

# ST. TAMMANY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT # 1

1358 Corporate Square Drive  
Slidell, LA 70458



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**Fire Chief Chris Kaufmann**

## Rapid Diver Scenario

At approximately 10:01 AM on May 22, 2014, Slidell Fire Alarm received an emergency call reporting a vehicle had left the roadway and entered the canal off Marina Drive. Witnesses have not seen anyone come up from the vehicle. Driver may be trapped in the vehicle under water.

Responding units are Engine 16, Rescue 11, Ladder 11 and Battalion 1. Acadian Ambulance is also responding.

Assignments are as follows:

Command – Brent Dupuis

Diver – Steve Coulon

Rope Tender – Brian Veron

Rescue Swimmer – Matt Dupre

Second Diver – Justin Galatas

Lift Crew – Joshua Musselman

Tim Harrison

Victim – Billy Dekemel

Safety – Mark Michaud

Video Crew – Alan Novak

Brad Baughman

Safety Boat – Ryan Gaudin and Ken Kittel

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## **Rapid Diver Program**

Billy Dekemel, Coordinator

The Rapid Diver program is a quick entry and under water extrication program that began in 2009, with the idea that if our employees had to enter the water, we wanted them to have the equipment necessary to complete the job and also to protect them from becoming victims. The program is designed for rescue purposes and not meant for recovery operations. We are ready, willing and able to work in conjunction with St. Tammany Parish Sheriffs' Office dive team and Slidell Police Department dive team and assist them in any way possible.

After extensive research, it was decided that we would use the Zeagle Rapid Diver system as our equipment of choice. Working with a local scuba dive shop, we procured the equipment and began training our employees to use the system safely and effectively. Our employees were trained in both the classroom setting and in the pool. After several days of training, they were tested in the pool and in open water where we would be using this equipment.

The initial training class, which was given in July 2009, consisted of 27 firefighters. Since then, two more classes have been completed and our number of trained Rapid Divers on the department has increased to 41 and is broken down as follows: Crew 1-12, Crew 2-14, Crew 3-11, Fire Prevention-2, Training Academy-1, and Headquarters-1.

Our training is provided by Rick Sutton, PADI Instructor from Coral Reef Dive Shop and Mark Michaud, Diver Master for the Slidell Police Department. They are assisted by Billy Dekemel, who is certified as a Dive Master with PADI (Professional Association of Dive Instructors) and serves as STFPD1's Rapid Diver Coordinator. The initial training consists of a half day of classroom lecture, one and a half days of practical training in the pool and one day of practical training in the open water. Refresher training is conducted on a semi-annual basis and is completed in the pool and the open water in the form of exercises and drills. There are 11 additional firefighters in the Rapid Diver training program at this time.

Presently, we have eight rapid diver units in service. They are assigned to Rescue 11, Engine 15, Engine 16 and Engine 17. We also have 2 units as spares. If there are any issues with front line

equipment, we are able to replace that equipment, immediately, with a spare until the affected equipment is repaired. All rapid diver units are serviced annually and repaired (on an as needed basis) by Coral Reef Dive Shop in Slidell. Other equipment used in the program includes SCUBA masks, swim fins, weight belts, seatbelt cutters, window punches, PFD's, rope throw bags and underwater flashlights. All equipment is in very good shape and should last a number of years before replacement is required.

Since inception of the program in 2009, we have made entry into the water approximately 8 times while attempting to conduct rescue operations. Although, we have responded to many more submerged vehicles that have entered the waterways where the victims have self-rescued themselves or were rescued by bystanders.

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## Rapid Diver Program Facts Sheet

- The program was started in July of 2009
- The initial training was done through the Coral Reef Dive Shop (Rick Sutton, PADI Instructor and owner) and Slidell Police Officer Mark Michaud (PADI Dive Master)
- Rapid Diver Coordinator is FPO/EMT-B Billy Dekemel (PADI Dive Master)
- The device used is a Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus (SCUBA)
- We currently have 41 trained Rapid Divers that go through semi-annual training/refresher classes. We also have 11 more in training at this time.
- The Rapid Diver Packs can be donned in a matter of seconds
- The Rapid Diver Pack allows a diver to be underwater for approximately 15-20 minutes and allow them to dive to a depth of 15-20 feet
- We currently have 10 Rapid Diver Packs that are located on 4 trucks at 4 fire stations
- We respond on average to 2-3 emergencies per year where the Rapid Diver Packs are needed

For more information about St. Tammany Fire Protection District #1 visit us at [www.slidellfire.org](http://www.slidellfire.org) or follow us on [Facebook](#) - *St. Tammany Fire District #1* and [Twitter](#) - *@SlidellFire\_PIO*

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