith was seriously injured and lost his leg. He returned to light duty and worked as a fire department dispatcher, and subsequently underwent 29 operations before passing away on March 10, 1956. He was the first line-of-duty death in the Raleigh Fire Department.

The 1:00 p.m. accident also pinned Captain James T. White under the wreckage and injured the three firefighters riding the tailboard. All five firefighters were transported and admitted at Rex Hospital. The three tailboard firefighters were soon released, while Captain White suffered a compound leg fracture, possible skull fracture, broken left shoulder, back injury, and internal injuries. A broken brake lever on the 1926 American LaFrance Type 75 pumper was determined as the cause. The apparatus was travelling no more than 20 MPH at the time of the accident. The City Council immediately approves funding for a new pumper. The damaged apparatus was retired.



1952, Jun 7 - Engine 6 struck a telephone pole on Beechridge Road just east of Lochmore Drive just before 9:00 p.m., while responding to a grass fire on Oxford Road. The apparatus “failed to make a curve” on Beechridge, after serving to avoid a delivery truck that had “raced along in front of the fire truck for two blocks” and stopped suddenly. Two firefighters were injured, Driver J. G. Harrison and Fireman H. E. Partin. Harrison was treated at Rex Hospital for injuries to his left arm. Partin had leg injuries but didn’t require “hospital attention.” Two other firemen were aboard and one jumped from the truck, when he saw the collision coming. The 1950 Mack pumper sustained damage to its left front fender, bumper, left running board, and left rear fender. Engine 6 operated a reserve 1926 American LaFrance pumper while the engine was being repaired. This reserve unit overturned five months later, due to mechanical failure, and seriously injuring Driver Vernon Smith, who died from his injuries four years later, and became the first line-of-duty-death for the Raleigh Fire Department. See above account.



1951, Feb 8 (Thu) - Engine 3 collided with a city bus and a building at the intersection of Bloodworth and Martin streets about 10:15 p.m., while responding to an overheated stove at 506 Smithfield Street. The apparatus was heading south on Bloodworth Street, and the bus was travelling east on Martin Street. Police found no skid marks to indicate braking by the bus but found that the fire engine applied brakes 34 feet from the point of impact. Four firefighters were aboard, and one was transported with minor injuries, James T. Talton. He was taken to Rex Hospital for “examination” and released shortly afterward. About ten people were aboard the

bus, and none were injured. The vehicles struck both a house and the unoccupied Martin Street Food Store. Spectators expecting heavy casualties summoned every available ambulance in the city. Neither driver was charged, including A. W. Watkins, driver of the pumper. The next day's newspaper headlines read "Death Caught Napping as Fire Truck, Bus Crash Here" and "Several Escape Death in Tangled Wreckage." *News & Observer* photos. Sources: *News & Observer*, Feb 9, 1951. *Raleigh Times*, Feb 9, 1951.

