



# Collaborating With Emergency Medical Services in Safe Communities

What happens if -- in a heartbeat -- tranquillity is shattered? As fast as your pulse can race, life itself becomes a priority.

## The Role of EMS in Safe Communities

Your local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system is much more than flashing lights, blaring sirens and rushing ambulances. It is a complex health care delivery system comprised of trained medical technicians, some of whom are paid and others who volunteer, that respond to emergencies to provide treatment and transport of the sick and injured to a medical facility or between facilities.

Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) are in a unique position to make a real difference in the quality of life in your community. They not only provide immediate medical assistance in times of crisis but they also have the credibility to communicate principles of disease and injury prevention, and promote healthy lifestyles to family, friends, neighbors, and any other recipients of the EMT's good care.

The combination of these two functions, prevention and promotion, can actually prevent or modify the impact of many medical emergencies long before an ambulance is required.

This article discusses how and why EMS organizations should become a partner in a Safe Communities program. It focuses on two areas: EMS information systems and community injury prevention. An understanding of these two areas provides the insight for successfully collaborating with EMS to provide public health education both at the patient level and through group efforts.

## EMS Systems: How to Contact Your EMS Provider

How your EMS system is organized may affect whether patient care reports are computerized and retrievable and the system's ability to provide staff support to Safe Communities efforts.

EMS response and transport systems vary greatly. Systems may utilize volunteers, private ambulances, municipal agencies or a combination of several agencies, to provide service. EMS system response will also vary from community to community, with most systems servicing a defined geographic

area, such as a town, fire district, or city.

The response may be either single or multi-tiered. In single-tiered response systems, all vehicles and personnel are capable of delivering essentially the same level of service. In multi-tiered systems, vehicles and personnel of various capabilities may respond to provide Advanced Life Support (ALS) or some lesser level of care according to a previously established system-wide dispatching plan.

Furthermore, multi-tiered response agencies may be from one or two entirely different organizations. The most common is the first response of basic life support personnel via the closest fire station with an ALS ambulance responding from a different location. In this scenario, the fire department is a municipal agency and the ambulance may be a private proprietary agency. Each agency will document their response and treatment provided to the patient on a patient care report.

Many individual agencies do not computerize their patient care reports. Some large municipal or private agencies may have computerized billing systems that contain some response information. Request a meeting with the administrator of your local agency to identify and determine the information and resources they have to contribute to Safe Communities.

EMS agencies are members of either a county or regional based coordinating system. The coordinating systems often provide communications, medical control, and other types of support to the agencies. The county or regional EMS systems may computerize EMS response information that is generated by the agencies in their geographic catchment area. The administrator of your local EMS agency can introduce or refer you to the county or regional coordinator. Again, your goal is to make them a partner in your Safe Communities efforts. This group may be in a better position to assist you in delivering your message to numerous EMS agencies at once. Additionally, they should be able to identify agencies or systems that have computerized EMS data.

At the state level, most states maintain an office of Emergency Medical Services. This office is generally responsible for the training, coordination, and licensing of EMS. The state office may maintain a computerized uniform statewide EMS data system that has the capability to generate reports and information for dissemination to the local level. A list of the State EMS Offices and their addresses is included at the end of this article.

## **What EMS Brings to Safe Communities**

EMS agencies collect information about every request for assistance and every patient they encounter. Most EMS communications centers, also known as 911 Public Safety Answering Points, collect detailed injury type, accident location, and emergency response data. EMT's document the patient's injuries or illness, diagnostic signs, treatment, and disposition. This patient care report serves as a medical record for the patient, EMS agency, and receiving hospital. State, regional or local health organizations may computerize this information for system analysis and management.

