

Crash and burn

Crews make repairs as summer crashes, fires destroy roadways

By Kim Corley

Crews in Districts 1 and 3 have really felt the heat this summer. Three separate fires shut down sections of South Carolina's busiest interstates and caused extensive damage. Motorists posted pictures and videos of black smoke billowing for miles on social media.

The first fire occurred just before 6 a.m. on May 27, 2015 on I-26 between exit 104 and 106 in Richland County. Eight cars, a tractor trailer and a gasoline tanker carrying 8,500 gallons of fuel were involved in the collision. Fuel from the tanker spilled into a 300 foot drainage pipe and ignited. Luckily, only four people required medical attention at nearby hospitals for minor injuries. After Columbia firefighters extinguished the flames, DHEC officials were called to the scene to investigate any environmental damage. SCDOT had four crews (25 employees) respond to the incident. The intense heat from the fire caused severe damage to the median barrier wall and several sections of pavement. Those crews repaired 177 square yards of asphalt roadway that were severely damaged to re-open all lanes on I-26 before the afternoon rush hour. Additional repairs were completed by a contractor. Including the repair/replacement of:

- 860 feet of barrier wall scorched and damaged by heat.
- 420 feet of chain link fence burned/melted.
- 7650 square yards of asphalt roadway – moderate damage & exposed to unleaded fuel.

The total SCDOT and Contractor cost for response and repairs to I-26 in Richland County was \$643,725.84

A month later, another fire engulfed parts of I-26 near mile

marker 17 in Spartanburg County. The crash on the morning of June 27, 2015 involved two vehicles and a tanker truck loaded with gas and diesel fuel. The tanker overturned and caught fire causing extensive damage to both lanes of I-26 westbound. Firefighters held the fire at bay while they waited for a special crash truck used to extinguish airplane fires to arrive at the scene. Unfortunately, there were three fatalities and a fourth person was severely burned and airlifted to the hospital. SCDOT crews worked over thirty-six hours straight to reopen I-26. Crews milled 6 inches from the bridge for approximately two hundred feet and replaced the asphalt roadway. In addition, there was barrier wall and traffic control repair and debris removal.

The total SCDOT and contractor cost for response and repairs to I-26 in Spartanburg County was \$85,101.94.

Most recently, an 18-wheeler hauling frozen chicken overturned and caught fire after hitting a dividing wall on I-85. The incident happened around 4:30 p.m. Aug. 3, 2015 at mile marker 68 near Hwy 129 in Spartanburg County. The driver of the 18-wheeler suffered fatal injuries. A woman who was driving on the other side of the interstate was taken to the hospital after she was hit by debris. After emergency response workers battled the flames, SCDOT crews worked overnight to have all lanes open just before 8:00 a.m. Tuesday morning.

Currently, the SCDOT and Contractor cost for response and repairs to I-85 in Spartanburg County is \$33,813.18.

These crashes were investigated by the South Carolina Highway Patrol's Multi-disciplinary Accident Investigation Team (MAIT).

RIGHT: On Aug. 3, 2015, a truck carrying frozen chickens crashed and burned on I-85 in Spartanburg.



TONY MAGWOOD/RICHLAND MAINTENANCE

The burned up tanker and vehicles had to be removed before crews made repairs in Columbia along I-26.



ROB THOMPSON/THE CONNECTOR

Richland Maintenance crews make repairs to I-26 after the tanker crash on May 27, 2015. Damaged roadway was repaved to open all lanes of traffic on the same day.



PHOTO BY DISTRICT