



EMS LIFE SAFETY PROCEDURES

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Resources: None

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to identify and implement procedures to ensure the safety and protection of emergency medical services responders.

II. Assumptions

- A. All emergency response activities possess inherent risk. Predictable risk can be reduced or eliminated with appropriate actions.
- B. EMS providers not routinely assigned to 911 responses may, by circumstance or operational need, participate in a 911 response within the county. Therefore, all Santa Clara County paramedics, EMTs, and field supervisors must understand life safety procedures.
- C. Responder safety is the responsibility of every emergency medical services provider. Therefore, it is essential for all providers to prioritize situational awareness while on duty and maintain continuous watchfulness for threats, hazards, and abnormal behaviors or events.
- D. Emergency medical services providers may be mistaken for firefighters, police officers, private security, or other personnel.
- E. The first provider to arrive at the scene of an emergency shall assume the role of Incident Commander (IC) and become responsible for scene safety and security. Until scene safety and security are assured responders are unable to aid the ill or injured.
- F. Section III through Section VI of this policy do not apply to Santa Clara County fire departments. These departments follow internal response policies that may vary from the content contained in the sections identified. Additionally, fire departments share operational standards across departments when on the scene of mutual aid responses as prescribed by the Santa Clara County Fire and Rescue Operational Area Mutual Aid Plan.

III. Assessing the Scene

A. First Unit On Scene

1. If the first unit to arrive at the scene of an emergency is an ambulance, one crewmember shall become Incident Commander (IC) and be responsible for overall incident safety.
2. The IC shall assume responsibility for incident management, which requires that a “CAN” report be provided to County Communications or another appropriate public service answering point (PSAP):
 - a. Conditions: what is observed
 - b. Actions: what the IC plans to do
 - c. Needs: what additional resources are needed
3. The IC shall always prioritize responder safety and scene protection while implementing the procedures contained within this policy.
4. As soon as possible following the arrival of a fire department or law enforcement agency at the scene, the IC shall provide a CAN report, transfer command to the appropriate jurisdictional authority, and request an assignment.
5. Upon transfer of command, all involved communications centers shall be notified of position changes so that scene safety notifications and single-point ordering are sustained by the appropriate communications center.

B. First EMS Unit On Scene

1. The first EMS unit arriving on scene shall advise County Communications of any safety concerns, provide the location of any staging areas and, if appropriate, provide a CAN report.
2. The CAN report shall always be provided by the first arriving ambulance to County Communications if multiple non-fire EMS units are responding to the incident. Examples include, but are not limited to a FAA Alert 2L, Ambulance Task Force, MCIP activation, etc.

IV. Life Hazard Zones (LHZ)

- A. A Life Hazard Zone (LHZ) is defined as the area containing a process or condition that would likely cause serious injury or death to exposed

persons. A LHZ shall be isolated by the IC or designee with identifying barriers to alert responders to the presence of the hazard.

- B. Conditions found at or near an emergency scene which require a LHZ include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - 1. Fallen power lines or any power lines that a responder may approach or come into contact with
 - 2. Energized electrical equipment, especially if the equipment is damaged
 - 3. Collapse zones (areas around damaged structure that would be covered in debris if the structure collapsed)
 - 4. Large unprotected holes, ditches, and openings such as trenches, swimming pools, and sewer access points
 - 5. A damaged vessel containing any pressurized liquid or gas
 - 6. Ammunition or explosives such as gun powder, blasting caps, and dynamite
 - 7. Presence of suspected or actual hazardous materials including fuel spills from traffic collisions
- C. A LHZ shall be marked with a minimum of three horizontal strands of red and white barrier tape with “Do Not Enter” or “Do Not Cross” printed conspicuously in large lettering.
- D. Caution must be exercised by responders who encounter barrier tape of any kind until the reason for the barrier has been identified (restriction of public access, crime scene, etc.).
- E. Although yellow tape is not appropriate for designating a LHZ, responders shall assume that any area barricaded with three horizontal strands of any color/pattern of barrier tape is a LHZ until proven otherwise.
- F. No person shall enter an area marked “Do Not Enter” or “Do Not Cross” at any time.
- G. All responders shall observe for any established LHZ and ensure others do not enter such areas.
- H. In addition to barrier tape, a LHZ may be marked with cones or light sticks/strobes.
- I. Any LHZ barrier shall be clearly illuminated.

- J. Any responder who discovers a previously unrecognized LHZ condition shall immediately do the following:
1. Maintain personal safety
 2. Immediately restrict access to the area
 3. If the responder is the only unit at the scene that responder shall notify County Communications via radio and state: "Emergency Traffic / Life Hazard Alert" followed by the nature of the hazard and a CAN report.
 4. If a fire/law IC has already been established the discovering responder shall immediately notify the IC via direct radio, runner, or via County Communications.
 5. Remain at the border of and restrict access to the LHZ until reassigned by the IC, Safety Officer, or their designee.

V. Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones (LCES)

- A. The use of LCES on every response will better prepare responders to react to changing scene conditions and will assist in the safe recognition of a marked LHZ or unmarked LHZ condition.
- B. All ambulance crew members should prioritize situational awareness and the crew member(s) not responsible for direct patient care should continuously scan the scene for danger.
- C. A crew member shall immediately communicate any threats or hazards to the IC or designee and advise County Communications in order to communicate LHZ conditions to responding units which have not yet arrived.
- D. A safe escape route shall be identified for every emergency scene to allow for rapid retreat from a residence, roadway, or any other incident location. Escape route planning shall include consideration for the location and positioning of equipment, vehicles, and personnel.
- E. A safety zone shall be established on the scene by the IC or designee. This area should generally be close to the incident location and may be used for staging or as an area of safe refuge.

F. Examples of LCES observations include but are not limited to:

1. Loose sharps
2. Bodily fluids
3. Fuel leaks
4. Unusual bystander or patient behavior
5. Aggressive animals
6. Self-locking doors
7. Fire spread
8. Other emergency vehicle parking
9. Indicators of other abnormal events
10. Traffic
11. Fall/trip hazards

VI. Emergency Vehicle Positioning

- A. Positioning emergency vehicles to form a physical barrier between an emergency scene and flowing traffic or other hazards is a practice known as safety support. In most cases safety support shall be used for traffic collisions and other events on active roadways; however, safety support may be utilized where indicated in any situation.
- B. If an ambulance arrives at a scene on an active roadway before other responders the crew shall position the ambulance before the scene to provide safety support against flowing traffic. If possible the crew should position the ambulance for egress.
- C. Once the emergency scene has been adequately protected, the impact to traffic flow in lanes or areas adjacent to the scene should be minimized where possible.
- D. When an ambulance or other emergency vehicle is providing safety support on an active roadway the crew shall follow these procedures:
 1. Whenever possible, the driver's side shall be angled away from flowing traffic to enable the driver to reenter the vehicle more safely before departing the scene.

2. Any emergency vehicle positioned for safety support shall be unoccupied in order to reduce harm should another vehicle collide with the safety support barrier.
 3. Patients shall not be loaded into an ambulance providing safety support unless it is safe to access the rear doors. In most cases this requires either that another emergency vehicle provides safety support for the ambulance or that the ambulance is moved to a safer location.
 4. The vehicle shall be parked far enough before the emergency scene to create a safety zone between the vehicle and scene.
- E. If the scene has already been protected, arriving ambulances shall position themselves beyond the scene for rapid egress unless directed otherwise by the IC.
 - F. Parking beyond the incident provides the most protection for the crew and for the loading of patients.
 - G. The IC or designee may establish a staging area to limit the flow of on-scene units to provide for greater responder mobility and scene safety.
 - H. Additional ambulances arriving at the scene shall park beyond the incident, report to staging, or report to a location assigned by the IC.
 - I. Emergency lights shall be used to alert others to the presence of the emergency scene and provide the earliest possible visible warning.
 - J. Scene lights, such as flood/takedown lights, shall be used where possible and appropriate for the incident.

VII. Imminent Danger

Imminent danger is defined as any threat or hazard that could reasonably be expected to cause immediate death or serious physical harm to a responder. A secure scene refers to an emergency scene free of recognized imminent danger; however, even a secure scene cannot be guaranteed to be completely free of all threats and/or hazards.

A. Scene Staging

1. Dispatch may advise responders to stage if there is reason to believe imminent danger exists at or near the emergency scene.
2. Responders may stage when they believe that imminent danger exists at or near the emergency scene. In such cases, the crew shall notify County Communications of the intent to stage and the reason.

3. When EMS responders have staged for greater than ten minutes due to the threat of imminent danger, the crew shall:
 - a. Contact and coordinate with the IC to rapidly identify means to quickly and safely access the patient.
 - b. Take additional and persistent actions to identify ways to quickly and safely access the patient.
 - c. Document all actions taken to quickly and safely access the patient in the patient care report.

B. Scene Security

1. Force protection is defined as law enforcement support to provide overall scene security during routine events that do not have imminent danger. Responders should coordinate with the IC to request force protection as appropriate. EMS responders shall not enter or remain on any scene where imminent danger exists regardless of the presence of law enforcement.
2. EMS personnel may not enter any scene where imminent danger exists, even if accompanied by law enforcement or other specialized personnel. Examples include but are not limited to:
 - a. Tactical law enforcement entries
 - b. Hazardous materials entries
 - c. Water rescue
 - d. High/low angle rescue
3. Personnel must be specially trained, qualified, and authorized to operate in these areas. EMS responders may support allied agency personnel while remaining in the cold zone or safe-refuge area only.