Your local EMS agency may be able to assist your group in identifying high risk community sites, such as:

- ▶ The playground in your community that generates the most injuries to children
- ▶ The roadway where pedestrians are most often struck by vehicles
- ▶ The incidence and location of bicyclists who suffer serious head injuries
- ▶ The location and time where the majority of alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes occur

EMS agencies will welcome the opportunity to become a member of your Safe Communities group. Some agencies already participate in local or county based committees with hospitals, law enforcement, and traffic safety groups. A simple phone call or visit to the local ambulance station should be all that it takes to start the ball rolling. It is important that you welcome them as a Safe Communities partner. EMT's will be able to assist you with determining safety needs, formulating and implementing an action plan, and evaluating effectiveness.

## Community Injury Prevention

Frequently, health agencies are both understaffed and overused. This is especially true of emergency medical services. Resources are generally allocated to provide a fast response and well trained technicians to every emergency. Traditionally, community education and injury prevention have a lower priority for EMS.

But your local EMS agency can benefit from assisting the Safe Communities to develop a comprehensive public health education program in your community.

A good EMS-based community injury prevention program will:

- ▶ Provide educational assistance and generate awareness of preventable injuries. Safe Communities Coalitions can expand their outreach programs using EMS professionals and present prevention programs directly to areas of the community that have the greatest risk. Paramedics using an ambulance to present a safety program at the local playground on a Saturday afternoon in your hometown can have a tremendous impact on children and parents alike. Joining forces with your local fire department and EMS organization can expand your Safe Communities volunteer manpower pool greatly.
- ▶ Educate the general public in the basic principles of safe driving. Safe driving programs that utilize EMT's who share their experiences related to impaired or unbelted occupants have a tremendous impact. The development and implementation of comprehensive programs for schools, community groups, and others can be a tremendous task. EMS organizations need your support and assistance to accomplish this.
- ▶ Develop a referral service that can be delivered by health professionals. An EMT who is thoroughly knowledgeable in local health and community support systems can make a critical contribution to the health of patients and their families. In many cases a referral can be related to secondary problems in the home or to people other than the primary patient. A pamphlet identifying child restraint loaner seat programs, designated

drivers, or the benefits of bicycle helmets can be provided immediately at the time of crisis, when it is usually needed the most. Most communities have support groups for various medical, psychological, and social conditions that provide significant help for the victims and their families. From the American Heart Association to Mothers Against Drunk Driving or SafeKids, there is always a group or individual in the local area trained to deal with almost any problem. Safe Communities groups can assist local EMS organizations distribute information about existing referral systems. Referrals may be as simple as EMT's providing pamphlets, identifying local community resources to families in need, or it may include notifying another agency for immediate intervention. The end product is that the family that required additional assistance receives it directly at the time when it is needed most.

- ▶ Correct misuse and abuse of the emergency service by clearly defining its program and capabilities to the various groups and individuals in the community.

Your local EMS system is much more than flashing lights, blaring sirens, and rushing ambulances. They can become better at serving your family and your community with input and assistance from you and other members of your Safe Communities group. Public education is required to change public attitudes and behavior concerning preventable injuries in your community. Programs designed to educate the public through the EMS system will help you market the concepts of injury prevention in your community.

### **State EMS Agencies**

#### **Alabama**

Emergency Medical Services Division  
Department of Public Health  
434 Monroe Street  
Montgomery, AL 36130-3017  
Phone: (205) 613-5383

#### **Alaska**

Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Health and Social  
Services  
PO Box H-06C  
Juneau, AK 99811-0616  
Phone: (907) 465-3027

#### **Arizona**

Office of Emergency Medical Services  
Arizona Department of Health  
Services  
1651 E. Morten  
Suite. 120  
Phoenix, AZ 85020  
Phone: (602) 255-1170

#### **Arkansas**

Division of Emergency Medical  
Services  
Arkansas Department of Health  
4815 W. Markham Street  
3 Lot 38  
Little Rock, AR 72205-3867  
Phone: (501) 661-2262

#### **California**

Emergency Medical Services  
Authority  
State of California  
1930 9th Street  
Suite 100  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Phone: (916) 322-4336

