

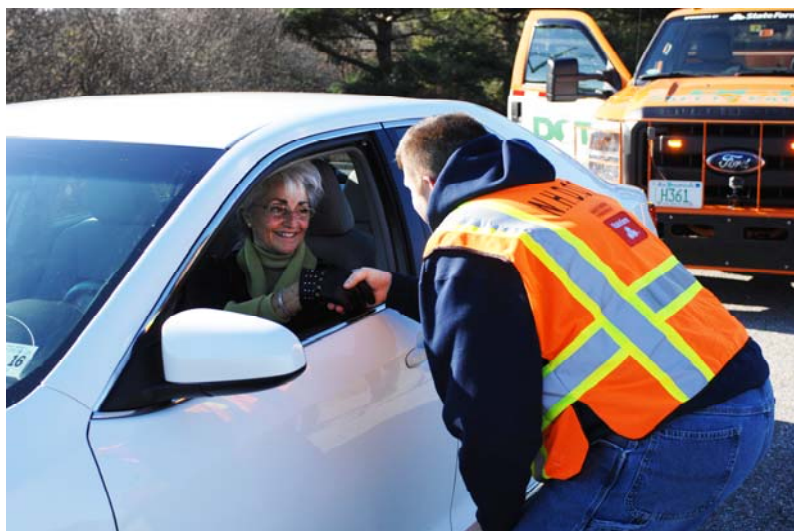
# On Patrol

Official newsletter of the Safety Service Patrol Industry Association

Vol. 1, Issue 1 — Summer 2019

## Why a Safety Service Patrol Industry Association and Why Now?

In certain jurisdictions, Safety Service Patrol (SSP) operators deliver important, but somewhat limited, services. In other locations, personnel deliver what is known as “full-function” SSP services, including incident response, traffic control, communication with and support to other first responders, etc. Full-function SSP operators are highly trained and provide services as important to users of the roadways as those provided by police, fire and rescue, and they should be accorded the same rights, benefits and respect as these other first responders.



By helping to standardize the industry across many states and jurisdictions, the SSP Industry Association seeks to raise the level of public awareness of these professionals while enhancing the ability of agencies and private providers to attract and retain qualified staff to provide these valuable services.

### The SSP Industry Association's Mission

- Promote and foster the communication and exchange of ideas/best practices among Safety Service Patrol professionals across the nation.
- Improve the individual and collective proficiency of our members in the performance of their duties.
- Encourage camaraderie and educational opportunities among SSP membership.
- Advocate and strive for uniform application of best practices for increased safety of the SSP personnel and the motoring public, and the standardization of compensation and training.
- Create and maintain a tradition of esprit de corps, ensuring commitment to duty under all conditions and circumstances.
- Cultivate a spirit of mutual cooperation among our members and the people we serve.
- Increase the efficiency of the SSP profession and thus more firmly establish the confidence of the public in the service dedicated to the safety of responders and assistance to motorists.



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## What is a Safety Service Patrol Operator?

As the nation's roadways become more congested and incidents more prevalent, highway operators are working to fill a critical void to ensure the roadway network remains safe and operates most efficiently. Increasing demands from the motoring public and freight communities coupled with staffing limitations and shifting priorities within the "traditional" response disciplines have created a void that many jurisdictions have filled with a growing number of unique professionals, the Safety Service Patrol operator.

These professionals provide life-saving services to motorists on freeway, arterial and local roadways by being ever vigilant custodians of the surface transportation system. In addition to working with other first responders to safely and quickly clear incidents from the roadway, they assist disabled motorists with fuel and flat tires, and are ambassadors of goodwill described by many as, "knights in shining armor," "angels sent from heaven," "life-savers" and "heroes." The Safety Service Patrol professionals work in a stressful, inherently dangerous environment, and are highly trained to cope with all forms of roadway disruption.



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## SSP Video — "A Day in the Life of a HERO"



Take a ride with the Georgia DOT's Highway Emergency Response Operators (HERO) as they patrol interstates in and around metro Atlanta. Visit [tinyurl.com/HeroService](http://tinyurl.com/HeroService) or scan the above code to see the YouTube video.

