This month we will look at scene awareness and general techniques for determining if a scene is violent or not. We will also outline techniques and tools used to help you recognize potential dangers on your everyday residential calls. We will also discuss things that should be done if the scene ends up being a crime scene.

**Approaching the scene:**
For paramedics and other responders, determining personal safety is a basic part of analyzing the scene. It usually begins before you even arrive at the scene and comes from information provided by your dispatch center. Such information may be the known location of an unsafe scene, large crowds, people under the influence, on scene violence and even weapons. Other information can be gathered enroute from other crew members, dispatchers or other EMS responders who may have previous experience with a particular area or address.

Be aware of additional inherent hazards that may exist at the scene such as downed power lines, busy roadways, toxic substances, potential for fires, dangerous pets and vehicle hazards and dangers. If the scene is not safe, EMS crews should not enter the area. Stage at a safe location and wait for law enforcement and or other rescuers. Begin your observation several blocks from the call location.

Scenes that have been considered safe can become unsafe, even when police are present. This may happen as violence resumes and crowds gather or turn violent. Violence against EMS may also occur if mistaken as police officers or when they exit vehicles with their emergency lights activated. You should be familiar with your city or towns protocols when intervening in violent situations and it is always a good idea to have an escape route ready and planned.

The scenes that you encounter that are known to be violent, you should remain at a safe distance and out of sight until the area is secured. Remember the phrase “out of sight, out of scene” for determining if you are a safe distance. Stay in that staging area until the area is known to be secured.

Most states including Illinois and Wisconsin have enacted laws that permit citizens to carry handguns or other weapons. All of these weapons should be secured by law enforcement if officers are present at the scene. If law enforcement is not present, request that the weapon be safely secured away from the scene. You should explain this to the patient that it is an additional safety measure to ensure EMS providers safety. Most of your departments may even have guidelines that will not permit weapons in their department vehicles as well.

As you arrive on the scene, there may be other danger signs to note. Are there loud noises such as screams, items breaking, gunshots being heard? Do you see any acts of violence taking place at this time? Do you have a strong smell of chemicals or the presence of empty chemical containers? Are there dangers in the home or is it unusually silent or darkened. If so, you should retreat and ask for law enforcement assistance.

**Highway Dangers:**
Responding to traffic incidents should never be considered routine. Inherent dangers include traffic flow, emergency vehicle positioning and of course extrication. There can be danger of violence on the scene as well from occupants being armed, wanted or fleeing felons. Intoxicated or under the influence of drugs and violent or abusive because of altered mental state.

When approaching the vehicle, a one person approach is recommended. Allows your partner to call and notify dispatch if there is any situation, license plate numbers and state of registration if suspicious. EMS personnel that approach the vehicle should approach on the passenger side of the vehicle. This helps to provide protection from other traffic and is usually the opposite side form where law enforcement would approach.

You should also consider not walking in between your MICU and the vehicles involved to avoid being pinned, should they move their vehicles. If you should observe suspicious activity in the vehicle as you approach, retreat and request law enforcement if not already on the scene. Ask yourself or your department, what type of call routinely gets a response from law enforcement. Do they come on every call you go on, or do they just respond if requested.

**Violent Street Incidents:**
Murder, assault and robbery are common occurrences in the U.S. Many of these crimes involve dangerous weapons and at times the violence may be directed toward the EMS provider. Violent acts can also come from injured or distraught patients, dangerous crowds and bystanders who can become volatile when in large numbers. Many may direct the violence toward everyone and everything in the surrounding area.

Some warning signs of potential danger in street incidents are when voices become louder and escalate in tone. Pushing and shoving, hostility toward people at the scene (perpetrator, police or victim), use of alcohol or other drugs at the scene and inability to control the scene by EMS and law enforcement. Constantly monitor the crowds and retreat from the scene as necessary. Location and careful parking of emergency vehicles is an important item for all personnel to remain safe. Make sure to position the vehicle so it does not get blocked in by other vehicles. When possible and safe to do so, the patient should be removed from the scene as soon as possible to alleviate the need to return to the scene.

According to the Department of Justice, more than 770,000 gang members currently belong to more than 27,500 gangs throughout the U.S. Most of these gangs operate through intimidation and extortion. A gang can be defined as any group of people who engage in socially disruptive or criminal behavior. They usually are territorial and often are the same gender. They operate by creating fear in the community and usually have a name, logo, specific color or method of dress to identify its members and counterparts.

Graffiti is known as “tagging” and is the most visible sign that a gang is in the area. Usually it marks territorial boundaries which are known as their turf.

Common gang activities are fighting, vandalism, armed robbery, weapon offenses, auto theft, battery and drug dealing. Their criminal activity is committed usually to gain status or a monetary benefit within the gang. The likelihood of any violent acts against EMS personnel is due to the fact we often “look like” law enforcement.
Clandestine Drug Labs:
Illegal manufacture of drugs can pose significant hazards for emergency personnel. The process of a drug lab can produce oxygen depleted atmospheres and can also be highly explosive with toxic and dangerous vapors. These can be absorbed through the skin in fatal amounts. Other concerns are that these labs can have booby traps that can maim or kill the intruder. Operators of the lab can be armed or otherwise violent individuals as well. Be aware of chemical odors and the presence of chemical equipment such as glassware, chemical containers, heating mantles and burners. If a lab is identified, EMS crews should leave the area at once. Notify law enforcement and request appropriate agencies such as haz-mat teams, fire, DEA and even chemical specialists may be needed.