#### **Colorado**

Emergency Medical Services Division  
Colorado Department of Health  
EMSD-ADM-A3  
4300 Cherry Creek Drive South  
Denver, CO 80222  
Phone: (303) 692-2980

#### **Connecticut**

Office of Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Health

#### **Delaware**

Emergency Medical Services  
Emergency Medical Services Division

150 Washington Street  
Hartford, CT 06106  
Phone: (860) 509-7595

**District of Columbia**

Emergency Health and Medical  
Services  
1660 L Street, N.W.  
Room 1223  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 673-6744

**Georgia**

Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Human Resources  
878 Peachtree Street, N.E.  
Suite 207  
Atlanta, GA 30309  
Phone: (404) 657-6704

**Idaho**

Emergency Medical Services Bureau  
Department of Health and Welfare  
450 West State Street  
Boise, ID 83720-9990  
Phone: (208) 334-5998

**Indiana**

Emergency Medical Services  
Commission  
302 West Washington  
Room E208  
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2258  
Phone: (317) 232-3980

**Kansas**

Board of Emergency Medical Services  
109 Southwest 6th Street  
Topeka, KS 66603-3805  
Phone: (913) 296-7296

**Louisiana**

Emergency Medical Services  
P.O. Box 44215  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804  
Phone: (504) 342-4881

**Maryland**

Maryland Institute of Emergency  
Medical Services  
22 South Greene Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201-1595  
Phone: (410) 706-5074

**Michigan**

of Public Health  
P.O. Box 637  
Dover, DE 19901  
Phone: (302) 739-6637

**Florida**

Emergency Medical Services Health  
and  
Rehabilitation Services  
1317 Winewood Boulevard  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0700  
Phone: (904) 487-1911

**Hawaii**

Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Health  
3627 Kilauea Avenue  
Room 102  
Honolulu, HI 96816  
Phone: (808) 733-9210

**Illinois**

Division of Emergency Medical  
Services  
Department of Public Health  
525 West Jefferson Street  
Springfield, IL 62761  
Phone: (217) 785-2080

**Iowa**

Emergency Medical Services  
Iowa Department of Public Health  
Lucas State Office Building  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0075  
Phone: (515) 281-3239

**Kentucky**

Emergency Medical Services Branch  
Department of Health Services  
275 East Main Street  
Frankfort, KY 40621  
Phone: (502) 564-8950

**Maine**

Emergency Medical Services  
16 Edison Drive  
Augusta, ME 04347  
Phone: (207) 287-3953

**Massachusetts**

Office of Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Public Health  
470 Atlantic Avenue  
Boston, MA 02111  
Phone: (617) 753-8300

**Minnesota**

Division of Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Public Health  
3423 North Logan Street  
P.O. Box 30195  
Lansing, MI 48909  
Phone: (517) 335-9502

**Mississippi**

Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Health  
P.O. Box 1700  
Jackson, MS 39215-1700  
Phone: (601) 987-3880

**Montana**

Emergency Medical Services Bureau  
Department of Health and Environmental Science  
Cogswell Building  
Helena, MT 59620  
Phone: (406) 444-3895

**Nevada**

Emergency Medical Services  
Nevada State Health Division  
505 East King Street  
Suite 204  
Carson City, NV 89710  
Phone: (702) 687-3065

**New Jersey**

Office of Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Health  
P.O. Box 360  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0360  
Phone: (609) 633-7777

**New York**

Bureau of Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Health  
433 River Street  
Suite 303  
Troy, NY 12180  
Phone: (518) 402-0996

**North Dakota**

Emergency Health Services Division  
Department of Health  
600 East Boulevard Ave  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0200  
Phone: (701) 224-2388

Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Health  
717 Southeast Delaware Street  
P.O. Box 9441  
Minneapolis, MN 55440  
Phone: (612) 623-5484

**Missouri**

Bureau of Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Health  
P.O. Box 570  
17318 East Elm Street  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
Phone: (314) 751-6369