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## What is a Safety Service Patrol Operator? (Continued)

In 2017 a job analysis identified the most common duties performed by safety service patrol drivers. A cross-section of subject matter experts was gleaned from a long-standing incident response and motorist assistance team and an academic institution facilitated many meetings and discussions to provide insight as to their roles and function. The study found eleven (11) areas of service these professionals provide:

- Responding to emergencies on the roadway
- Performing traffic control and lane closures
- Clearing debris from traveled portions
- Collaborating with other agencies
- Assisting disabled motorists on the shoulders
- Communicating information to other agencies and motorists
- Having a continuous and watchful eye on the roads by patrolling
- Maintaining the equipment and supplies on their specially equipped vehicles
- Educating coworkers, the public and other responders about changing road and traffic conditions
- Providing customer service
- Marking/logging of unattended vehicles

Safety Service Patrol operators are paramount to the safety and health of travelers across the vast roadway grid of our nation. The services they deliver to stranded motorists, along with the margin of safety they provide at incident scenes, should and will be recognized at the same level of acknowledgement as the more “traditional” responder disciplines. The Safety Service Patrol is a cadre of devoted individuals and an ever-growing community of professionals who provide daily life-saving attributes, worthy of our praise and support.

## Building Blocks for Improving the Livelihoods of Operators – A DOT Case Study

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Incident Management Assistant Patrol (IMAP) was initiated by the NCDOT in 1991. Over the past 25+ years, the IMAP program has evolved from assisting isolated vehicle breakdowns to a complex response unit for major roadway incidents and a partner agency with Emergency Response teams. Today’s IMAP program, known as the NCDOT State Farm Safety Patrol, has 60+ IMAP responders throughout the state working to keep North Carolina’s interstates safe and operating efficiently. As the program has grown and expanded, it has matured through the establishment of a consistent structure, certification processes and service standardization across the state.



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## Building Blocks for Improving the Livelihoods of Operators – A DOT Case Study (Continued)

As the program has matured, NCDOT realized that an effort was needed to elevate the position of an IMAP Responder to a level that aligns with the responsibilities of the job. Some structural inconsistencies remained and varying staffing levels of IMAP positions across the state left responders without a clear path for career advancement. Among other actions, this effort included an evaluation within the Transportation Worker (TW) classification based on the competency levels of the IMAP responders and supervisors. The evaluation focused on establishing a growth potential within a clearly defined career path from entry to senior levels.

Obtaining internal NCDOT approval and implementing the reclassification of the positions involved a multi-step process of collaboration and coordination:

- Education of NCDOT Division Engineers and senior management, along with North Carolina State Highway
- Patrol (NCSHP) and other first responders
- Building Support among these stakeholders
- Documentation and standardization of the position descriptions being requested
- Application to NCDOT Human Resources (HR) for approval



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## Building Blocks for Improving the Livelihoods of Operators – A DOT Case Study (Continued)

### Education

The reclassification of IMAP Responders' positions has been driven by considerable growth of their skillset from their original purpose to current day functions, along with the ability to attract and retain staff in certain locations. The role of the IMAP Responders demonstrates a depth of responsibilities, expectations, and experience that was not adequately accounted for in the current TW level position. The current IMAP Responder and Supervisor position description and job responsibilities include:

- Work independently
- Think critically
- Prioritize and control situations
- Communicate effectively
- Act as State ambassadors
- Understand the consequence of error
- Coordinate with multiple agencies
- Understand traffic engineering concepts
- Administer first aid
- Assist with the clean-up of hazardous spills
- Complete mandatory prerequisite training
- Possess relevant experience
- Demonstrate proficiency in computer applications
- Work in all conditions
- Have high school diploma or GED

Development of an awareness video focused on highlighting the critical decision making and independent work environment IMAP Responders face daily. A successful internal roll-out to the Division Engineers and senior management was followed by further sharing with external partner agencies such as NCSHP and first responders.

Site visits to the Traffic Incident Management training track have been a continuous information sharing tool but extending an invitation to NCDOT HR staff allowed them to ride in IMAP vehicles and get first-hand exposure to some of the demands being asked of responders and supervisors. This experience strengthened the case and further educated HR on the responsibilities of the IMAP employees.

### Building Support

To garner statewide support for the reclassification of these positions, the proposed process was outlined and presented to NCDOT regional and senior management involved with the IMAP Program. This outreach informed supervisors and managers of the reclassification goals and objectives and equipped them with familiarity so they could initiate additional conversations within the Department and better promote the goals of the reclassification study.

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## Building Blocks for Improving the Livelihoods of Operators – A DOT Case Study (Continued)

### Documentation

The next step included assembling existing position descriptions and job postings that were being used across the state. These served as a baseline for the development of statewide job descriptions for multiple levels of IMAP Responders. Reviews of the new job descriptions were conducted with multiple internal stakeholder groups involved with the IMAP program. All comments were integrated into the documentation and formally presented to HR through a face-to-face meeting.

