



Photo: David Yee for Berkeleyside, 2/09/2016

Street Trauma Prevention: Vision Zero and the Fire Service Safer Streets in Sonoma County

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What do firefighters and paramedics do?



Pacific Palisades and Eaton Fires, January 2025



Emergency Medical Services (EMS): about 75% of calls to 911 are medical aids. Dual-trained firefighter-paramedics carry this load.



Photo: David Yee for
Berkeleyside, 2/09/2016

This includes street trauma: cyclist struck and pinned.



Fire-medics treat and transport patients using mobile intensive care ambulances.



...where patients are treated
and hopefully stabilized



...for hand-off to a hospital or trauma center



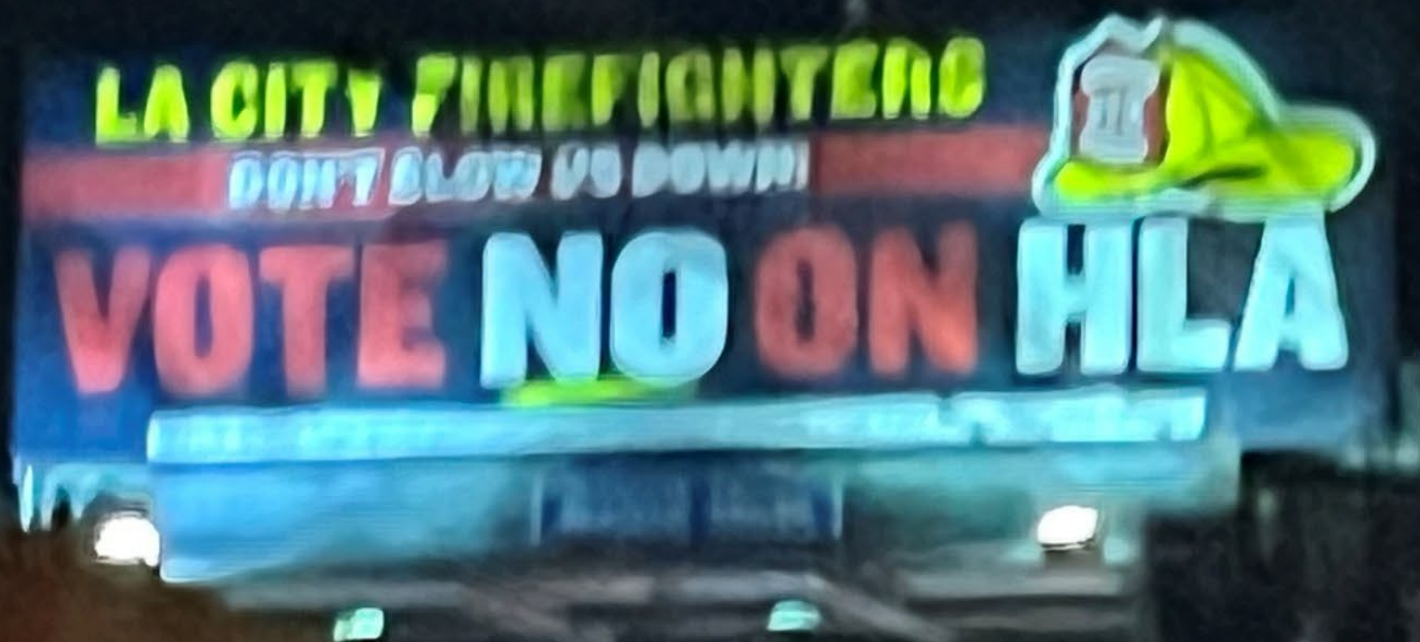
...for definitive treatment.

Opposition from Fire Depts:

- Los Angeles
- Oakland
- San Francisco
- New York City
- Baltimore
- Berkeley
- Others

