

TITLE

SCENE SAFETY CHECKS

SCOPE

Provincial: Emergency Medical Services

DOCUMENT

SWE-EMS-05

APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
Clinical Operations, Primary Care & EMS

INITIAL EFFECTIVE DATE

July 7, 2017

SPONSOR

Senior Provincial Director and Chief Paramedic

REVISION EFFECTIVE DATE

February 5, 2019

PARENT DOCUMENT TITLE, TYPE, AND NUMBER

Not applicable

SCHEDULED REVIEW DATE

February 5, 2022

NOTE: The first appearance of terms in bold in the body of this document (except titles) are defined terms – please refer to the Definitions section.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the information in this document, please contact Policy Services at policy@ahs.ca. The Policy Services website is the official source of current approved policies, procedures, directives, standards, protocols, and guidelines.

OBJECTIVES

- To ensure the safety of **Emergency Medical Services (EMS) staff**.
- To deliver EMS in compliance with Part 28 of the *Working Alone Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

PRINCIPLES

- All Alberta Health Services (**AHS**) **EMS Dispatch, Communications and Deployment Centers**, including contracted satellite dispatch centers, across the province are committed to ensuring the safety of EMS staff in the workplace.

APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this document is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, students, volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary).

ELEMENTS**1. EMS staff Communication Device Checks**

- 1.1 At the beginning of each shift, EMS staff who use the **Vehicle Equipment Check System** (also known as the **E-Check System**) shall ensure that communication devices including portable devices are present and functional in accordance to the EMS *Vehicle & Equipment Readiness Procedure*.

- 1.2 EMS staff who are not using the E-Check System will comply with their services' standard practice to ensure that communication devices are present and are functional.

2. Conducting Scene Safety Checks

- 2.1 All communication that takes place between the **Emergency Communications Officers (ECOs)** and EMS staff will be spoken using plain language with the exception of codes described in this document.
- 2.2 Scene Safety Checks will be conducted by the ECO during all 911 generated EMS events and during select Inter-Facility Transfer (IFT) events (see section 6). Scene Safety Checks will include the following components:
- a) Scene Safety Checks are tracked using the **Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)** timer.
 - b) EMS staff shall mark their unit as arrived on the **Mobile Data Terminal (MDT)**. When it has been determined that the scene is safe, the first Scene Safety Check is performed.
 - (i) "Dispatch, (Crew Identifier) **Code 15.**"
 - c) When the first Scene Safety Check is not initiated by EMS staff within 10 minutes after EMS staff have marked their unit as arrived on the MDT, the ECO shall initiate the first Scene Safety Check.
- 2.3 The ECO will transmit an Scene Safety Check in accordance with the following phraseology:
- a) "(Crew identifier) **Unit Contact**".
- 2.4 The ECO shall pay specific attention to the response received from the EMS staff following the Scene Safety Check. The only acceptable response is:
- a) "Dispatch, (Crew Identifier) Code 15".
 - b) Any other response other than "Code 15" shall be considered a "Code 200".
- 2.5 This may be followed with additional information such as; we will be off scene in a few minutes."
- 2.6 Scene Safety Checks shall then be conducted every 20 minutes until EMS staff advise the ECO that transport is initiated or they have cancelled and cleared the scene.
- 2.7 Additional Scene Safety Checks shall be conducted by the ECOs when they feel concerned about EMS staff's safety or when requested by the EMS staff who are on location.

- 2.8 Following the EMS staff's activation of the MDT or radio Emergency Button, the ECO will complete the Scene Safety Check:
- a) "(Crew identifier) Unit Contact".
 - b) when the EMS staff provides an appropriate response, the ECO will continue with Scene Safety Checks.

2.9 When the response is:

- a) **"Code 200"**
- b) an inappropriate response

EMS staff may be physically overpowered, or faced with an immediate threat of injury or death. The ECO shall contact the appropriate law enforcement agency, provide the last known location of the EMS staff, and request such agency to attend the scene.

Note: EMS staff shall initiate a "Code 200" when physically overpowered, or faced with an immediate threat of injury or death at any time during an event, including outside of a Scene Safety Check.

- 2.10 For any "Code 200" or for an activation of the MDT or radio Emergency Button for any reason including error, law enforcement will be activated. In these cases, the Operations Supervisor or designate for the specific area and the **Deployment Manager** must be notified.

3. Other Codes (do not use as the response to a "Unit Contact" query)

3.1 "Code 69";

This is a request by EMS for law enforcement to attend the scene to help but they are not in immediate danger. The requesting crew will indicate if the response should be hot or cold by indicating "Code 69 Hot" or "Code 69 Cold". The ECO will contact the appropriate law enforcement agency and provide the last known location and request a law enforcement unit to attend the scene. On scene EMS staff must make every effort to provide details of the request so the ECO can inform the law enforcement agency.

3.2 "Code 9 Bravo";

When providing details the EMS on scene crew may use the term "9 Bravo" to be discreet in communicating there is a death or fatality on scene. If "9 Bravo" is stated, the ECO will enter this information into the CAD comments for the event.