VIII. Retreat from Scene

- A. "EMS responders" shall refer to EMTs, paramedics, and applies equally to those facilitating patient care by directing or supervising a scene consistent with the California Health and Safety Code Section 1799.106 and 1799.107.
- B. In the event that EMS responders arrive at scene (with or without making patient contact) and are subsequently faced with imminent danger, EMS responders may retreat to a safe area. Imminent danger is defined as any threat or hazard that could reasonably be expected to cause immediate death or serious physical harm to a responder.

- C. If EMS responders determine that retreat from the scene is necessary, they shall make reasonable effort to evacuate any patients. Efforts to evacuate a patient shall be thoroughly documented. If a patient is not evacuated, EMS responders shall make a reasonable effort to return to the scene to continue assisting the patient if and when it becomes safe to do so.
- D. In the event that EMS responders retreat the crew shall immediately advise County Communications and the IC of the situation and request appropriate additional resources, such as assistance from law enforcement, in order to mitigate danger to any patients still at the scene.
- E. As soon as it is safe to do so, the EMS responders shall notify the EMS Field Supervisor of the retreat and complete a System Variance Report. The supervisor shall immediately notify the EMS Duty Chief.

IX. Risk Refusal

- A. All EMS responders have the right and obligation to report unsafe working conditions.
- B. If an EMS responder feels that a work assignment is unsafe they must identify, to whatever degree possible, safe alternatives for completing the assignment.
- C. A “turn down” is a situation where an EMS responder has determined that, due to safety concerns, they cannot undertake an assignment as given and they are unable to negotiate a safe alternative solution.
- D. The turn down of an assignment must be based on assessments of risk and the ability of the individual or organization to control that risk. EMS responders may turn down an assignment as unsafe when:
 - 1. There is a violation of safe work practices
 - 2. Environmental conditions make the work unsafe
 - 3. The individual lacks necessary qualifications or experience
 - 4. Defective equipment is being used
 - 5. The assignment violates federal, state, or local law or regulation
 - 6. The assignment violates EMS Agency established policies, procedures, or treatment protocols
- E. If an assignment is turned down due to safety, the EMS responder shall immediately notify the Safety Officer (or IC if there is no Safety Officer) of the turn down and of the safety factors resulting in the turn down. The

EMS responder shall also notify the EMS Field Supervisor and complete a SVR as soon as it is safe to do so.

- F. If an assignment is turned down due to safety the EMS Field Supervisor shall notify the EMS Duty Chief and ensure that the involved EMS crew completes a SVR.

X. Personnel Accountability Reporting (PAR)

- A. A PAR is a periodic welfare check to verify the safety and security of responders.
- B. A PAR includes all personnel assigned to or in the care of an EMS provider unit, including but not limited to:
 - 1. Ride-along observers
 - 2. Trainees and interns
 - 3. Patients and their families
 - 4. Assisting allied responders
- C. To successfully complete a PAR, EMS responders must know the following information for every emergency response:
 - 1. To whom they report within the structure of the incident
 - 2. Who reports to them within the structure of the incident
 - 3. How to communicate (radio frequencies/channels in use)
 - 4. Existence of any life hazards
- D. The IC shall ensure that a PAR includes all resources attached to an incident, but the use of multiple radio frequencies and dispatch centers complicates this process. To overcome this complication, the IC may utilize the following :
 - 1. Fire apparatus regularly stationed within the county have a County EMS 800 MHz portable radio. The IC or designee may use this radio to conduct a PAR of all EMS units assigned to the incident.
 - 2. The IC may direct subordinate division/branch/unit managers/supervisors within the ICS structure of the incident to conduct a PAR of all assigned EMS units.

3. The IC may request the assistance of County EMS responders or EMS Field Supervisors to conduct a PAR of all EMS units assigned to the incident.
- E. The person conducting the PAR shall report all completed PAR information to the IC or designee. If any EMS responders are missing or injured, the person conducting the PAR shall also immediately notify the EMS Field Supervisor and EMS Duty Chief.
 - F. When an EMS unit receives a request for a PAR the crew shall immediately do the following:
 1. Visualize all personnel assigned to or in the care of the unit and determine without doubt that they are present and safe. If all personnel are present and safe, the unit “has PAR”. If all personnel are not present and/or safe the unit “does not have PAR”.
 2. State the following information over the radio:
 - a. Unit ID
 - b. Whether the unit has PAR or does not have PAR
 - c. The number of assigned crew present
 - d. The number of non-crew personnel present (ride-along/passenger/patient/intern, etc.)
 - e. The assignment and last known location of any personnel who are not present or visible.
 - f. Your unit assignment and location (triage, staging, etc.)
 3. Monitor the radio for instructions if appropriate.