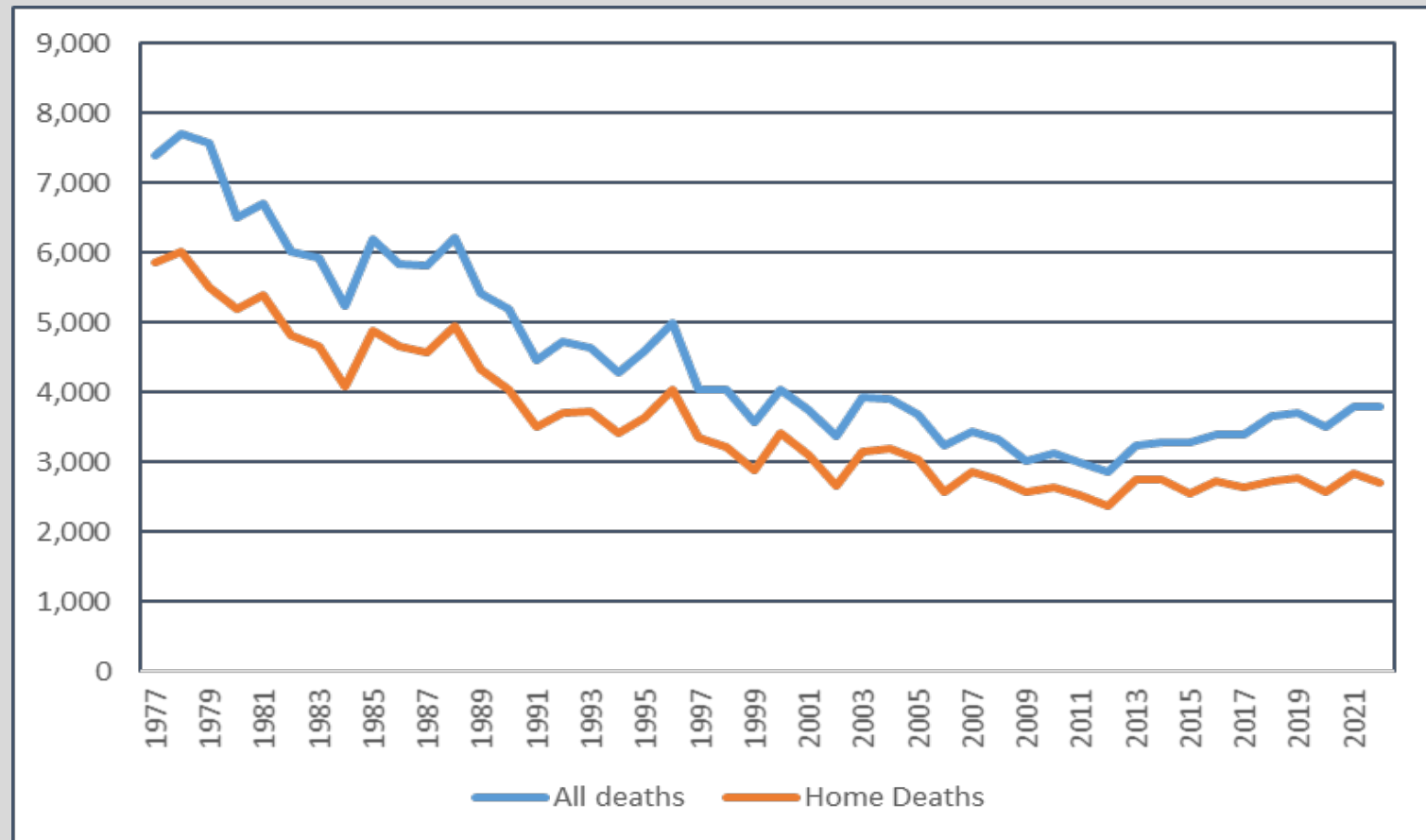


Problem: Firefighters and fire/medics face a lot of trauma. Sometimes, seconds matter. If they think traffic calming measure could slow them down, they will oppose it. They act based on their lived experience.



Firefighter local unions of the IAFF have sometimes participated in campaigns against safe streets.