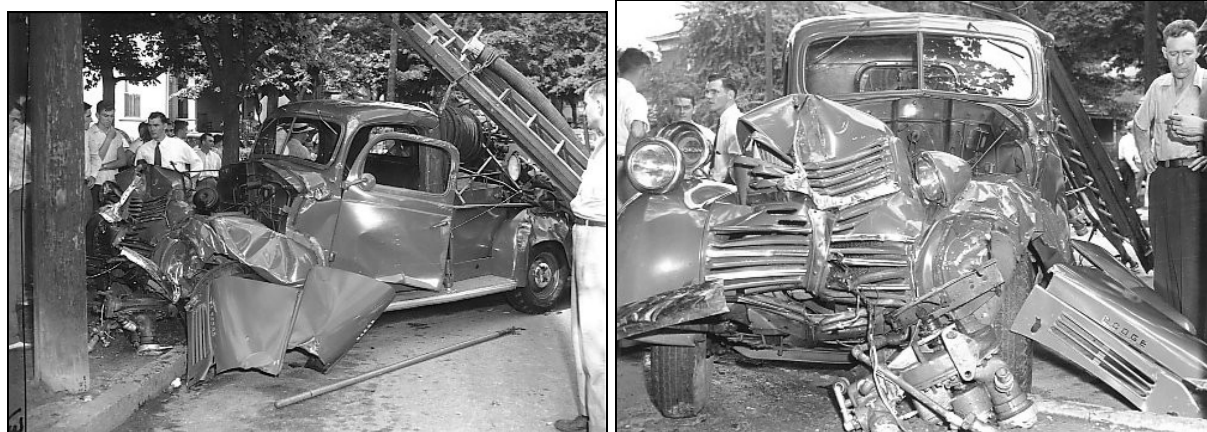


1947, Sep 11 (Thu) – The squad truck (or auxiliary truck) collided with Greyhound bus at the intersection of Blount and Edenton streets about 9:30 a.m., while responding to an automobile fire on North Dawson Street. The apparatus was headed north on Blount and the empty bus was travelling east on Dawson when they collided. The apparatus travelled 49 feet before stopping; the bus stopped 107 feet from the point of impact, and after uprooting a four-inch diameter tree and breaking a six-inch diameter steel sign pole. The two firefighters were both ejected from the cab of the apparatus.

Fireman Roy R. High, 31, who was driving and was thrown 70 feet and sustained injuries, including a broken left arm, broken left ribs, broken chest bone, fractured left shoulder, and punctured left lung. The severe chest injuries were reported as caused by "being thrown against the steering wheel." Fireman Harold S. Stephenson, 24, thrown about 45 feet, sustained a fractured left shoulder blade, lacerations of the face and scalp, and a slight concussion. The bus driver received minor injuries. Both firefighters recovered, though High did not return to active duty, and becomes a veteran dispatcher who served for two decades. Damage to the apparatus estimated at around \$5,000. The 1944? Dodge half-ton truck was apparently totaled. The bus sustained bad damage to the right front, along with several broken windows.

The intersection had a "blinker-type traffic light". Police reported that there was some evidence that the bus was exceeding the speed limit. The fire truck was using the siren, as witness reported hearing the siren from over four blocks away. It was traveling from Station 1 on Salisbury Street via a route "designated by officials to keep fire trucks responding to the same call from 'conflicting with each other'." Because the call was for an automobile fire, the auxiliary truck

was the only unit dispatched. Sources: News & Observer, Sep 12, 13, 1947; Raleigh Times, Sep. 12, 1947.



## 1920-1939

1929, Jun 16 (Sun) – Engine \_ struck an automobile at the intersection of Blount and Lenoir streets, while answering an alarm from Box 242, at the corner of Lenoir and Swain Streets. The apparatus struck a tree, after the collision. H. R. Winston, a fireman who was standing on the left running board, was slightly injured. The other firemen “escaped with bruises.” The passenger in the automobile was killed, Newton Williams. The driver of the car was injured.

The engine was travelling east on Lenoir Street, with its siren “screaming its warning.” The automobile, a Ford, was travelling south on Blount Street. The driver of the engine “cut sharply” to avoid a collision, but the “heavy, speeding truck was too close to the intersection” when the car “shot across in front of it.” The victim apparently died at the scene. The fire alarm from Box 236 was a false alarm. Eight minutes later, another false alarm was transmitted from the same alarm box.

The following day, a corner’s jury ruled that the collision was “unavoidable” and Lieutenant Malcomb Moore, driving the apparatus, was “in no way responsible” for the victim’s death. Source: News & Observer, June 17, 18, 1929.

1923, Nov 7 (Wed) - Engine 1 collided with spectators on West Martin Street at 2:45 p.m., while operating at a fire on South West Street and just “opposite of Union Station.” Hundreds of people had gathered to watch the fire. The engine struck a group of people standing on a sidewalk. A dozen people were “knocked down,” with adult Walter Reid seriously injured and ten-year-old Carl Willard killed nearly instantly<sup>1</sup>.

A warehouse and small garage were burning, with three lines of hose were in operation. The fire was nearly under control when the Fire Chief ordered the operator of Engine 1 to lay another line across the railroad tracks. The apparatus was travelling at a reported 25 MPH when it “ran wild

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<sup>1</sup> The Raleigh Times reported the boy’s age as nine years old.



as it turned off West into Martin street” struck the spectators. Reid was struck by a ladder “protruding from the truck” and suffered crushed ribs and a possible punctured lung. He was transported and treated at St. Agnes hospital. The boy was caught under the front wheels and crushed to death.

