

# Safety Spotlight

## EMS Providers and Distracted Driving

One of the leading causes of motor vehicle crashes is distracted driving, which occurs any time the driver takes their eyes off the road, hands off the wheel, or concentrates on something other than driving. On average, crashing involving injuries cost \$504,408 for a fatal injury and \$73,750 for a nonfatal injury. By implementing a distracted driving policy for your emergency medical service organization, you can help to reduce the risk of crashes due to distracted driving.<sup>1</sup>

### Sterile Cockpit<sup>1</sup>

When developing your policy, consider using the "sterile cockpit" rule from the airline industry as a model: prohibit activities not related to safe operation during critical phases. Anytime an EMS provider is behind the wheel of an ambulance should be treated as a "critical phase" of operations. This rule is meant to eliminate unnecessary risks created from the driver's attention being diverted from the important task of operating the vehicle.

### Policy Provisions<sup>1</sup>

The policy should include the following provisions, but can be updated to fit your organizations' specific needs:

- Crew members not driving or providing patient care should serve as an extra set of eyes on the road and should not do anything to distract the driver. They should assist with navigation and contact dispatch or medical control, as necessary.
- Restricting the use of a cellphone, even when hands-free, for any reason by the driver of an ambulance except when it is an emergency and another crew member is not available to assist.
- Prohibiting the use of a hand-held cellphone while operating an ambulance – regardless of whether the ambulance is in motion or stopped at a traffic light.
- Restricting conversation between crew members to only operational tasks during a patient transport and whenever the vehicle is in emergency response mode.
- Prohibiting the driver of the ambulance from using the radio, unless another crew member is unable to operate the radio.
- Prohibiting the use of earpieces or headphones, except an employer-provided radio headset, while driving the ambulance.
- Requiring the GPS, whether on board the ambulance or on a smartphone, to be set before the vehicle is in motion.
- Requiring the use of steering wheel mounted siren controls, when possible, so the driver's hands can remain on the wheel.

<sup>1</sup> Page, Wolfberg & Wirth. "Distracted Driving Policy for Ambulance Operations." EMS1, 17 Sept. 2015, [www.ems1.com/paramedic-chief/articles/3218534-Distracted-driving-policy-for-ambulance-operations/](http://www.ems1.com/paramedic-chief/articles/3218534-Distracted-driving-policy-for-ambulance-operations/).



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