4. Scene Safety Checks Transmission

- 4.1 In situations where the ECO does not receive a response from the EMS staff, the ECO will ask the EMS staff the following:

- a) “(Crew identifier) Unit Contact”.
- 4.2 The ECO will proceed to conduct a total of three (3) Scene Safety Checks, each five (5) minutes apart. If, during this time, there is no radio transmission received from the EMS staff or no confirmed Code 15, the ECO will do the following:
- a) When the telephone number to the location is available, call the location, and ask to speak with the EMS staff or try to contact them on their assigned cell phone. If contact is made, the ECO will advise that the Scene Safety Check is being conducted. Then follow the steps outlined in Section 2.3.
- b) When the ECO has not confirmed “Code 15”, has received a “Code 200” or has received an inappropriate response to the scene safety check they will notify the appropriate law enforcement agency and request that a law enforcement unit respond to the scene. The ECO will provide available event information and details of the situation. If available the following information will assist the responding law enforcement agency. However, do not delay notification or require this information from the EMS staff:
- (i) exact location;
 - (ii) who is involved;
 - (iii) what exactly has or is taking place;
 - (iv) how many people are involved;
 - (v) injuries, if any; and
 - (vi) any weapons threatened or real.
- c) Following contacting law enforcement, the ECO will notify the EMS Deployment Manager and Operations Supervisor or designate and they will have a collaborative conversation to share information and to determine possible next steps or options.
- 4.3 Once notified, the Operations Supervisor shall do the following:
- a) confirm how many scene safety checks have been attempted by the ECO and the details about the attempts;
 - b) as appropriate, attend the scene;
 - c) where possible, attempt to call the EMS staff’s personal cell phones; and
 - d) when on location, confirm whether or not law enforcement is on scene, or required.

- 4.4 When unable to use radio communication, EMS staff shall communicate safety status using the MDT to CAD messaging function or other communication pathways, including but not limited to; using their assigned cell phone or land line that may be available at the event location.
- 4.5 Special attention should be paid to the manner in which the EMS staff responds to the Scene Safety Check. The use of "Code 15" is vital within the transmission. Any deviation from the use of "Code 15" should be deemed suspicious as it may indicate a safety threat.

5. Deferring Scene Safety Checks

- 5.1 EMS staff may defer Scene Safety Checks in the following situations:
- a) events that occur at police stations of correctional institutions;
 - b) fire or police stand-by events;
 - c) Palliative End of Life Care (PEOLC) events with extended scene time; or
 - d) events involving unique circumstances; these events require permission from the on-duty supervisor prior to deferring scene Safety Checks.

6. Inter-Facility Transfer Specific Considerations

- 6.1 Safety Checks will be conducted when transporting or responding on an Inter-Facility Transfer (IFT) when there will be a travel time greater than 60 minutes. The ECO shall initiate a Unit Contact every 60 minutes while the **Emergency Response Vehicle** is Enroute or Transporting.
- 6.2 Safety Checks shall be conducted when transporting or responded to an IFT event that involve patients who have a history of violent behaviour or patients who are in law enforcement custody. These Safety Checks will be initiated by the EMS staff who will notify the ECO. The ECO will manually set a CAD timer for 60 minutes, conduct a Safety Check after 60 minutes and if necessary, reset the timer for 60 more minutes.

7. Radio Communication Range

- 7.1 When EMS staff are aware that they will be required to proceed out of radio communication range, they will notify the ECO in advance and advise that Scene Safety Checks will not be possible. EMS staff shall provide an estimate period of time that they will be out of range due to radio coverage issues. The ECO will set a manual timer beginning at the estimated time the EMS staff will be back in radio communication range.
- 7.2 When EMS staff are out of radio communication range, upon expiration of the estimated period of time, the ECO will conduct a Scene Safety Check and shall notify the EMS staff that law enforcement will be notified if a response is not received within 10 minutes. If there is no response from the EMS staff after 20

minutes, the ECO shall follow the steps outlined in Section 3. The ECO may consider contacting the EMS staff using another device such as a cell phone, mobile satellite device or MDT.

DEFINITIONS

AHS EMS Dispatch, Communications and Deployment Centers means the HAS dispatch centres for AHS.

Code 15 means a term EMS staff uses to confirm their safety. This term would be used independently or in response to the term Unit Contact.

Code 200 means terms EMS staff uses to communicate they are being overpowered physically, or is facing an immediate threat of injury or death. This term would be used independently or in response to the term Unit Contact.

Code 69 means a term EMS staff uses to communicate a request for a law enforcement unit to attend the scene help but they are not in immediate danger. "Hot" means quickly. "Cold" means slowly.

Code 9 Bravo means a term EMS staff uses to communicate discreetly to that the patient (one or more) has deceased on scene.

Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) means an Incident Management system that provides call-center and communications center operators with tools that they need to field calls, create and update incidents, and manage an organization's critical resources by providing real-time interaction of crucial data.

Deployment Manager means a leadership role within a dispatch centre that reports to a Communications Director.

Emergency Communications Officer (ECO) means an officer who answers; call evaluates, and delivers emergency communications from a caller to the appropriate party following approved guidelines from Alberta Health Services (AHS) Medical Direction and International Academy of Emergency Medical Dispatch.

Emergency Response Vehicle means an EMS Vehicle including, but not limited to, Ambulances and paramedic response units that is equipped with Emergency Warning Devices and used or intended to be used for providing EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES.

Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) means a computer mounted in the cab of an emergency response vehicle that is used for communicating event information between DISPATCH AND OPERATIONS STAFF.

Unit Contact means the term used by ECOs in situations to ask Emergency Staff to confirm their safety (the response would be CODE 15, CODE 69, OR CODE 200).

Vehicle and Equipment Check System means the second party web-based and province-wide system that is used to record and manage all vehicle and equipment checks for EMS.

REFERENCES

- Alberta Health Services Governance Documents:
 - *Vehicle & Equipment Readiness Procedure* (#PS-EMS-01-01)
- Non-Alberta Health Services Documents:
 - *Occupational Health and Safety Act (Alberta)*, Code and Regulations

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