Violence:
Let us now discuss domestic violence. This occurs between people in a relationship. The perpetrator can be male or female and can be in opposite sex or same sex relationship. This usually results in a physical, emotional, sexual, verbal or economic abuse. They can even occur in several combinations of these as well.

The signs of a domestic violence are the apparent fear of a household member, different or conflicting account by parties at the scene, one individual preventing the other from speaking, injuries that do not match reported mechanism of injury and unusual or unsanitary living conditions. EMS providers should be aware that acts of violence may be directed toward them by the perpetrator. Be aware and take all safety precautions. If the scene is considered safe, then treat the patient’s injuries. Remember in certain instances, EMS is a required reporter of their findings. There are several hotlines that we have to report such cases such as Elder Abuse Hotline and Crisis Line in McHenry County.

EMS at Crime Scenes:
A crime scene is located where any part of a criminal act has occurred. This could be where the evidence relating to the incident may be found. Physical evidence can be fingerprints, footprints or blood and other body fluids. Fingerprints and footprints are unique to an individual. No two people have identical prints. Ridge characteristics often are left behind on the surface of areas as well as oil and moisture from the skin. Body and other fluids can be tested for DNA or ABO blood typing. Particulate evidence would be hair, carpet, and even clothing fibers. These items can provide information as well and be valuable to the crime scene.

Paramedic’s observations at a crime scene are very important. Documentation should also include any statements made by the patient or other people at the scene and should be placed in quotes. Record your observations objectively and avoid personal opinions. Remember that a patient care report is a legal document and can be used in court. Avoid the labeling of wounds as entrance or exit wounds.

The care of the patient is your main priority. Evidence can be protected while caring for the patient just by being careful not to disturb the scene unnecessarily and destroying evidence. Be observant of the scene and the surroundings. You should only touch what is required to treat the patient. Wear latex or nitrile gloves to avoid leaving additional fingerprints at the scene.
So …Remember the phrase RESPOND to help you while on the scene of crime scenes. This stands for
R-Respond
E-Evaluate
S-Secure
P-Protect
O-Observe
N-Notify
D-Document

Respond- what is general observations on the way. Your safety is #1

Evaluate – Call in progress. Suspects, witness, victims. BLS, Haz-Mat, Chemicals, wires down, weapons, fire,
gas and electric.
Evaluate – Call not in progress. Ask for help. Limit the access in/out (people and vehicles) Gloves and other
PPE. Take notes of who, what, when, where and time.

Secure – Establish perimeter with tape or rope. Be aware of footprints, tire prints, pavement gouging, and
physical evidence (blood, hair etc.) suspects escape route. Establish an attendance log of who was there and turn
list over to law enforcement. Should include name, date, agency, time entered and exited as well as reason for
entrance.

Protect – Safeguard the scene until law enforcement arrives from weather, animals and foot and vehicle traffic.
Safeguard the scene room in which the patient was treated, vehicles, patient’s cell phone, ID’s, wallet and
personal items.

Observe- Time of call and arrival, weather/temperature, doors open or locked, lights on or off, position of
patient and vehicles.

Notify – Call your immediate Supervisor and get them to the scene. Notify your dispatcher of the situation, so
they can notify law enforcement and get them to the scene as well.

Document – Attendance log, call times and arrival times, Initial patient contact time and what was done, patient
care report, a detailed sketch if requested by PD, your NFIRS incident number or Incident number.

Ref: Mosby ‘s Paramedic Textbook Fourth Edition. Jones and Bartlett Learning, LLC
Crime Scene Awareness and Safety for Fire and EMS Responders. Spring Valley F.D.
1. List some of the inherent hazards that may exist at the scene.
   1 ____________________
   2 ____________________
   3 ____________________
   4 ____________________
   5 ____________________
   6 ____________________

2. A gang is defined as.

3. EMS personnel that approach a vehicle should approach on the ______________________________.

4. The process of a Clandestine Drug Lab can produce.
   1 ____________________
   2 ____________________
   3 ____________________

5. When involved in any type of crime scene, you should always remember this phrase.
   1) ____________________
   2) ____________________
   3) ____________________
   4) ____________________
   5) ____________________
   6) ____________________
   7) ____________________

6. Physical evidence at a crime scene can include.
   1) ____________________
   2) ____________________
   3) ____________________
   4) ____________________

7. Inherent dangers at highway traffic incidents include.
   1) ____________________
   2) ____________________
   3) ____________________
8. You should always label the patients wounds as entrance or exit wounds on the patient care report.

True  False

9. Domestic violence usually results in.

1) __________________
2) __________________
3) __________________
4) __________________
5) __________________

10. EMS providers often determine personal safety before they even arrive at the scene. A lot of that information can come from the dispatch center. Such information may be (explain below).

IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER OF THE MCHENRY WESTERN LAKE COUNTY EMS SYSTEM, PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR ADDRESS ON EACH OPTIONAL QUIZ TURNED INTO OUR OFFICE. WE WILL FORWARD TO YOUR HOME ADDRESS VERIFICATION OF YOUR CONTINUING EDUCATION HOURS.

IF YOU ARE A MEMBER OF OUR EMS SYSTEM, YOUR CREDIT WILL BE ADDED TO YOUR IMAGE TREND RECORD. PLEASE REFER TO IMAGE TREND TO SEE YOUR LIST OF CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS.

ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS CAN BE ADDRESSED TO THE EMS OFFICE AT 815/759-8040.
THANK YOU.