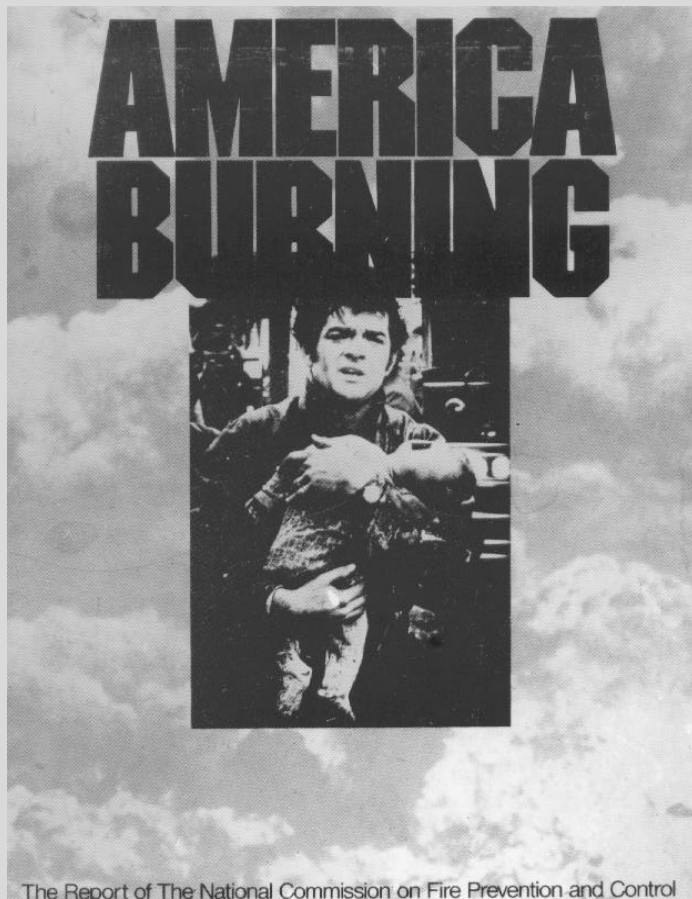
But rejecting prevention is at odds with the fire service's own remarkable 50-year history of prevention of structure fires.



All U.S. Civilian Fire Deaths and Home Fire Deaths, 1977-2022
~5,000 fewer deaths between 1977 and 2012 = 64% decline over 33 years.

2,451 Trade Tower deaths on
9/11/2001 not included.

Hall, S. (November 2023). Fire loss in the United States during 2022. Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association. <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/home-and-community/safety-topics/fire-related-fatalities-and-injuries/>

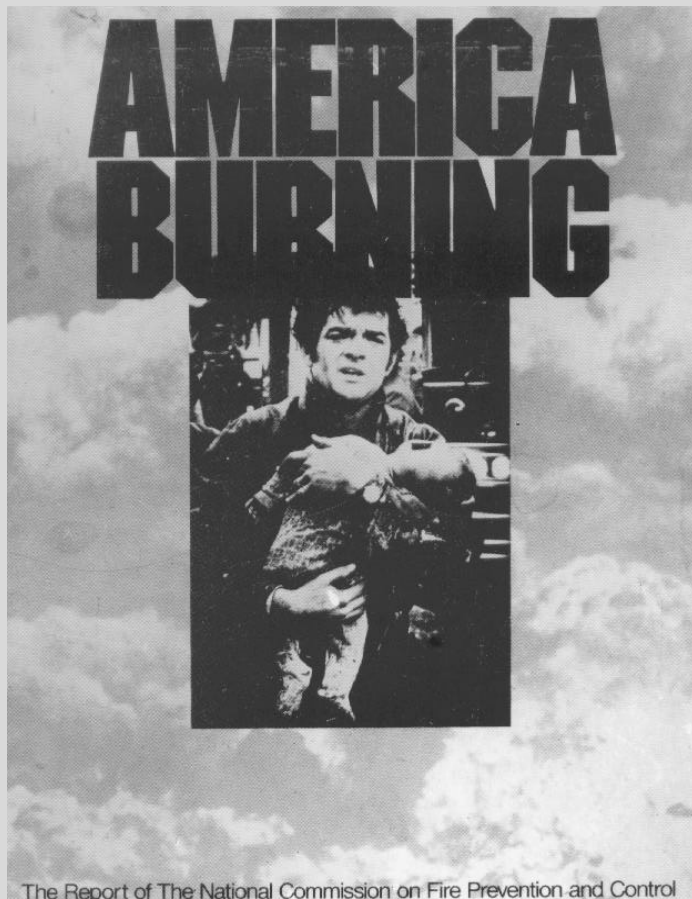


The report highlighted fire prevention as an essential role of the fire service, alongside suppression.

The report supported passage by Congress of the 1974 Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act.

