Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) Safety Meeting Kit



EMTs are employed by many organizations, public and private, emergency and nonemergency. These include ambulance companies, fire departments, recreational facilities, law enforcement, hospitals, educational institutions, care centers, search and rescue squads, transfer services, and others.

While Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) act as first responders, they must also take precautions to ensure that their safety isn't at risk. Rules and regulations can usually be gleaned through EMT basic training, but others are learned through experience in the field.

SCENE SAFETY FOR EMTS/PROCEDURES

Scene safety is paramount in the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) profession. When EMS providers arrive at the address of an emergency, they are entering an unknown situation that could be unpredictable. If a scene is considered "safe," this means there are not any obvious potential threats or hazards that could impede the EMTs from doing their work or bring them harm. This could be anything from an electrical hazard to an active shooter to an agitated patient. When entering a scene, EMTs are taught priorities in a specific order: 1) personal safety, 2) safety of their partners or colleagues, and 3) care of the patient. Any threat to one prevents moving forward to the next.

A proper assessment of scene safety begins at the time of dispatch. The call-taker has collected information from the 911 call, and this can prove invaluable. The description of the emergency and the destination address are critical pieces of information and are useful for preparation. In the same way that notification of a cardiac arrest has responders preparing for CPR, notification of a motor vehicle accident should trigger thoughts about having police on scene for traffic control or dispatch to a chemical plant should cause consideration of potential hazards.

Advance knowledge of the neighborhood can also be helpful. Many full-time first responders are expected to be familiar with the details of the territory within their service area. Awareness of areas known for high rates of criminal activity can be useful in safety preparation. If responders are aware that their destination is an active crime scene, law enforcement should secure the premises

before EMS entry.

Observation is a valuable tool when entering an unknown situation. Noting the actions of bystanders near the scene can be suggestive. For example, someone fleeing the scene on EMT arrival may suggest foul play. Large crowds gathering could be dangerous to the safety of the first responders – especially if the crowd appears agitated. Noting the number of cars parked on the street or in the driveway could indicate the number of people inside. Broken windows or doors should raise concerns.

Responders should always approach the scene with caution, and any suspicious activity merits serious consideration. It is often suggested that first responders stand to the side of the doorframe when knocking to minimize themselves as a potential target. First responders should be vigilant about their safety and prepared to act at all times. It is essential to have an exit strategy in mind. When there are multiple bystanders on a scene, the location of these people is crucial information. If at all possible, they should not be allowed to get behind first responders, minimizing the risk of an unseen attack from behind. Bystanders should also not be allowed to block exits.

Close monitoring of bystanders is also important for another reason. Family members or other people in the house may be disruptive verbally and physically to patient care. Recognition of body language and any concealed possessions (e.g., potential weapons) may head off potential threats.

There may also be animals involved at the scene. Large, agile animals may pose a particular threat. Growling, barking, and foaming at the mouth can be signals of animal agitation and impending attack. First responders should avoid sudden movements and retreat to a safe distance.

Drugs and drug paraphernalia are other hazards often encountered. EMTS should attempt to familiarize themselves with the appearance of common substances in their areas. Especially with unidentified substances, caution is necessary; and the first responders should always be mindful of the potential irritant or explosive properties of these agents.

Hazardous materials pose their own set of challenges. If possible, EMTs should avoid entering a hazmat scene entirely. The ambulance should ideally be parked up-wind, a long distance away from the scene, and the appropriate authorities should be notified.

BEST SAFETY PRACTICES FOR EMT WORKERS

Carefully watch for hazardous scenes: It’s also important to be aware of hazardous elements that you may encounter on a call. For example, these can include downed power lines, fuel leaks, and unstable structures, just to name a few. As an EMT professional, you often need to expect the unexpected.

Wait for police to secure violent scenes: For your safety, it is of the utmost importance that you do not rush into a violent scene before the police have cleared it. Remain at a safe distance until the police are able to secure the area. It’s also important that you do not follow a police car into a scene. If the police need to draw their weapons, you don’t want to get caught in the line of fire.

Remember your safety gear and equipment: Get in the habit of wearing your issued safety gear. This can include safety vests, gloves, helmets, and EMS turnout gear. Not only are these items designed to protect you from injury, but they also limit or prevent exposure to dangerous chemicals, blood borne pathogens, etc.

Operate the ambulance as safely as possible: While there isn't an excuse to discard your safety gear, there also isn't an excuse to drive dangerously. Remember that you aren't just responsible for your safety, but your partner's safety, the patient's safety, and the public's safety. Always pay attention to the weather and road conditions.

Perform a pre-shift vehicle checkout: It's vital that EMT professionals conduct a pre-shift vehicle checkout by inspecting oil levels, the tires, the siren, and the lights. You need to ensure that everything is in working order before you start your shift. Why? The answer is usually the same, and it can be summed up in one word: safety.

Avoid lifting injuries on the job: Lessen or avoid back pain on a shift by squatting and using proper body mechanics. As they say, always lift with your legs—never your back.

FINAL WORD

The injury risk to EMTS personnel is high. EMTS employers can help prevent injuries by providing workers with training and equipment to perform their job safely and by enforcing safety policies and procedures. EMS personnel should advocate for their own safety by discussing safety concerns and near misses as well as by using available resources and equipment.