



REHABILITATION BEST PRACTICES

A significant percentage of injuries and illnesses, and more than half of all fatalities, are directly related to the stress and overexertion of those involved in emergency scene operations or training exercises. A comprehensive rehabilitation program for emergency incidents, training exercises, and prolonged planned events is one strategy that fire and EMS agencies use to protect their responders from the physical and emotional rigors of their jobs. The other components include:

- Periodic physical examinations,
- Agency supported physical and emotional wellness programs, and
- Good operational risk control decision-making.

This bulletin will discuss the legal requirements and best practices for establishing rehabilitation at incidents, training, and extended planned events.

[N.J.A.C. 5:75-2.9 Medical Unit – Responder Rehabilitation](#) requires fire agencies to minimally develop written rehabilitation (rehab) policies and procedures for firefighters' wellness at emergency incidents that include:

- Nourishment and rehydration
- Rest and recovery
- Medical evaluation and treatment
- Accountability

The Division of Fire Safety distributes [Fire Service Reference Booklet 11: Statewide Incident Rehabilitation Guidelines for Emergency Responders](#). The booklet provides 60 pages of sample language for setting up, supplying, operating, and responder accountability in a rehab area. It also provides sample rehab area diagrams, decision-making flow charts, and forms. It also recognizes that rehabilitation is also needed for strenuous training exercises and prolonged planned events.

NFPA Standard 1584 Standard on the Rehabilitation Process for Members During Emergency Operations and Training Exercises is the national standard and should be the guiding principle for fire agencies in establishing their rehab program. The standard comprises eight chapters and three appendices. While this bulletin will focus on firefighter rehab, the standard states that rehab practices are also appropriate for EMS and law enforcement.

[MSI Fire & EMS](#), provides two model rehabilitation policies:

1. **Rehabilitation – Division of Fire Safety:** This model policy provides the minimum standard for establishing rehabilitation in accordance with N.J.A.C. 5:7-2.9 in black font. Additional optional guidance, as provided in Booklet 11, is provided in red font.
2. **Rehabilitation – NFPA:** The NFPA is the industry standard for fire and many EMS operations. Its standards are considered the best industry practices.

Fire and EMS agencies should review the two versions. They must, at a minimum, formalize a policy as outlined in the black font in the Division of Fire Service. However, agencies are further encouraged to provide officers, firefighters, and EMT with additional specificity on establishing and operating a rehabilitation area by adding verbiage from Booklet 11 and NFPA Standard 1584.