

# TEXAS TIM

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## IN THIS ISSUE

On the Road Again...Talking  
TIM Across Texas ..... 1

High-Tension Cable Barrier  
Training.....2

Flying High in San  
Antonio.....3-4

Challenge Coin Awards and  
Statewide Webinar..... 5

Towman of the Year &  
Faces of the Fallen ..... 6

## BREAKING NEWS

### US Senate Passes Move Over Resolution, 11/28/23

To read the complete resolution [Click Here](#).

According to the 2023 Law Enforcement Officers Fatalities Report, in 2023 there were 37 officers killed in traffic-related incidents. That marks a decrease of 27% compared to the 51 crash-related deaths in 2022. There was an overall decrease of 39% in Law Enforcement LODDs in 2023. For the full article, [Click Here](#).

For newsletter comments, contact: [TIM@txdot.gov](mailto:TIM@txdot.gov).



## ON THE ROAD AGAIN...TALKING TIM ACROSS TEXAS

By Sean Mannix, Statewide TIM Coordinator, TxDOT

The first quarter of 2024 has proven to be quite productive and exciting for the statewide TIM program. In the last issue we introduced the two new statewide TIM Coordinators, myself and Chris Gray. As of this writing we were getting grounded in the program and curriculum, meeting the players, and basically learning the ropes.

We are now off and running sharing this life-saving training with responders across this great state. We have been as far west as El Paso and as far east as Carthage and dozens of great towns in between. We have had the opportunity to attend several TIM Team meetings in some of the larger metro areas and are excited to assist the El Paso District in their formation of a rural TIM Team in Alpine.

In the first quarter of 2024 we taught or facilitated fifteen classes with over two-hundred responders receiving the training. Our colleagues, Cecil Arient and Jim Comfort, have been a big help in this endeavor. Additionally, Jim has taught four classes on working with high tension cable barriers and special concerns with electric vehicles. With more requests coming in for these trainings, myself, Cecil, and Chris traveled to the headquarters of Gibraltar Global in Burnet, TX, to be trained as trainers in working with high tension cable barriers in traffic incidents. This will help us in being able to offer this training more frequently and broadly across the state.

Early on, Chris and I found that our classes were heavy on firefighters, medics, tow operators and transportation professionals, but light on police officers. To spur interest in the police executive community as to the importance of this life-saving training, Chris and I went to the Texas Police Chiefs Association (TPCA) Conference in Galveston. The TPCA was very generous in providing us with an informational booth for the duration of the conference, where we had the opportunity to interface with hundreds of police chiefs and executives from across the state. It is our hope that this will prompt a strong interest in getting hundreds more officers TIM trained.



Statewide TIM Coordinator Sean Mannix (In red shirt) at the Texas Police Chief's Conference.

While this was a very busy first quarter, we have no intention of slowing down as we get on the road again into the second quarter. We have our first Train-the-Trainer coming up in May at Houston Community College and a half dozen 4-hour courses already locked down. To find a training near you or to host a training at your facility contact [TIM@txdot.gov](mailto:TIM@txdot.gov). We look forward to hearing from you!

Stay Safe.

# HIGH-TENSION CABLE BARRIERS: ARE THEY A TIM LIFESAVER?

By Christopher Gray, Statewide TIM Coordinator, TxDOT

If you've ever driven in Texas, you have probably noticed these strange posts in the center median with 3 to 4 cables hanging from them. If you haven't noticed them, take a second look, as they line over 700 miles of Texas highways. What are they? What do they do? Do they really make a difference in saving lives?

What you are seeing is the High-Tension Cable Barrier systems. There are four companies that manufacture the cable barrier systems that you see in place along Texas highways. Gibraltar Global, located right here in Central Texas, is one of the main manufacturers of high-tension cable barriers in the United States.

The main purpose of these cable barriers is to provide a soft system to prevent cross-median crashes. The cable barriers work when the vehicle strikes the barrier causing the posts to break away, allowing the cables to flex capturing the vehicle causing less injury to vehicle occupants. The cable barrier also causes less damage to the vehicle and doesn't rebound the vehicle back into traffic. Often a large percentage of vehicles are capable of being driven away after striking the High-Tension Cable Barrier. In one study the installation of the High-Tension Cable Barrier in Minnesota reduced crash fatalities from 655 deaths down to 395 deaths.<sup>1</sup> In another study only 1.7% of vehicles that struck the cable barrier breached the barrier and crossed the median into oncoming traffic.<sup>2</sup>



I think it is safe to say, these High-Tension Cable Barriers are making a huge impact in saving lives, at a fraction of the cost of traditional methods, insuring the TIM mission statement that "Everybody Goes Home."

