New technology means new rescue techniques

By Ross Stansberry
ross.stansberry@knoxnews.com
865-342-6396

The scene at a business along Rutledge Pike was one of cars turned on their sides and flipped upside down. Rescuers gathered around to begin cutting inside the vehicles. This time it was just a training exercise.

Newer cars are becoming safer and stronger with newer metals and designs, but they can create a new set of issues for rescuers trying to get to crash victims stuck inside.

Boron steel is a high-strength metal used with greater frequency in vehicles in the past 10 years. Unfortunately, rescuers don't have a tool able to cut through it.

This and other issues were the focus of a training session for Knoxville firefighters and EMT professionals on Rutledge Pike on Thursday.

“The Boron steel is one of our biggest problems,” said Bryan Crawley, firefighter and paramedic for Rural Metro, as well as an instructor for Tennessee Association of Rescue Squads.

“One of the biggest aspects of the training right now is getting our people used to the newer techniques for the newer metals.”

Crawley said Rural Metro firetrucks in Knoxville don’t carry the “Jaws of Life” extrication equipment used in the training, but firefighters and paramedics still should learn the techniques so they can work effectively with the Knoxville Volunteer Emergency Rescue Squad on a crash scene.

They can also use knowledge learned at the session to treat patients trapped inside vehicles, before it is possible to extricate them.

Other parts of the training focused on proper safety for the rescuers, bracing unstable vehicles, working around deployed air bags and learning techniques for working with unibody framed vehicles.

Crawley said cars in 2015 will contain even more Boron steel, and rescuers need to be prepared to deal with that.

The region’s 170 firefighters are required to clock 12 hours a year of this type of training and pass a written test.

Vehicles on which they practiced and the space to practice Thursday were provided by discount parts retailer Pull-A-Part.

“It’s great to be able to help provide that training for them,” said Steve Levetan, executive vice president of Pull-A-Part. “The result of this is that it saves lives. The better prepared these guys are, the faster they're able to get someone outside of a car.”

Lee Rayburn, also a firefighter and paramedic as well as an instructor on the scene, said he expects equipment will be developed to cut through Boron steel, but for now it’s vital to understand techniques for dealing with it using equipment available.