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LESSON LEARNED

Mass Casualty Incident: Establishing a Staging Area

SUMMARY

Incident commanders should establish a staging area and assign a visually identifiable emergency medical services (EMS) command officer to coordinate it as soon as possible after a mass casualty incident (MCI). The staging area should be large enough to contain the number of vehicles anticipated and to allow for rapid access and egress. Vehicles in the staging area should be organized by function, and EMS crews should remain with their vehicles until given an assignment.

DESCRIPTION

The fire that destroyed the Station Club in West Warwick, Rhode Island, on February 20, 2003, resulted in 100 deaths and over 200 injuries. Due to the magnitude of the incident, approximately 57 EMS units reported to the scene to provide medical care and transport injured victims to area hospitals. However, Incident Command did not assign a responder to direct traffic at the onset of emergency response operations. As a result, responders parked their vehicles wherever they could find space, sometimes blocking lanes of traffic. This caused traffic gridlock, hindering EMS units from rapidly accessing and exiting the incident site.

An EMS coordinator assumed the role of staging officer approximately 45 minutes after the Station Club fire started. He established a staging area in a parking lot 500 feet from the incident site to resolve traffic congestion problems. The staging officer requested that Incident Command instruct all EMS units waiting for an assignment at the incident site to relocate to the staging area and to remain there until given an assignment. He then asked responders at the triage area to contact him via radio when additional EMS units were needed to transport victims. The staging officer assigned an appropriate number of EMS units to report to the triage area and to pick up the designated victims for hospital transport when needed. The staging area was large enough to accommodate the EMS units, which enabled their rapid access and egress.

For additional information on appointing EMS Branch leadership positions after an MCI, please refer to the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Lesson Learned document: [Incident Command: Filling Emergency Medical Services Command Positions](#).

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CITATION

Titan Systems Corporation. *Rhode Island: The Station Club Fire After-Action Report: State, Local, and Federal Government and the Private Sector*. Jul 2004.
https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=10806

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