

Car, fire truck collide; girl dies

Victoria Fasciano, 11, of Johnston, was a passenger in a car driven by her mother when it collided with a fire engine responding to an alarm.

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JOHNSTON -- An 11-year-old girl died yesterday after the car she was riding in collided with a fire engine at the intersection of Hartford and Atwood avenues.



Journal photo / Mary Murphy

The car driven by Anne Marie Indell, of Johnston, collided with a fire engine at Hartford and Atwood avenues yesterday morning. Indell's 11-year-old daughter, a passenger in the car, was taken to Hasbro Children's Hospital, where she died last night.

Victoria Fasciano, of Johnston, had been a passenger in a car driven west on Hartford Avenue by her mother, Anne Marie Indell, 39, of Johnston, when the accident occurred at about 10:20 a.m. She spent most of the day in critical condition. Johnston police reported she died at 6:15 last night.

"You didn't hear the truck slow down or tires screech before the sound of the impact," said Melissa Greenless, a cashier at the Tim Hortons coffee shop near the intersection. "The fire truck plowed into that car. It didn't stop. There were no skid marks on the road or anything."

Johnston Fire Department's Engine number 3 was on its way to check on a fire alarm on Simonsville Avenue, Deputy Police Chief Gary W. Maddocks said. It entered the intersection heading south on Atwood Avenue, with its lights on and siren blaring. At the same moment, Indell's black Acura Integra entered the intersection and the two vehicles collided. The front right side of the Integra crumpled into the front end of the fire engine.

The fire engine pushed the Acura into the curb. Witnesses said Indell was able to pull herself from the wreck. Her daughter, who had been in the front passenger seat, was taken out of the totaled car by rescue personnel about 10 minutes after the accident. The two firefighters riding in the fire engine were not injured.

"[Indell] was sitting on the ground screaming and looking at the car," said Samantha Pierce, also a Tim Hortons employee. "The right side of the car had been completely smashed in. It looked as if there was nothing left."

Indell was taken to Rhode Island Hospital with injuries to her knee, neck and back. Her daughter was taken to Hasbro Children's Hospital. The call that firefighters were responding to turned out to be a false alarm. There had been a system malfunction in the master fire alarm box at the Simmons Village apartments, an elderly housing complex, Fire Chief Paul D. Labbadia said.

Scott Clement, the firefighter driving the truck, is nearly a 10-year veteran of the Fire Department, according to Labbadia. "He's an exceptional firefighter," the chief said. "He's a mess. It's affected him a lot. . . . This is the next closest thing to losing a firefighter in the line of duty. We are there to save people and losing the life of a little girl is something we never want to see happen."

Labbadia was not sure how fast the fire engine was traveling, but said engines responding to fire alarms are not allowed to travel more than 10 mph over the posted speed limit. Labbadia said all firefighters are trained to be as careful as possible when responding to calls, but added that speed was still very important when it comes to saving lives. "We can't crawl to calls we are unsure about," he said. "We can't make a call of what it's going to be unless we investigate, and we have to take everything like it's going to be a real emergency."

In order to help emergency vehicles maneuver through the normally congested Atwood Avenue, the town uses an infrared system that sends a strobe light into a sensor on the traffic lights.

The device, known as an Opticom system, works from between 200 to 250 feet away and changes the traffic light to green in the direction emergency vehicles are traveling. It appears as if the system was working properly yesterday morning, turning the lights at the intersection green for vehicles traveling north or south, and red for those traveling east or west. However, the police and state Department of Transportation workers were seen examining the traffic light controller box at the intersection yesterday afternoon.

"We are investigating every possibility," Police Lt. Robert P. Menard said. John Horton, an account executive at the Verizon Wireless store near the intersection, said he had looked out onto the scene about 10 to 15 seconds after the crash and remembered seeing that the light for cars traveling east and west was green.

Indell, employed by the Town of Johnston as a clerk, had taken the day off to spend time with her only daughter, coworker Justine Ambrosino said.

With staff reports from Phillip Marcelo