



News Release

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After 15 years and 100,000 stops, yellow Incident Response trucks in Treasure Valley valuable as ever

BOISE - A visitor who stops by 12,000 times a year is usually no longer appreciated, but almost every time the yellow trucks patrolling the Treasure Valley interstate make a stop, they are a welcome sight.

Over the last 15 years, ITD's Incident Response traveler service has aided well over 100,000 area drivers, including nearly 12,000 in 2011, the busiest year ever. Most often they are dispatched by Idaho State Police, or they come upon a situation while driving and pull to the side of the road to offer assistance.

During morning and evening commuting hours on weekdays, the Incident Response team offers assistance on the heavily traveled stretch of I-84 between Nampa and east Boise and on the Connector (I-184). In peak traffic times, drivers can obtain service by calling ISP Dispatch at 846-7500 or *ISP. Drivers can also access road and weather condition information across the state by phone or computer at 5-1-1 or 511.idaho.gov.

Here's [photo 1](#), [photo 2](#) and a map of the [service area](#) for the Incident Response service.

Although the kinds of incidents differ from winter to summer, the frequency of requests remains the same.

"We have a lot of slide-offs and crashes to respond to when the roads are bad," said Terry Zabel, Incident Response program manager. "Radiators overheat because people don't use antifreeze, air brakes on semis lock up when it freezes, car batteries freeze ... things just start to go wrong."

The warmer weather, by contrast, brings overheating radiators because of lack of water or coolant. And as budgets get tighter, more drivers ignore their gas level too long. They try to squeeze an extra mile out of the tank before the next fill-up, and instead, find themselves stranded on the side of the road. Fixing flat tires and removing road hazards is an everyday activity as well.

The Incident Response team also supports emergency responders, such as law enforcement and ambulance staff. The program's goal is to improve safety and facilitate traffic flow on the interstates near Boise, by:

- Changing a flat tire
- Jump-starting a car
- Refilling a radiator
- Providing gas to stranded drivers
- Offering use of a cell phone to make an emergency call
- Assisting other agencies

In 1997, ITD formed the unit after a successful pilot program. The program is funded through registration revenue as well as dollars generated from fuel taxes.

Reducing congestion helps travelers in many ways, but improved safety is the main benefit of the Incident Response program.

Any incident that clogs the roadway has the potential to create secondary crashes. But the quicker the original incident is cleared, the less time motorists and response personnel are exposed to hazards and the possibility of secondary collisions.

For each minute a crash is not cleared, the chances of a secondary crash increase by about three percent. By this measure, each half hour a crash is not cleared almost doubles the chances of another crash.

There also is a significant economic benefit to reducing traffic impediments. It's been estimated that in southwest Idaho, a half-hour delay in an urban setting can equate to about \$30,000 in lost work productivity, secondary crashes, increased fuel consumption and increased vehicle emissions.

"The total operating budget of \$207,000 equates to the economic costs represented by about 3.5 hours of delay," said Dan Bryant, ITD's southwest Idaho maintenance manager who oversees the Incident Response program. "In other words, if Incident Response reduces delays by 3.5 hours in the course of a year, it has paid for itself."

The Incident Response trucks are also occasionally dispatched to other highways, if there is a need. They patrol the busy Idaho 55 area near Banks on Memorial Day Weekend, Fourth of July Weekend and Labor Day Weekend because of the huge amount of traffic on that roadway on those busy holidays.

"High traffic volumes and the sheer number of incidents and breakdowns on the urban interstate in Treasure Valley makes this program an essential part of our highway operations activities," said Dave Jones, who oversees the Incident Response team as the ITD district engineer for the southwest Idaho area. "The Idaho State Police has told me that they consider them indispensable. I'm very proud of our guys and the job they do."

The public can help provide input to improve the program by sending ITD an e-mail at comments@itd.idaho.gov or by calling (208) 334-8363.

