



East Coast truckies to the rescue

LIKE MANY TRUCKIES WORKING ON THE EAST COAST, WILLIAM Houkamau has come across many crashes on the narrow and windy State Highway 35.

In 21 years of driving logtrucks on the Coast he's even once been first on the scene after a mate crashed his car and was trapped in it. William got him out: "Thankfully," he adds, "it wasn't life-threatening."

Incidents on the picturesque but dangerous Pacific Coast Highway are so frequent that in just two months late last year, for example, he and his fellow-drivers at Rangitukia-based Rewi Haulage alone were the first on the scene of three crashes.

A "very proud" Hoana Rewi, the company's health & safety manager, says they administered first-aid, alerted emergency services and assisted medical staff.

And, she stresses, their actions were typical of East Coast truckies – across the industry...and that's something that needs to be made public.

When Rewi Haulage driver Beau Hailey came across a rollover, "it was the first time he'd had to use his first-aid kit."

Matri Kururangi and Pauly Hale were first to arrive at a 4WD rollover, helped get the occupants out of the vehicle and moved it off the road.

And William and fellow-drivers DJ Fox, Nui Lawson and Claude Waitoa were the first arrivals at a vehicle rollover in which five teenagers had been injured. Together they tended to the injured, alerted authorities, commenced traffic control and assisted medical staff when they arrived.

Says Hoana: "Will, being a first responder and fire warden, knew exactly how to handle the accident."

That's right: William's good work on SH35 goes beyond helping those he chances on while at the wheel of his logtruck – he's also been a volunteer fireman in hometown Te Araroa for 26 years.

And that means he's also attended many, many more motor vehicle accidents on callouts.

Sadly, that has included serious injury accidents...and fatalities.

William Houkamau has come across many crashes and incidents on State Highway 35...as well as attending many, many more as a volunteer firefighter





William Houkamau is “well-known for being the most courteous driver on the road,” Hoana Rewi reckons

“Please tell these guys that they are amazing and thank them for stepping up....”

Hoana believes that the reason there are so many accidents on SH35 is “not just the state of the road – it’s the speed.”

William’s interest in trucks came from his Dad, Tau – “who has been driving trucks since I was at school. He drove for Direct Transport back in the 1970s-’80s – and then had a partnership on the East Coast.”

William got his car licence when he was 15 and his HT licence three years later....“because the old man said I might need them down the track.”

It turned out to be quite a long way down the track! He didn’t drive fulltime until he was 39. He started out as an apprentice plumber, but “there wasn’t much work around so I gave Dad and the business a hand....for about four or five years. But sort of in and out.

“Then I came back up the Coast to Te Araroa to give my grandparents a hand during Cyclone Bola in ‘88 – and just stayed,” working for 10 years as a school caretaker before getting into truck driving fulltime.

Hoana says William was reluctant to be featured as a “hero” and he insists: “I don’t think I’m any different to anyone else. Most Kiwis, all around NZ, will stop and help anybody – that’s who we are.”

And certainly Hoana says Rewi Haulage drivers’ experience in regularly encountering and helping at crashes is far from unique: “It’s not just our drivers – it’s across the whole industry.”

And that is not something that usually gets any publicity – which is why she was moved to let the local office of Waka Kotahi New

Zealand Transport Agency, the Road Transport Association of NZ local exec and forestry company management know about this example of some positive news about truckies.

As she adds: “It is nice to see them being the heroes of late and not the villains – as often portrayed in the media, when they have accidents.”

She says that the East Coast logtruck industry has had “our issues” in terms of truck accidents and incidents, “but let’s also acknowledge this side of it” – that they are so often the first on the scene at other people’s accidents.

RTANZ area executive Sandy Walker comments: “Yes, unfortunately our professional drivers are usually first on the scene and deal with a number of issues prior to emergency services or traffic control.

“It is great that someone has recognised the good work they do outside of their daily duties” – particularly since, he adds, it can result in them having “to deal with the trauma side of this when they get home to their families.”

The Rewi Haulage drivers were also praised by NZTA senior compliance officer, safer commercial transport, Lynn Williams, who acknowledges that truck drivers often “happen upon something untoward in the course of their day – and, most importantly, act on it.

“Please tell these guys that they are amazing and thank them for stepping up.....they are the eyes and ears out there and we rely on them as road users to help keep the roads safe for everyone.” 