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# LESSON LEARNED

## Emergency Medical Services: Staffing Family Assistance Centers

### SUMMARY

Emergency medical services (EMS) personnel who participate in an incident response should not be assigned to standby support at a Family Assistance Center (FAC) unless no alternative is available.

### DESCRIPTION

The fire that destroyed the Station Club in Warwick, Rhode Island on February 20, 2003, resulted in 100 deaths and over 200 injuries. A FAC was established the following morning to meet the immediate and short-term needs of victims and their families. The FAC offered a variety of services, including medical treatment for headaches, emotional distress, and other minor maladies.

An EMS crew from the Warwick Fire Department that had responded to the fire was tasked with handling potential medical emergencies at the FAC. Though helpful for the families, this back-to-back assignment was distressing for EMS crews. Fire suppression, patient treatment, body recovery, crowd control, freezing temperatures, and long hours had imposed physical and mental stress on the emergency response personnel. The added anxiety of working with the distraught families of victims proved difficult for EMS personnel. Consequently, a second crew that had not responded to the Station Club fire had to replace the EMS staff at the FAC.

EMS personnel who participate in an incident response should not be assigned to standby support at a FAC. Instead fresh EMS crews should be used whenever possible. This will help emergency responders to remain both healthy and capable of treating victims and their families.

### CITATION

- Titan Systems Corporation. *Rhode Island: The Station Club Fire After-Action Report: State, Local, and Federal Government and the Private Sector*. 13 July 2004. ([LLIS.gov ID# 10806](#))

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