



Be There . . . Safely.

Emergency Medical Services, by the nature of the job, attracts those who enjoy excitement and might require providers to run toward situations that most people would escape. Safety hazards sometimes come with the territory.

So how do we make sure that EMS providers return safely from every call? Where should EMS providers draw the line between a necessary risk and needless disregard for their own safety? For a profession that attracts “adrenaline junkies,” it may be hard to draw the line. But here’s the bottom line: in order to do the job, EMS providers must get there safely, deliver safe care and return safely—so they will be there to answer the next call.

EMS needs to adopt an entire “culture” of safety—an expectation that acting safely and delivering safe care is just as important as response times and protocols. We have a long way to go. One survey shows that almost 9% of those responding reported being in an ambulance crash—within the last 12 months¹. Another data source on line of duty deaths to firefighters showed that of the 14 deaths that occurred in 2008 involving vehicle crashes, eight were not wearing seat belts and of these, six were fully ejected from their vehicle². How can we keep providers and their patients safe? Here’s what NHTSA’s Office of EMS (OEMS) is doing:

EMS Workforce

To track the extent of EMS workforce injuries, OEMS is collaborating with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to improve data collection on EMS worker injury and ambulance safety. NIOSH and OEMS are using the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System—Work (NEISS - Work) to collect data from hospitals across the nation on EMS worker line of duty injuries.

Federal Interagency Committee on EMS (FICEMS) & National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

As a direct result of NTSB hearings on helicopter EMS, FICEMS is charged with two tasks: to develop guidelines for selection of appropriate mode of emergency transportation and guidelines for the use and availability of helicopter transport.

Ambulance Safety

1. Improving Ambulance Safety Standards. NIOSH and NHTSA are teaming together on a four year project to develop recommendations for evidence-based safety standards aimed at increasing patient and EMS worker safety in the patient compartment.
2. “Solutions for Safely Transporting Children in Emergency Vehicles.” OEMS in partnership with NHTSA’s Occupant Protection Division initiated a two-year project to develop a set of recommendations on how to safely and appropriately transport children via ground ambulance.

National EMS Advisory Council

NEMSAC members have identified patient and provider safety as issues requiring immediate and substantial attention. They have adopted a position in favor of, “...*Establishing a Culture of Safety: A National Strategy*” and have made recommendations to DOT and FICEMS for further action.

1. Studenek, JR and Fernandez AR (2008). Characteristics of Emergency Medical Technicians Involved in Ambulance Crashes. *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, 23(5): 432-37.
2. U.S. Fire Administration (2009). Firefighter Fatalities in the United States in 2008. <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/fireservice/fatalities/> (last accessed October 22, 2009).