The statewide Texas TIM Team offers a course that is specifically designed for traffic incidents involving cable barrier entanglement. It covers methods of disentanglement, dismantling the system to release tension in order to remove vehicles, and safely cutting the cables in life-threatening situations. To set up a training class in your area, please email the statewide TIM Team at [TIM@txdot.gov](mailto:TIM@txdot.gov).

<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Department of Transportation, "Cable Median Barriers". January, 2024. <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/trafficeng/reports/cmbarrier.html>

<sup>2</sup> Stuart, Chris. "UD study: Highway cable barriers prevent most dangerous crashes". July 6, 2020. <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/transportation/study-highway-cable-barriers-prevent-most-dangerous-crashes/eVYhEYOTiDm6dVMmSbDpL>

## CABLE BARRIER TRAINING IN SAN ANTONIO

By Cecil Arient, San Antonio TIM Coordinator, TxDOT

On February 7th, 2024, at the TransGuide TMC in San Antonio, Jim Comfort, AECOM, conducted a two-hour course for over a dozen first responders. Representatives from TxDOT West Bexar Maintenance, HERO, and the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD) attended the sought-after training. Sgt. Michael Moore, the supervisor for the SAPD Commercial Vehicle Enforcement (CVE) Team, saw the benefits of having his entire truck team attend the training. Many crashes that the CVE Team responds to involve commercial motor vehicles entangled in cable barriers in the highway's median. First Responders receiving the training learn how to disentangle a vehicle from the cable barrier system and learn how to manipulate the system in unstable rescue conditions. Responders learn various methods to release cable tension and the importance of keeping non-emergency personnel in safe areas during operations. After receiving the training and understanding the value, SAPD plans to have all their traffic team attend HTCB training, as well as the San Antonio Fire Department.



# FLYING HIGH IN SAN ANTONIO

By Jim Comfort, AECOM

**O**n February 21st, 2024, the Statewide Texas TIM Webinar was hosted in San Antonio District's Emergency Operations Center at the TxDOT TransGuide Traffic Management Center (TMC). The meeting focused on TIM technologies, particularly unmanned aerial surveillance (UAS) or drone technology for crash scene investigation. The meeting included presenters with several decades of drone pilot experience in law enforcement.

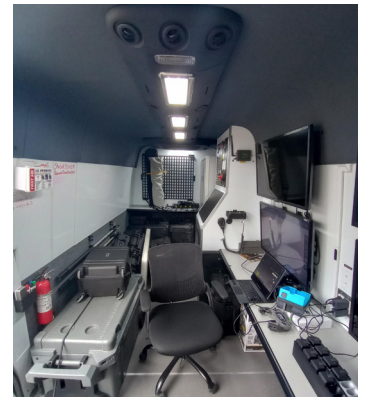
John Buell, a retired 26-year Austin Police Officer and 14-year US Army and Texas Army National Guard veteran, is the owner/founder of Drone Pilot, Inc.(DPI), and the Vice-President of Partnerships for EVE Vehicles Corporation. Established in 2014, DPI is one of the first FAA approved Section 333 exemptions for training and commercial operations. He was the founder of the Austin PD Pilot/Robotics unit, recording over 4,000 flights for SWAT, special events, homicide, and organized crime investigations.



Sgt. Trace Shannon is with the Bexar County Sheriff's Office in San Antonio, TX, and supervisor of the Criminal Investigations Division (major Crimes and Traffic Homicide). He also oversees the drone unit, known as the Air and Land Enhanced Robotics Team (ALERT). He is an Advanced Collision Reconstructionist and a Crash Data Retrieval (CRS) Tool Technician/Analyst and he has managed the Bexar County Drone Program since its inception in March 2018.



