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# LESSON LEARNED

## Mass Casualty Incidents: Legal Advice to Investigators

### SUMMARY

Emergency response personnel should be provided with timely legal advice from competent authority following a mass casualty incident (MCI). Local law enforcement officers may not be familiar with the legal complexities of an MCI; timely advice is essential to help them when confronting such unusual circumstances.

### DESCRIPTION

The fire that destroyed the Station Club in Warwick, Rhode Island on February 20, 2003, resulted in 100 deaths and over 200 injured individuals. During rescue and recovery operations, law enforcement officers faced complicated legal questions. Officers wanted to search nearby vehicles and personal effects to obtain information about potential victims, but they were concerned that improper searches could undermine any future criminal investigation.

Attorneys from the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office voluntarily reported to the incident site during recovery operations. These attorneys provided practical and timely legal advice to officers, enabling them to perform their duties without prejudicing possible criminal investigations. This legal advice was very beneficial and greatly appreciated by law enforcement officials.

Following a MCI, emergency response personnel should be provided with timely legal advice from competent authority. Local law enforcement officers may not be knowledgeable of all the legal complexities of mass casualty situations, and timely advice is essential to help them when confronting such unusual circumstances.

### CITATION

Titan Systems Corporation. *Rhode Island: The Station Club Fire After-Action Report: State, Local, and Federal Government and the Private Sector*. 13 Jul 2004.

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