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AMBULANCE CRASHES CUT IN HALF LITTLE SIRENS HAVE BIG IMPACT IN OKLAHOMA

After just one year, EMSA's feeling the impact of new siren technology – and motorists likely are feeling it, too. Last November, EMSA began installing Howler sirens on its ambulances. Since that time, the number of ambulance wrecks at intersections have been cut in half.

Manufactured by Whelen Engineering, the Howlers emit low-frequency tones that cause objects within 200 feet to reverberate. So even if motorists can't see or hear an ambulance approaching, they may feel the ambulance coming in time to pull over.

From January 1-October 31, 2008, EMSA reported 16 wrecks at intersections statewide. From January 1-October 31, 2009, ambulances were involved in just half as many (eight) collisions – that, despite the fact that EMSA put over 4.3 million miles on its ambulances during the time period!

EMSA estimates that the reduction in collisions has saved \$80,000 in ambulance repair and replacement costs alone. "Of course, that's just damage to our ambulances. It's not at all unusual for cars that collide with ambulances to be totaled," says EMSA Fleet Manager Kelly Smith. "And there's a human aspect – injuries, pain and suffering, lost productivity – that must be considered, too."

The Howlers don't replace EMSA's existing sirens but rather complement them. The Howler's penetrating, 10-second burst is ideal for helping paramedics cut a path through heavy traffic and intersections.

EMSA Paramedic Michael Ginn was involved in two of last year's 16 crashes. In both instances, motorists failed to yield the right-of-way, even though the ambulances' emergency lights and sirens were activated. Too often, says Ginn, drivers fail to take notice of the regular sirens. "Drivers are increasingly distracted. But the Howler seems to shake them to attention," Ginn explains. "It takes longer for ambulances to get to patients when motorists fail to yield. The Howler helps us get where we're going faster and improves safety on the road."

The Howlers cost less than \$400 each. EMSA and Acadian Ambulance Service in Louisiana were the first ambulance agencies in the nation to outfit their entire fleet with the sirens.

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