

NEW EMS SAFETY ORGANIZATION & INITIATIVES LAUNCHED

Participants represent wide spectrum of interests

The EMS community is mobilizing around operational issues related to the safety of patients, providers and the public. This movement is evidenced by the founding of a new organization, the meeting of a new National Academies EMS/Medical Transport Safety Subcommittee and creation of an ad hoc task force to press the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Transportation Safety Board to investigate ambulance crashes.

The EMS Safety Foundation

Prehospital safety maven and emergency physician Nadine Levick, MD, launched the EMS Safety Foundation Dec. 11 with an invitation-only Webinar virtually attended by 40 EMS leaders, federal and state officials, safety experts and others. Several years ago, Levick initiated crash tests of ambulances that produced stunning videos showing crash dummies in patient compartments being destroyed during even relatively low-speed crashes.

Levick founded ESF as a non-profit, multi-disciplinary "think tank and test bed" that would bring the EMS community together with experts in transportation-system engineering, vehicle design and ergonomics to improve the safety of ambulances, EMS transports and patient handling.

"This is a way to bridge the silos, to bring the expertise from engineering, system design, automotive and ergonomic design together with experts from the EMS community," she said. "We know a lot of stuff that is not implemented, and this is a way to translate the knowledge we have into practice."

ESF has a unique organizational structure consisting of an Innovation Consortium (e.g., ambulance-service chiefs /administrators and other "end-users"), a Technical Expert Panel (e.g., engineers, designers, ergonomists) and Affiliate Members (e.g., field paramedics and other interested parties who don't fit into the first two categories).

Levick encourages everyone in the EMS community to visit the ESF Web site (EMSSafetyFoundation.org) to learn more and to apply for membership in one of the three categories.

"There's a lot of low-hanging fruit that can help EMS if we're innovative and creative," Levick said. "Let's rip off and duplicate."

ESF also has an advisory panel and a board of directors with three members: Levick, Bill Leonard, a longtime EMS insurance broker and risk-management expert, and Steve Luchter, a former NHTSA program manager responsible for developing injury outcome measures.

The organization is designed to conduct most of its business "virtually," via e-mails, listservs and Webinars in addition to occasional face-to-face meetings in conjunction with other meetings or conferences. ESF is also planning a multi-disciplinary group trip to a large EMS conference (RETmobil) in Germany in May, "so we can learn from folks overseas about their vehicle designs, how they secure equipment, etc.," Levick said.

National Academies address medical transport

The first face-to-face meeting of the ESF will happen in Washington, D.C., Jan. 16 in conjunction with the first meeting of the National Academies Transportation Research Board's new EMS/Medical Transport Safety Subcommittee.

Levick spoke on ambulance safety issues at the TRB's annual meeting in 2007, noting that, "Ambulances are generally not built by the automotive industry, [and] transportation-safety engineering and transport-systems engineering are not generally integrated into EMS systems." She also noted that federal truck safety goals aimed to decrease the fatality rate of 2.8 per 100-million truck miles driven in 1996 to 1.65 by 2008, but ambulance crashes are estimated to result in 7.66 to 41.93 fatalities per 100 million ambulance miles driven.

"It is no longer acceptable for EMS to be functioning outside of transportation, automotive and [personal protective equipment] safety standards," she told the TRB.

In response, the TRB created the new subcommittee and asked Levick to moderate its first meeting. "There will be



New Jersey to Use VoIP for Emergencies

According to New Jersey Director of Transportation Security Harold Neil, the state is laying the groundwork to build a new wireless VoIP-based communications system for emergency responders. (See "Internet Protocol-Based Communications Offer Inexpensive Interoperability," November 2007 *EMS Insider*.) Beta News reported that Neil told participants in a Nov. 28 Maritime Security Expo that New Jersey plans to start running voice together with data and video on a system to be used by both local and state emergency agencies. ■

an invited multidisciplinary panel on EMS and medical transport safety and a number of presentations,” she said. “[In the] second half of the [four-hour] meeting, we’ll discuss the ‘low-hanging fruit’ issues for focused transportation research.”

