

RELATED TERMS

- Agency Response Plans
- Hospital



Lessons Learned Information Sharing

www.LLIS.gov

LESSON LEARNED

PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Emergency Medical Services
- Emergency Management
- Medical Care

Emergency Medical Services: Morphine Sulfate Use by Advanced Life Saving Personnel

SUMMARY

State public health agencies should review protocols to determine whether advanced life saving (ALS) personnel should be allowed to administer morphine sulfate to the victims of major accidents or disasters.

DESCRIPTION

The fire that destroyed the Station Club in Warwick, Rhode Island on February 20, 2003 resulted in 100 deaths and over 200 injuries. Approximately 68 emergency medical services (EMS) units, mostly ALS, responded to the incident. An ALS unit consists of at least one EMT-B and an EMT-C or paramedic. EMT-Bs have basic emergency medical training, while EMT-Cs are cardiac rescue technicians with additional lifesaving skills. Paramedics have the highest level of EMS certification.

During the incident, EMS personnel assessed that approximately 75% of the victims required morphine sulfate for pain relief from burns and lacerations. To administer this drug, ALS personnel sought authorization from Medical Control at area hospitals. At the time, permission was required under the Rhode Island Prehospital Care Protocols and Standing Orders. However, ALS personnel's attempts to receive permission initially proved unsuccessful. Communication problems, such as busy phone lines and time spent on hold, delayed authorization for 30 to 40 minutes. Eventually, EMS providers got through to Dr. Selim Suner at Rhode Island Hospital, who authorized ALS personnel to medicate patients with up to 5 mg of morphine sulfate.

Obtaining explicit permission to administer drugs may be difficult during the confusion of a mass casualty incident. State public health agencies should review protocols to determine whether ALS personnel should be allowed to administer morphine sulfate to the victims of major accidents or disasters. Such provisions could save valuable time during an emergency response and help alleviate the suffering of injured individuals.

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. ([LLIS.gov](http://www.LLIS.gov) ID# 10806)
- Kennedy, Leo. Cranston, Rhode Island Deputy Chief EMS Director. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*. 21 Jul 2005.
- Suner, Selim. Doctor of Emergency Medicine at Rhode Island Hospital. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*. 25 Jul 2005.

DISCLAIMER

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) is the US Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency response and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the US Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email Feedback@llis.dhs.gov or visit www.llis.gov.