Although originally built for military purposes, UAS has become a common part of everyday life. Drones were first used by law enforcement for traffic crash investigations in 1999 when the quadcopter was used for crash reconstruction for state highway patrol agencies. This ultimately led to its use in other forensic investigations.<sup>1</sup> According to the Federal Aviation Administration, as of December 2023, there are 790,918 registered drones (369,528 commercially licensed) and 368,604 certified drone pilots.<sup>2</sup> According to a recent article in Commercial UAS News, over 1,400 agencies in the United States are now using drone technology in their law enforcement activities – a 54% increase in the past six years.<sup>3</sup>



The capture phase is best done in a "sterile cockpit" which is free from distractions such as curious onlookers, people asking questions, and even adverse weather. The Bexar County Sheriff's Office took two years to design a mobile command vehicle dedicated to providing a sterile cockpit for the pilots. It provides two comfortable pilot stations inside the vehicle and when the rear doors are opened, there is a large display screen for responders to see the video footage as it is being captured. The unit can also stream the im-ages to another site via internet to those feeds specifically invited to receive them.

Mr. Buell explained that when looking at crash scene reconstruction, it is the capturing and rendering of information that can be reused. Information captured in a 3-D rendering allows investigators an unlimited time to "go back" to the crime scene and discover new evidence, get measurements, or confirm data for criminal investigations. A photo shows one perspective that will not change and cannot reveal new information. Insurance agencies and prosecutors have found evidence on the 3-D renderings that were missed in the initial investigation.

In the capturing phase, specially designed software can be used to create an immediate 3-D rendering, if it is necessary. It is a lower-quality view but can be used immediately to display an orthomosaic view where a number of overlapping photos (e.g. from a drone or aerial camera) are "stitched together" with distortions removed to create a complete and continuous image representation or map of a portion of the earth. The post-



processing stage takes much more time. This process requires software that stitches the photos together but with greater detail and requires a computer with enough computing power to create the images effectively.



When dispatched to a scene to capture, the pilot must consider many factors before they are able to launch the drone. They must consider the ability to capture effectively by looking at the weather conditions (cannot capture in pouring rain or in excessively high winds), safety for the craft and by-standers from where the drone will be launched, and the authority to fly in that airspace (Texas Code 423 for drone operations).

The drones themselves have evolved considerably over the past few years. New models have become more sophisticated, with improved endurance to maintain greater height, lighter materials to allow for greater payloads (cameras and video equipment), and the addition of smaller cameras with enhanced capture capabilities. In recent years, some manufacturers have begun to experiment with solar power to tackle the problem of battery depletion and change out during extended operations.



Photo 1

Pictured above (photo 1) is a drone from 1998, weighing approximately fifty-five pounds and requiring a two-man team to

deploy. At right (photo 2), Mr. Buell holds the Bexar County SO drone with two fingers and a pair of dedicated goggles for the pilot to wear so he can see what is captured on the cameras during flight. Photo 3 shows the foldable drone on top of its storage case. The controller, batteries, and other equipment needed for operation are also stored in this case.



Photo 2



Photo 3

Commercial drone technology continues to proliferate throughout the United States, especially in law enforcement and fire department operations. However, drone use can be a complicated issue. Opponents of responder drone use have voiced privacy and safety concerns that lawmakers on both the state and federal levels continue to address. Law enforcement agencies must not only ensure their officers are properly trained but also comply with numerous regulations from state and federal agencies.

Regardless of politics, drone use has proven to be a valuable tool in the arsenal of many law enforcement agencies worldwide. **For Traffic Incident Management, drones have shown to significantly decrease on-scene investigation times, thereby decreasing time for lane closures and incident clearance times.** Another way to ensure that "Everybody Goes Home."

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<sup>1</sup> Police Chief Magazine, "The Evolution of Drones in Law Enforcement," May 30, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Aviation Administration, "Drones by the Numbers," December 31, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Lexipol Content Development Team, "Key Considerations for a Law Enforcement Drone Policy", March 11, 2024. <https://www.police1.com/police-products/police-drones/key-considerations-for-a-law-enforcement-drone-policy>

# TEXAS TIM CHALLENGE COIN AWARDS



David McDonald and Chief James Groom



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David McDonald and Chief James Groom

It is always a great day when the Statewide Coordinators get to recognize the outstanding work of our Texas First Responders. Statewide TIM Coordinator Sean Mannix presented the Challenge Coin to John Buell of Drone Pilots, Inc, for his work in UAS Technology in the state of Texas after the TIM meeting.

Statewide TIM Coordinator Christopher Gray also presented coins to Detective Sergeant Trace Shannon of the Bexar County Sheriff's Office and Enrique Flores, a retired Austin Police Officer for their work flying drones for law enforcement. Each man will have his name added to the Texas TIM Wall of Fame.