### Application

The foundation of the training and certification program demonstrated a mature program and provided the means to easily highlight the higher demands being placed on these positions. The revised job descriptions were assembled and formally presented to HR with the confirmation of the multi-level, statewide support. The level of support from those managing the IMAP Program across the state demonstrated to HR a statewide appetite for this evolution of the position levels and the establishment of a more developed career path for IMAP Responders and Supervisors.



NCDOT's HR has agreed to the position reclassifications for IMAP Responders to include an entry level and a senior level Transportation Worker. Roll-out of the reclassification is currently underway, but not without some challenges. The NCDOT structure, organization, and available resources varies across regions. Each Division has a unique combination of permanent and temporary positions, as well as a range of current position levels. Current initiatives include moving to a standard staffing structure while also maintaining equity for existing staff.

There also is the need for equity and a balance of staffing support for the different regional needs. This process is proposing two tiers of a staffing cross-section to support the rural and urban regions as each have unique needs. Rural regions are proposed to have a 50/50 split for entry/senior level positions. However, the larger fleets and specialized projects in urban regions create higher staffing demands, which have led to a proposed position split of 30% entry level and 70% senior level.

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## Building Blocks for Improving the Livelihoods of Operators – A DOT Case Study (Continued)

### Summary/Lessons Learned

It has taken a great deal of time and effort, but the reclassification process will be completed within the next few months by NCDOT. Critical to the success of the reclassification effort has been outreach and education with NCDOT Division and senior management, as well as with partners such as the NCSHP and other regional first responder groups.

As Jennifer Portanova, PE, NCDOT's State Traffic Systems Operations Engineer, explains, "The most important component of our strategy was to have a multi-pronged internal approach – we started at the top of each field Division and in Central Office, while also engaging Human Resources to properly develop the revised position descriptions. Working across the organization, this effort enabled us to gain support at all levels."

Involving HR early in the process, coupled with providing field demonstrations, also proved to be instrumental in raising their awareness of the daily challenges faced by these professionals. Lastly, NCDOT sees the new Safety Service Patrol (SSP) Association becoming a driving force and advocate for SSP programs across the country. Involving these partners early and often in the process provides better awareness and support for the importance of SSP staff within incident management, thereby improving the livelihoods of the operators and the success of the program.

*The SSP Industry Association is actively seeking stories highlighting operational success and innovation. Please send details to Tom Clark at [thomas.clark@parsons.com](mailto:thomas.clark@parsons.com).*

### Innovation to Keep SSP Operators Safe – the "Extendobed"

In 2017, the Virginia Department of Transportation asked Parsons to develop a design for the VDOT SSP Truck that would include the best, most cost-effective innovations. As Parsons canvassed other SSP operators across the country and reviewed industry materials for work vehicles used for other purposes, they identified an innovation that has proven to be a true lifesaver – the Extendobed.

Built of all-steel frames and high-capacity roller bearings, the Extendobed can handle 1,000-3,000 lb. load limits, providing the SSP operator with safe accessibility to frequently used items. Highly durable, many of the first Extendobeds produced over 30 years ago are still in service, and they are transferable from one unit to another. One person can easily operate it when needed, and its use keeps the operator safer as he or she can remain on the side of the truck away from oncoming vehicles. Its use has also reduced on the job injuries as equipment is accessible without having to execute awkward lifts from the truck bed or climb in and out of the bed.

The Extendobed has been a worthwhile investment for the Virginia DOT, and they have elected to make it a standard feature on all new SSP trucks in their fleet.



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## Safety Service Patrol – Do You Know the Roadway User’s Best Friend?

After having reviewed hundreds of testimonials received by Safety Service Patrol managers over the years, one sees certain common themes among them:

I didn’t know this service existed!

I tried to tip the operator, but he refused it.

Your operator was friendly and helpful.

While a full function Safety Service Patrol represents a significant investment by roadway owners, the benefit to the public and to the agency far outweighs its cost. SSPs are consistently ranked as the most popular service offered by an agency to the public, and have the added benefit of reducing congestion and the severity of incidents. Having highly trained first responders on constant patrol or available for dispatch when needed saves travelers millions of dollars in lost time avoided and reduced vehicle emissions.

However, as can be seen from the testimonials, SSP owners have some public relations work to do. It is recommended that SSP owners consider ways to ensure that the public has a greater awareness of the services provided (where, what and by who) by engaging in educational outreach. This outreach need not be costly, and can start with educating new drivers (make it a part of driver’s education and a possible test question) and continue with the placement of signage at strategic locations on the roadways that are patrolled. Some well-placed “news” articles can help raise awareness, as can a stronger social media presence. This outreach will serve to not only educate the public, but also have the added benefit of educating politicians who fund SSP programs, with the goal of making them a permanent part of highway operations in jurisdictions nationwide.

