New York State
Department of Health
Bureau of Emergency Medical Services

POLICY STATEMENT

Supercedes/Updates: New

No. 13-02

Date: 02/14/13

Re: Recommendation for Health and Safety Officer (HSO)

This policy was created by the Safety subcommittee of New York State Emergency Medical Services Council. The subcommittee recommends that each agency establish the position of *Health and Safety Officer* (HSO) to develop, implement and maintain a system to address the potential health and safety hazards encountered by their EMS providers and patients. Additionally, it is suggested that agencies appoint a committee to support the HSO position. This policy is intended to improve EMS health and safety practices for the provider, the patient and the public as well as ensure regulatory compliance and to further promote a strong safety culture.

Background

EMS works in a very challenging environment in which providers face a multitude of inherent risks to themselves, their patients, their families and the public. The risk of injury, infection, vehicle crashes, emotional stress, physical violence, medical error, serious harm or even death is very real. Safety standards and procedures are learned and reinforced through education, annual training, lessons learned, best practices and responses experienced. Though many EMS providers understand the risks and how to reduce them, preventable incidents causing injury and death still occur.

Policy

An EMS agency manager/administrator may designate an HSO as well as the supporting safety committee, to work jointly to oversee the development and sustainment of a health and safety program. The HSO should hold, at a minimum, a current NYS EMT certification and maintain this certification throughout their appointment.

An HSO's Roles and Responsibilities may include, but not be limited to;

- Being an advocate for safe practices and procedures to better protect providers, the patient and the public. The HSO will be accountable for continual attention to safety issues and trends involving safety and wellness.

- Being familiar with regulatory standards that apply to EMS. The HSO should be well versed with infection control practices and knowledgeable on the hazards of diseases and illness. An HSO can provide information about workplace hazards and what protective practices and equipment are available to reduce preventable incidents from occurring. The HSO can assist in sponsoring health and wellness programs to address issues related to weight, diet, fitness and psychological stress.

- The role may include tracking safety organizations' principles and be aware of current safety products that reduce unsafe practices. An HSO can investigate accidents, injuries and near misses. The HSO should have the authority to track and monitor workplace safety, identify hazards as well as to correct them.

- The responsibility of ensuring that all incidents i.e. medical equipment malfunction or a vehicle crash with serious injury are reported in accordance with the appropriate authority's mandates. This reported data is important to identifying safety issues within the EMS system. This will allow the state to compile measurements on EMS related injuries, illnesses, medical adverse events and fatalities. This data driven information will promote procedures and initiatives to improve our EMS system.

Conclusion

EMS agencies must consciously understand the risks involved that are related to its responders and patient safety. The objective is to lower unfortunate, preventable incidents and to ensure our providers, patients and the public have a safe outcome. A designated HSO may assist with promoting a healthy and safe work environment within an EMS organization. An HSO contributes to a positive safety culture that will improve the health and safety awareness of EMS providers.

Key Responsibilities for an HSO:

Bloodborne Pathogens Exposure Control Plan
Driver Safety, Emergency Vehicle Operations, Investigations
Scene Safety, Scene Operations, Violent Scenes, Workplace Violence
Patient Handling, Stretcher Operations, Severe Weather
HazMat/WMD Awareness, Emergency Response Guide
Personal Health, Wellness, Ergonomics
Annual/Training, Records, Reported Data

Reference Sites for Health & Safety

www.cdc.gov

www.osha.gov/dts/oom/clinicians

www.health.ny.gov

www.labor.ny.gov/workerprotection/safetyhealth

www.nsc.org

www.naemt.org