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Report of the Week

It's just a *sick* person...

8/6/09

Report Number: 09-706

Report Date: 07/26/2009 0205

Synopsis

Violent patient threatens EMS responders.

Demographics

Department type: Paid Municipal

Job or rank: Fire Fighter

Department shift: 48 hours on - 96 hours off

Age: 25 - 33

Years of fire service experience: 0 - 3

Region: FEMA Region IX

Service Area: Urban

Event Information

Event type: Non-fire emergency event: auto extrication, technical rescue, emergency medical call, service calls, etc.

Event date and time: 07/20/2009 1700

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury

Event Description

We responded to a non-emergency abdominal pain call. We arrived to find a patient walking around a parking lot with his pants around his ankles. When confronted, the patient stated he was hearing voices and having suicidal thoughts. We stated that the patient needed to go the hospital to be evaluated by a doctor. The patient refused to be transported, so we stated, because he verbalized suicidal thoughts, he was required by law to be evaluated by a doctor. The patient continued to refuse treatment, so we notified the police department. At that time, the patient reached into his pocket and pulled out a knife. We retreated approximately 40 feet to a safe distance. The patient advanced on our position, approximately 10 feet and then proceeded to throw the knife at us. We notified the police department to expedite their response and subdued the patient after the knife was thrown. The police arrived and took the patient into custody. No personnel were injured during this incident.

Lessons Learned

The fire ground is not the only place complacency can kill. Situations can quickly escalate over virtually nothing so it's important that crews are always on their toes.

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Discussion Questions

Several common themes appear in near-miss reports. Miscommunication, complacency, and decision making errors are frequently cited. The generic EMS call for a "sick person" is full of ambiguity and unknowns. On a percentage basis, these incidents turn out to be benign, uneventful, categorized as non-emergencies and consequently we let our guard down. Many times we arrive at an incident like 09-706 and we have to re-script the call because it is nothing like what we were expecting. After you have reviewed 09-706 in its entirety and the related reports, consider the following:

1. How long would it take for law enforcement to arrive at the incident in 09-706 if the incident occurred in your jurisdiction?
2. What training have you received in handling violent situations?
3. Recount your last EMS incident that did not turn out as dispatched. What lessons can you share with your crew?
4. At what point does 09-706 switch from an EMS incident to a police matter?
5. What are your rights as an emergency responder when it comes to protecting/defending yourself in this scenario?

Related Reports

05-147

06-143

07-844

08-613

Have you been caught unaware at an EMS call? Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today and keep all first responders on their toes.

Note: The questions posed by the reviewers are designed to generate discussion and thought in the name of promoting firefighter safety. They are not intended to pass judgment on the actions and performance of individuals in the reports.