The fire truck backed out of the crash and back into the street “without the slightest hesitancy on the driver.” Soon, a fourth hose line was “playing on the blaze.” As witnesses voiced their anger at what happened, police took the driver, Captain Earl Smith, into protective custody and transported him to police headquarters. He was held on manslaughter charges and was released on \$2,000 bond. Neither the Fire Chief nor Captain Smith made statements to the press, which noted “Smith was unable to make any statement or discuss the matter when he was released from custody last night.” Smith was immediately taken to his home.

The charges were apparently dropped, as the firefighter remained a member of, and continued to be promoted in the fire department, until leaving in 1938. The family of the deceased child were later awarded nominal compensation by City Council. Sources: Raleigh Times, Nov. 7, 1923; News & Observer Nov. 8, 1923; City Council minutes [need date].

## **1912-1919**

1917, Nov 23 – Hose Company 2 struck a telephone pole and several trees at the intersection of Martin and Swain streets. The fire engine was attempting to turn the corner, and skidded into the post and trees. Fireman C. F. Gaston was thrown to the pavement and lightly injured. The others aboard were not injured. The apparatus was “badly damaged,” with a front wheel “smashed,” two ladders broken, and running boards bent. It was later repaired at Station 1 and returned to service that afternoon. Gaston was “carried to his room” at Station 2, and was expected to resume his duties within a few days. Source: News & Observer, Nov. 24, 1917.

## **Other Accidents**

Other fire department apparatus and vehicle accidents include:

- 2011, Jan 25 – Engine 1 was struck in the rear by a passenger vehicle on eastbound Interstate 40/440 just north of Hammond Road. At approximately 9:30 p.m., they were struck while blocking for Engine 2 at the scene of a motor-vehicle accident. Engine 1 personnel were inside the apparatus and not injured. The driver of the automobile was transported with non-life-threatening injuries. Mike Legeros photos



- 1997, Mar 14 – Mini 9 was involved in accident on 4513 Lead Mine Road. It was single-vehicle accident with no injuries, and reportedly involved icy road conditions. The 1986 Chevy Cheyenne brush truck was totaled.
- 1964, Nov 18 – Fire Chief collided with a car at McDowell and Jones streets, while responding to call.
- 1943, Mar 13 – Engine 6 struck a bus at the Five Points intersection. The crash occurred at 5:15 p.m. Engine 6 was returning from an emergency call, and turning right from Glenwood Avenue to Fairview Road. The left front fender and the bumper of the apparatus caught the left front of a Carolina Power and Light bus, which sent the bus out of control, which traveled about 500 feet, and struck a parked truck. The fire truck sustained only slight damage. The truck sustained “considerable damage.” There were no injuries. Source: News & Observer, Mar 14, 1943.

## Horse-Drawn Era

Accidents from the horse-drawn era include:

- 1912, Dec 21 - Hose wagon collides with street car at corner of Blount and Martin streets. One firefighter (T. B. Castlebury, driver) and a horse (George) injured. The horse, about 17 years old, was euthanized. Incident time 9:30 a.m. Source: News & Observer, Dec 21, 1912
- 1912, Nov 12 - Hose wagon accident on South Dawson Street. Firefighter thrown, uninjured.
- 1912, Jun 10 - Hose wagons collide at Fayetteville and Hargett Streets. One firefighter injured.
- 1911, Dec 30 - Chief buggy accident on Hillsboro Street. Fire Chief and firefighter injured.
- 1911, Jul 1 - Hose wagon accident on East Davie Street. Firefighter thrown, injured, minor.

- 1910, Feb 8 - Hose wagon accident at Fayetteville and South streets. Firefighter thrown, injured.
- 1907, Jan 21 - Hose wagon accident on North East Street. Three firefighters thrown, injured.
- 1903, July 29 - Hose wagon overturns on New Bern Avenue and Person Street. Three firefighters injured.