Pressing the NTSB

In July 2007, an ambulance crash in rural Ohio killed three EMS crew members and two patients, prompting some EMS leaders nationwide to take action. “A number of people called each other, very determined that the Ohio people know they had support from around the country who knew this was not an Ohio problem; it’s an issue of national significance,” Levick said.

Subsequently, 15 people (including several Ohio officials, an FDNY EMS division chief, a Rural/Metro risk manager director, EMS attorneys and the director of an EMS accrediting body) convened an ad hoc task group—The Ambulance Transportation Safety Task Force—to encourage the NTSB to begin investigating fatal ambulance crashes beginning with the 2007 Ohio crash. (Although Levick is involved, she did not convene nor is she leading this task force.)

“The NTSB has the discretion to investigate individual accidents, even if they do not involve traditional federal areas, such as airline and railway accidents; they just need to do that in cooperation with the state where the accident occurred,” said EMS attorney and task force member Steve Wirth. “The NTSB can bring expertise and credibility to the process with their independent approach and teams of expert investigators. [And] the NTSB can make policy recommendations and other commentary that will be heard far and wide.”

In early December, task force members and supporting organizations sent letters to the NTSB imploring the agency “to conduct an NTSB investigation of [the Ohio crash] as well as future ambulance accidents that result in significant damage, injury or death [and to] strongly recommend that existing federal databases be expanded to include all major ambulance crashes.”

Task force member Eileen Frazer, executive director of the Commission

on the Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems, also e-mailed Bruce Magladry, director of the NTSB Office of Highway Safety, with a copy of the letter and a request for him to meet with task force representatives.

On Dec. 14, Magladry replied in an e-mail to Frazer that his office has only two teams of investigators, allowing it to investigate only four major accidents a year. “At this time, the Safety Board does not plan to investigate ambulance accidents,” he said.

His e-mail noted the advent of the TRB subcommittee that will look at EMS transportation safety issues and the recently published NHTSA report titled “Feasibility for an EMS Workforce Safety and Health Surveillance System.” ■

For more information, visit www.emsafetyfoundation.org or www.objectivesafety.net. Contact Nadine Levick at nlevick@attglobal.net or the Ambulance Transportation Safety Task Force via Eileen Frazer at www.camts.org.

coming soon

- New Tools Available for Rural EMS
- Surprising Struggles for EMS Staff
- Large New EMS Studies Begin



Competing Medical-Director Insurance

The National Association of EMS Physicians announced in late 2007 that it was endorsing DirectorShield, a new liability insurance program for medical directors from NCG Insurance Services. Meanwhile, the American College of Emergency Physicians has endorsed another such insurance program (EMS Medical Directors Insurance) and now offers it through Hagan Benefits Inc. Until recently, physicians were unable to purchase liability insurance to cover all the duties they perform as EMS medical directors. A year ago, EMS Medical Directors Insurance, the first program to provide coverage for all duties, became a reality thanks to the work of several emergency physicians. (See “Now Available—EMS Medical Director Insurance,” December 2006 *EMS Insider*, and “Dozens of Medical Directors Buy Insurance,” October 2007 *EMS Insider*.)

When asked why NAEMSP didn’t simply endorse the first program, NAEMSP President David C. Cone, MD, EMS division chief at Yale University School of Medicine, said, “In a nutshell, the two programs were developed in parallel, with the two groups working with underwriters at the same time, and both programs got finalized and became roughly available at about the same time.” DirectorShield is offered via Prime Insurance Co., which, according to NAEMSP, has an A.M. Best rating of “B+ with a stable outlook.” EMS Medical Directors Insurance is offered via Nautilus Insurance Co., which has A.M. Best rating of A+. ■

For more information, visit www.directorshield.com, www.emsminsurance.com and www.hagangroup.com.