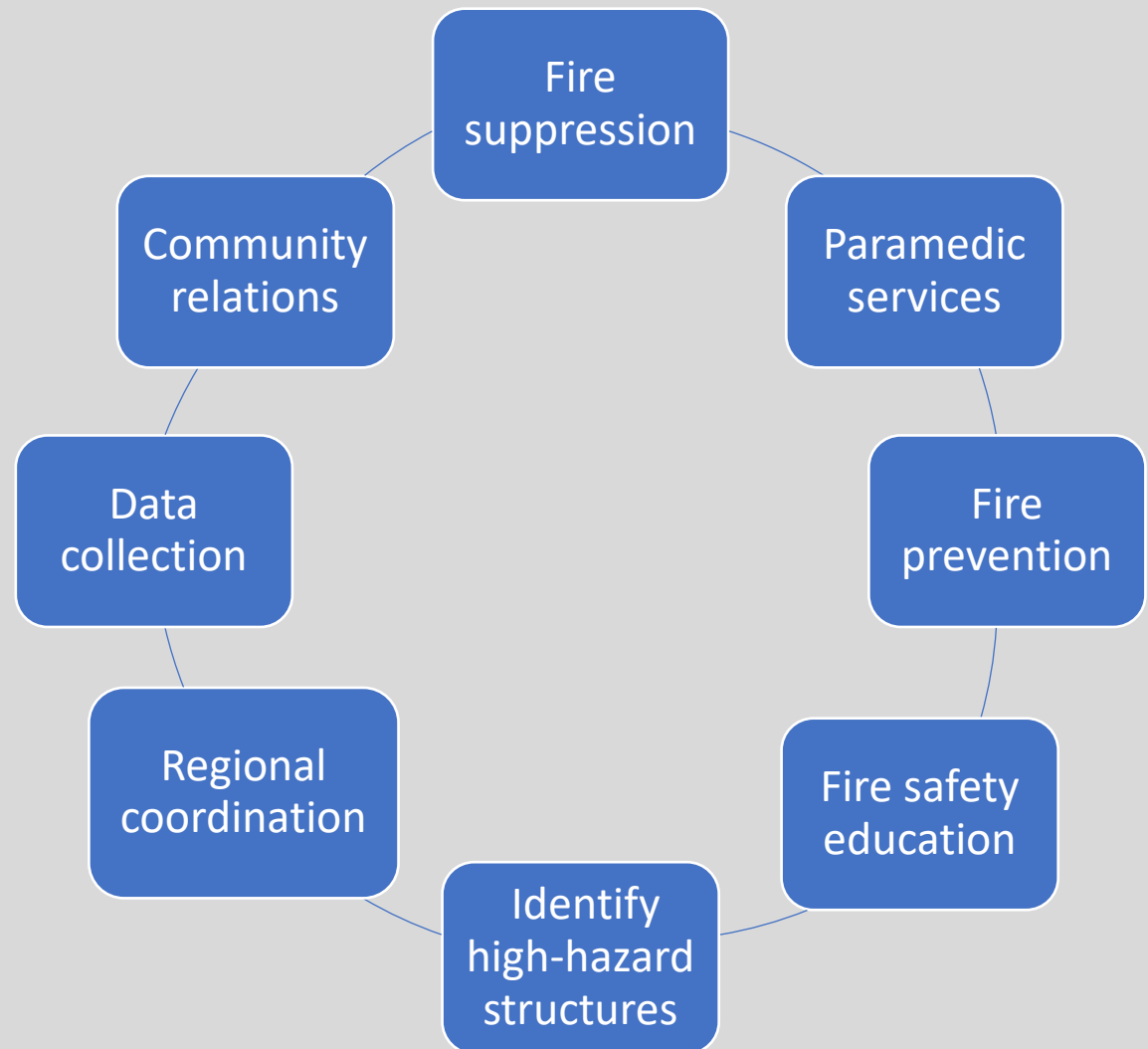
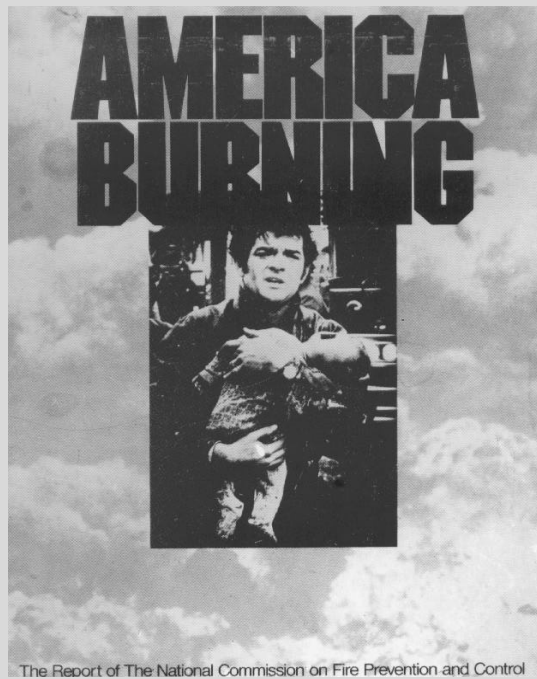
America Burning, released in 1973 by the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control.

