

# Medical Direction Committee WHITE PAPER

## Seatbelt Use in Ambulances

Saving lives is the goal of EMS – yet somehow it is this very industry that has been left out of the mainstream of the safety world. This is a system that has a large transportation element. And it is this transport component that carries some serious risks.

The numbers are concerning with an excess of 5,000 ambulance crashes per year, one medic killed per month, and a fatality as the result of an ambulance crash about every week, the injuries are in the thousands each year.(1) Between 1991- 2000, 302,969 Emergency Vehicles were involved in Motor Vehicle Crashes. 1565 involved fatalities. (2)

Most serious and fatal injuries occur in the rear compartment. Eighty two percent of fatally injured EMS personnel are rear unrestrained occupants.(1) A study by Johnson, Lindholm, and Dowd (2006) revealed two-thirds of the providers at two large EMS agencies did not wear their seatbelt when in the back of the ambulance.

We recommend that all personnel wear their seatbelt in the front and rear of the ambulance. We also recommend that agencies develop policies requiring compliance with seatbelt use. This would include, when safe for the patient, performing procedures and assessments at the scene prior to placing vehicle in movement. When possible medics should time actions requiring the medics to be unbelted to coincide with stops at red lights or stop signs. If not detrimental to patient care, the unit should pull over to a stop if extended times of being out of the seatbelt are required.

- 1 Becker, Zaloshnja, Levick, Li, and Miller. Acc Anal Prev 2003
- 2 Comparison of Crashes Involving Ambulances with those of similar sized vehicles. Adam Ray, Douglas Kupac, PEC DEC 2005; 9: 412-415