



VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

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Lock Your Unit

Do you have a policy mandating that your unattended units locked?

If you do not, you are just asking for trouble. How long does it take for someone to reach into the back of an ambulance, grab a drug box or monitor-defibrillator and hand it to the other person in a car? Can you imagine the paperwork required if narcotics were involved?

Most medical transport vehicles are stolen when the opportunity for theft is given to somebody with poor impulse control. Mentally unbalanced or intoxicated people have stolen our vehicles and created tragic results. A classic example of this type of tragedy occurred in Texas in 1999. A patient with diagnoses of psychosis and situational depression, evidenced by her behavior, was told to get help from a State facility and discharged from a hospital. As she was leaving the hospital, she entered an unattended, unlocked and running ambulance. She was spotted on a security camera, but none of the guards on duty tried to stop her.

While speeding, the discharged patient ran a stop sign, killed a 33-year old man and caused irreparable brain damage to his wife; she can no longer feed herself or speak. Several children were injured; one required multiple surgeries for severe head trauma.

In subsequent litigation, the hospital was found negligent for not adequately addressing the patient's psychiatric issues. The paramedics were found negligent for leaving the ambulance unattended, unlocked and running. The lawsuit settled for \$12.5 million. The psychiatric patient was sentenced to 8 years' confinement. Isn't it amazing that even with this 11-year precedent, when you "Google" stolen ambulance crashes now, you still get hits about many recent events?

Make locking your units a policy. Enforce it. Make checking unattended vehicles a priority for supervisors and staff. Work together so that if a vehicle is inadvertently left unlocked, you and your staff find it first.



Poster Pointers

Overhead Clearance !

We know about the hazards of backing into overheads from previous posters and "Backing Safety" in "Arrive Alive Do No Harm". Overhead Clearance is an issue going forward, too. You must know the height of your vehicle. In fact, it's a good idea to measure the height upon receipt of a vehicle. Some post the height of the vehicle prominently in the cab. If no Overhead Clearance height is posted and you don't trust your depth perception, get out and look or use a forward spotter. Running into an overhang while going forward is just as expensive as running into one while backing. However, "forward" is a great deal more embarrassing.