



## ST. TAMMANY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT NO. 1

1358 Corporate Square  
Slidell, LA 70458



**For Immediate Release**

**July 24, 2015**

### Rapid Diver Scenario

At approximately 10:01 AM on July 24, 2015, Slidell Fire Alarm received an emergency call reporting a vehicle had left the roadway and entered the Bayou at the Heritage Park boat launch. Witnesses have not seen anyone come up from the submerged vehicle and the driver may be trapped.

Responding units are Ladder 11, Rescue 11, Engine 11, and 120, Acadian Ambulance, and the Slidell Police Department.

Assignments are as follows:

Command – Steve Lemoine

Diver – Chris Darby

Rope Tender – Matt Parish

Rescue Swimmer – Jason Theriot

Second Diver – Chuck Davis

Lift Crew – Clint Coulon & Jeremy Suber

Victim – Billy Dekemel

Water Safety – Mark Michaud

Shore Safety – Roy Smith

Safety Boat – Alan Novak & Ryan Gaudin

[More...](#)

## 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, four more classes have been completed and our number of trained Rapid Divers on the department has increased to 74 and is broken down as follows: Crew 1-27, Crew 2-18, Crew 3-24, Fire Prevention-2, Training Academy-1, and Headquarters-2.

Our training is provided on Staff by Rapid Diver Coordinator Billy Dekemel (PADI Instructor), Rick Sutton (PADI Instructor from Coral Reef Dive Shop) and Mark Michaud (Dive Master for the Slidell Police Department). The initial training consists of a half day of classroom lecture and a half day of practical training in the pool followed by 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.

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 9 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.

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*

Chad Duffaut  
Chief of Fire Prevention/PIO  
[cduffaut@slidellfire.org](mailto:cduffaut@slidellfire.org)  
Cell: (985) 960-0976