

MANAGE

YOUR

RISK

Securing EMS Vehicles

The Federal Bureau of Investigation reported 707,758 vehicle thefts in the United States in 2015. Emergency vehicles are not immune and present many potential opportunities for theft. The damages resulting from the theft of emergency vehicles, including the specialized medical equipment and medications onboard, can be costly; and in some cases, losses of this nature have resulted in catastrophic injuries or fatalities. Furthermore, vehicle and equipment theft can occur anywhere. It is recommended that EMS organizations consider the following concepts for securing their vehicles while in use and while parked at the station.

It is not uncommon to see an unattended ambulance idling outside of an Emergency Department entrance. After all, the focus of an emergency responder is the patient. There have been many incidents of ambulances being stolen while outside of hospitals or even at the scene of an emergency. Vehicles and equipment have also been stolen from EMS stations. While thefts are sometimes spontaneous and motives unclear, all too often intoxication and/or mental health impairment is a contributing factor. Theft can also be premeditated with malicious and criminal intent. There have been instances across the world of emergency response vehicles being used in organized crime and terrorist activities.

Theft Potential

To assess the potential for unauthorized use or theft of emergency response vehicles, researchers analyzed the security-related behaviors of EMS response crews. A study titled “Ambulance Snatching: How Vulnerable Are We” observed 151 ambulance arrivals to trauma and Emergency Department ambulance entrances across several states and found 90.1% of the vehicles were left unattended, 76.2% of the vehicles were left unattended and unlocked, and 23.2% of the vehicles were left with the engine running.

While this may not be the case at the majority of hospital ambulance entrances in the country, the behaviors identified in this study highlight the potential attractiveness to an individual who may want to steal an emergency response vehicle or disrupt emergency services.

Are You Vulnerable?

Observations of Emergency Vehicles Left Outside of the ER

Unattended

90%

Unattended and Unlocked

76%

Engine Running

23%

DISCLAIMER: This is a sample guideline furnished to you by Glatfelter Commercial Ambulance. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization's needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm or damage to personnel, property and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact our Risk Control Representative at 800.233.1957.

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Securing EMS Vehicles

With increasing crime and terrorism throughout the world, it is critical that EMS operations take proactive measures to help reduce the possibility of unauthorized use or theft of their vehicles and equipment. Consider the following to help ensure EMS vehicles are secure.

- Leave a crew member with the vehicle when idling.
- Shut off the engine and remove the ignition key from any EMS vehicle left unattended.
- Install a commercial anti-theft or keyless entry device, if possible.
- Lock vehicles, equipment, and exterior storage compartments, whenever practical.
- Secure vehicles and contents when not in service or out for repair.

Securing EMS Stations

EMS vehicles are also a target for theft and break-ins while at the station. These often include occurrences of equipment and narcotics being stolen from ambulances while parked inside the station. It is important that EMS agencies routinely review the physical security of their facilities, including emergency vehicle parking lots, garage bays, storage areas, and maintenance facilities. Consider the following to help ensure EMS stations are secure.

- Leave bay doors closed/down.
- Lock station entrances.
- Remove items utilized to prop open doors.
- Install recorded video surveillance systems.
- Evaluate adequacy of exterior perimeter lighting to reduce secluded areas.
- Remove or trim vegetation to permit maximum visibility.
- Consider perimeter fencing.

Conclusion

The theft or unauthorized use of emergency vehicles can result in the disruption of emergency services. If involved in subsequent accidents, theft can also cause damage to the vehicle and/or injury to others. EMS operations inherently present an increased potential for theft. Some common behaviors of EMS crews that can increase theft potential include leaving an ambulance unattended, unlocked, with keys in the ignition, and/or with the engine running. EMS organizations can reduce theft potential by ensuring emergency vehicles, equipment and stations are properly secured whenever possible.

¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2016, September 17). 2015: Crime in the US – Table 1. Retrieved from <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/table-1>

² U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2015, October 14). Emergency Response Vehicle and Equipment Security. Retrieved from http://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USDHSFACIR/2015/12/01/file_attachments/455480/Emergency%2BResponse%2BVehicle%2BAnd%2BEquipment%2BSecurity%2BFact%2BSheet_October%2B2015_FINAL.pdf

³ Alves, D. W., MD, & Bissell, R. A., PhD. (2003). Ambulance snatching: How vulnerable are we?, *Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 25(2), 211-214. doi:10.1016/S0736-4679(03)00177-X