

EMERGENCY SCENE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EMS

The safety of first responders is the most important consideration for leaders at an emergency incident. Knowing who is on the scene, where they are, and how their actions fit into the operational plan are the critical elements of first responders' safety. First responders working at large-scale incidents must be managed using the Incident Command System (ICS) and a Personnel Accountability System (PAS) in New Jersey. Responders who self-deploy and unexpectedly show up at an emergency scene, or who fail to check in properly, can render a PAS inaccurate and endanger all first responders.

Personnel accountability at an emergency scene is the systematic process of knowing who is on scene, where they are operating, what assignment they have been given, and when they entered or exited a hazard area.

An effective Personnel Accountability System (PAS) allows the Incident Commander to:

- Track all personnel operating at the incident in real time
- Conduct Personnel Accountability Reports (PARs) — roll calls to confirm all personnel are safe
- Rapidly identify missing personnel in the event of a Mayday or emergency evacuation
- Manage resources effectively and prevent freelancing or unauthorized operations
- Ensure that personnel in hazard zones are properly equipped, trained, and authorized

The fire service in New Jersey recognized the hazard of an incomplete accounting of responders and supported the Emergency Deployment Act (N.J.A.C. 5:75-2.4), which states the incident commander "shall determine whether additional fire service resources are required and, if so, shall call upon the members of their local fire mutual aid plan." This statement mandates fire resources to be called by the Incident Commander, and unsolicited responses are prohibited.

The Emergency Deployment Act specifically exempts EMS agencies and personnel, except for any EMS unit or personnel providing fire and emergency medical services. However, the 2025 NJ EMS Clinical Practice Protocols do address off-duty response and effectively restrict unauthorized independent action. Additionally, NJOEM Directive NJOEM-10 (2022) mandates ICS for all emergency response agencies, which by extension requires EMS to operate within the command structure and not self-deploy outside of it.

EMS personnel are not immune to the hazards of emergency scenes. Structural collapses, fire extension, hazardous materials releases, traffic, violence, and environmental conditions all pose risks to EMS providers. Unlike firefighters who operate in clearly defined hazard zones with SCBA and protective gear, EMS personnel often work in transitional zones — close enough to the hazard to be at risk, but without the same level of protective equipment.

EMS leaders are encouraged to review their accountability policies and procedures to ensure they are updated to New Jersey guidelines. A model EMS Accountability Policy is available on MSI Fire & EMS, under the Model Policies.

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