America Burning, Prevention Needs Priority. pp. 7 & 71
<https://www.usfa.fema.gov/blog/america-burning-50th-anniversary/>



“Currently, about 95 cents of every dollar spent on the fire services is used to extinguish fires; only about 5 cents is spent on efforts...to prevent fires from starting.”

“Much more energy and funds need to be devoted to fire prevention, which could yield huge payoffs in lives and property saved.”



The report called on fire departments to build a comprehensive approach to fire prevention and life safety.



How does this play out in Berkeley? Average Annual Injuries:

Vehicle occupants, cyclists
and pedestrians injured in
crashes:

694 per year, 2017-2022

Persons injured in structure
fires:

2 per year, 2010-2022

Fire data: <https://firecares.nfors.org/departments/74866/berkeley-fire-department?page=1>

Collision data: <https://bpd-transparency-initiative-berkeleypd.hub.arcgis.com/pages/traffic-safety>



Starting now, fire agencies can and should apply the lessons of fire prevention to ***street trauma prevention.***

Principle 1.
Quick **response**
and hospital
return times are
essential to
save lives.





Photo: Mike Wilson

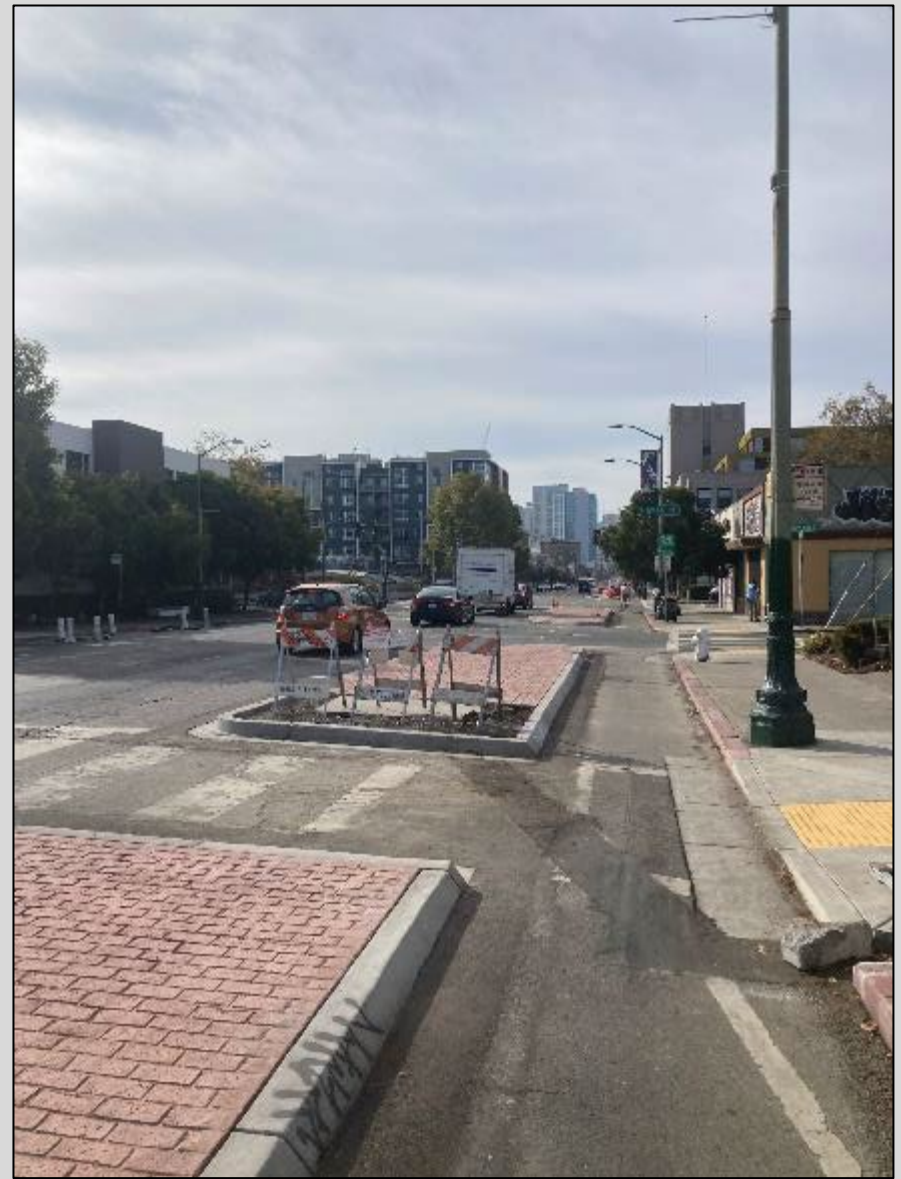


Photo: Mike Wilson

Principle 2: Street trauma can and should be **prevented** through well-recognized engineering controls.

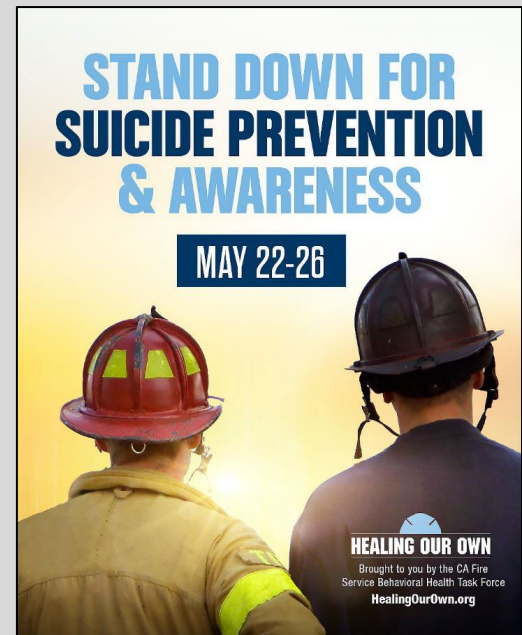


First Responders and PTSD

SB 542 (Stern) Oct 1, 2019,
PTSD Presumption.

“Trauma-related injuries can become overwhelming and manifest in post-traumatic stress, which may result in substance use disorders and even, tragically, suicide.”

“The fire service is four times more likely to experience a suicide than a work-related death in the line of duty in any year.”