**Nebraska**

Division of Emergency Medical Services  
301 Centennial Mall South  
Box 95007  
Lincoln, NE 68509-5007  
Phone: (402) 471-21

**New Hampshire**

Emergency Medical Services  
Health and Welfare Building  
6 Hazen Drive  
Concord, NH 03301-6527  
Phone: (603) 271-4569

**New Mexico**

Primary Care and Emergency Medical Services Bureau  
Department of Health  
P.O. Box 26110  
Santa Fe, NM 87502-6110  
Phone: (505) 827-2509

**North Carolina**

Office of Emergency Medical Services  
701 Barbour Drive  
P.O. Box 29530  
Raleigh, NC 27626-0530  
Phone: (919) 733-2285

**Ohio**

Division of Emergency Medical Services  
Ohio Department of Highway Safety  
240 Parsons Avenue  
P.O. Box 7167  
Columbus, OH 43266-0563  
Phone: (614) 466-9447

**Oklahoma**

Emergency Medical Services Division  
State Department of Health  
1000 Northeast 10th Street  
Room 1104  
P.O. Box 53551  
Oklahoma City, OK 73117  
Phone: (405) 271-4062

**Pennsylvania**

Division of Emergency Medical  
Services  
Health and Welfare Building  
Room 1033  
P.O. Box 90  
Harrisburg, PA 17108  
Phone: (717) 787-8740

**South Carolina**

Emergency Medical Services Division  
Department of Health and  
Environmental Control  
2600 Bull Street  
Columbia, SC 29201  
Phone: (803) 737-7204

**Tennessee**

Division of Emergency Medical  
Services  
Department of Health and  
Environment  
287 Plus Park Boulevard  
Nashville, TN 37247-0701  
Phone: (615) 367-6278

**Utah**

Bureau of Emergency Medical  
Services  
Department of Health  
P.O. Box 16990  
Salt Lake City, UT 84116-0990  
Phone: (801)-538-6435

**Virginia**

Division of Emergency Medical  
Services  
Department of Health  
1538 East Parham Road  
Richmond, VA 23228  
Phone: (804) 371-3500

**West Virginia**

Emergency Medical Services  
Department of Health  
1411 Virginia Street East  
2nd Floor  
Charleston WV, 25301  
Phone: (304) 558-3956

**Oregon**

Emergency Medical Services  
State Health Department  
P.O. Box 14450  
Portland, OR 97214-0450  
Phone: (503) 731-4011

**Rhode Island**

Division of Emergency Medical  
Services  
Department of Health  
3 Capitol Hill  
Room 404  
Providence, RI 02908-5097  
Phone: (401) 277-2401

**South Dakota**

Emergency Medical Services Program  
Department of Health  
118 West Capitol Street  
Pierre, SD 57501-2080  
Phone: (605) 773-3737

**Texas**

Emergency Medical Services Division  
Texas Department of Health  
1100 West 49th Street  
Austin, TX 78756-3199  
Phone: (512) 834-6700

**Vermont**

Emergency Medical Services Division  
Department of Health  
Box 70  
108 Cherry Street  
Burlington, VT 05402  
Phone: (802)-863-7310

**Washington**

Office Emergency Medical Services  
and Trauma  
Department of Health  
P.O. Box 47853  
Olympia, WA 98504-7853  
Phone: (360) 705-6700

**Wisconsin**

Emergency Medical Services  
Division of Health  
P.O. Box 309  
Madison, WI 53701-0309  
Phone: (608) 266-7743

**Wyoming**

Emergency Medical Services Office  
Hathaway Building  
Room 527  
Cheyenne, WY 82002  
Phone: (307) 777-7955

**About the Author**

Richard Guerin has been involved in both the career and volunteer sectors of emergency medical, rescue, and fire services for the past 20 years. Since 1987, he has coordinated EMS system development, education, and information systems for the New York State Department of Health. Additionally, he is the Director for New York State's Crash Outcome Data Evaluation Study (CODES) research project.