## TIM MEETINGS

### Texas Statewide TIM Webinar

April 17, 2024, 11:00 AM  
June 19, 2024, 11:00 AM  
August 21, 2024, 11:00 AM.

Every third Wednesday, every other month.

The cities of Alpine, Austin, Childress, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio all have local TIM meetings that discuss local TIM operations.

For Meetings and Webinar information, contact:  
[TIM@txdot.gov](mailto:TIM@txdot.gov).

## THE STATEWIDE TEXAS TIM WEBINARS

Since starting their roles as the Statewide TIM Coordinators, Sean Mannix and Christopher Gray have ramped up the TIM training throughout the state and given Texas a significant boost in training numbers reported to the Federal Highway Administration. In addition to training, Messrs. Mannix and Gray have revamped the Bi-Monthly Texas TIM Webinars. The webinars have been held every 3rd Wednesday bi-monthly continuously before and after the pandemic via the internet to include anyone from around the state that wished to participate. Beginning in 2024, the Statewide TIM Team is going back on the road hosting the bi-monthly meetings throughout the state. The goal is to highlight the TIM programs and encourage the development of new TIM teams, particularly in rural areas.

Our future statewide meetings will also be focusing on quality presentations and topics. To start the year, our February 21st meeting was hosted in the San Antonio District (see article on page 3-4 above). The next Statewide TIM Webinar will be hosted in the Odessa District headquarters, featuring Mr. Buck Russel, the Sr. Supervisor for Public Safety from the Union Pacific Railroad. He will discuss railroad, rail car, track and crossing safety when responding to incidents on or around railroad property. The meeting agenda also features state and national TIM training statistics along with regional TIM reports from around the great state of Texas.

If your agency would like to host a Statewide Texas TIM meeting, please contact the Statewide TIM Coordinators, Sean Mannix or Christopher Gray, at [TIM@txdot.gov](mailto:TIM@txdot.gov). This is an excellent opportunity to showcase your area's TIM program or to bring local first responders together to begin building a new team.



# TOWMAN OF THE YEAR BROUGHT BACK TO TEXAS

The American Towman Magazine was created in 1977 to address the specific needs of the towing industry. It highlights innovative equipment and towing techniques and it recognizes men and women that have made outstanding contributions to the towing industry. For the second time in three years, the American Towman of the Year was awarded to a Texas tower - Geoff Nienstedt of Road Runner Towing in Shertz, TX. In 2022, the award was given to to James Bennett, Jr. of Beard's Towing in Fort Worth, TX.

Mr. Nienstedt has been actively involved in pushing Texas legislation that increased the penalties for violation of the Slow Down/Move Over (SD/MO) Laws. His son Joshua was struck in 2015 by a passing vehicle while hooking up a car for a tow, inspiring him to pursue needed safety measures with an intense passion. Fortunately, his son was not seriously injured in the incident. As a result of this incident, he worked tirelessly to help pass Texas House Bill 898 into law, adding more severe penalties for SD/MO violators. As of September 1, 2023, penalties for first-time offenses now range from \$500 - \$1250 and are legally designated as misdemeanor crimes. For second offenses within five years, the fine increases up to \$2000.



As the owner/operator of Road Runner Towing for over twenty years, Mr. Nienstedt is a staunch advocate for the FHWA TIM training for all tow operators. He emphasizes safety first to all of the tow professionals with whom he has contact. He is an active member of the Northeast San Antonio and San Antonio TIM teams, giving voice to the local tow operators and showing that tow operators can earn the trust and respect of the first responders in both communities.

At the recent Northeast San Antonio TIM meeting, TIM Coordinator Cecil Arient (AECOM), presented Mr. Nienstedt with the Statewide TIM Challenge Coin for his work both statewide and nationally to promote safety in the tow industry. The Texas Statewide TIM Team would like to congratulate Mr. Nienstedt on his outstanding accomplishments in the area of traffic incident management for Texas and across the country. To read the full article in The American Towman Magazine, [Click Here](#).

## FACES OF THE FALLEN – REMEMBERING OUR COMRADES



Our hearts and our prayers go out to the families and friends of the two fallen responders. Thank you for your selfless service to the people of Texas. May they rest in peace.

**Tow Operator Oscar Merchan-Contreras**

*End of Watch: 02/07/2024 Duncanville, TX.*

**Tow Operator Simon Micheal Garcia, Sr.**

*End of Watch: 02/13/2024 Harris County, TX.*