In 2024, the City of Berkeley launched a Street Trauma Prevention (STP) program at Berkeley Fire to:

- Engage consistently and constructively in the City's Vision Zero process;
- Collaborate with other City departments to advance Vision Zero;
- Build an evidence-based approach to balancing street trauma response and prevention.



Photos: Mike Wilson



- The fire service is naturally focused on trauma response.
- But trauma prevention is effective and benefits everyone.
- So the fire service should actually be leading Vision Zero efforts.
- This is consistent with its remarkable legacy of fire prevention.
- Trauma prevention is also key to firefighter mental health.
- The fire service and Vision Zero can and should be natural allies.
- *Gently insist on this in the face of push-back and skepticism.*

ARTICLES ON VISION ZERO AND THE FIRE SERVICE

Liza Lutzker and Zachary Lamb (2026) “Safety-Safety Dilemmas: Understanding and Overcoming Conflicts between Safe Streets Interventions and Fire/EMS Response.” *Journal of Urban Affairs* (Under review).

It’s Time for the Fire Service to Join Communities in Preventing Street Trauma (Sept 30 2025). *Medium: Vision Zero Cities Journal*

<https://medium.com/vision-zero-cities-journal/its-time-for-the-fire-service-to-join-communities-in-preventing-street-trauma-67f4a36a45c9>.

Building an Alliance Between Firefighters and Street Safety Advocates (April 17, 2025). *California Bicycle Coalition*

<https://www.calbike.org/building-an-alliance-between-firefighters-and-street-safety-advocates/>.

A Near-fatal Bike Crash May Shift How Berkeley Does Street Design (August 6, 2024) *The Berkeley Scanner*

<https://www.berkeleyscanner.com/2024/08/06/traffic-safety/berkeley-street-trauma-prevention-program-mike-wilson-meg-schwarzman/>