



Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS Standard Operating Procedure

DOCUMENT DETAILS

Standard Operating Procedure: 3.04	Effective Date: June 8, 2023
Subject: EMS Sentinel Event Notification	Section: EMS Operations
Authorized: Eric Zaney, Assistant Chief	Revision Date: April 17, 2026

Applicability: Volunteer Career

I. PURPOSE

To establish a standardized process for the timely identification, notification, and documentation of EMS sentinel events. This policy ensures that critical incidents are promptly communicated through the appropriate chain of command, enabling rapid administrative awareness, coordination with partner agencies, and initiation of necessary reviews. Additionally, this policy supports transparency, accountability, and continuous quality improvement by ensuring sentinel events are consistently reported, evaluated, and addressed to enhance patient safety and operational performance.

II. DEFINITIONS

Adverse Event- An unintended injury or complication resulting from medical care or EMS operations that may or may not rise to the level of a sentinel event.

Chain of Command- The structured line of authority through which information and decisions are communicated within the organization.

Immediate Notification- Verbal notification made as soon as practical, without unnecessary delay, following recognition of a sentinel event.

Notification- The formal process of communicating a sentinel event through the established chain of command, including required timeframes and methods.

On-Duty Supervisor- The individual assigned responsibility for operational oversight at the time of the incident, typically responsible for initial notification and documentation.

Quality Assurance / Quality Improvement (QA/QI)- A systematic process used to review, evaluate, and improve patient care, operational performance, and compliance with established standards.

Sentinel Event- An unexpected occurrence involving death, serious physical or psychological injury, or the risk thereof, arising from EMS operations, patient care, or associated activities. Sentinel events require immediate notification and administrative review.

Serious Injury- An injury that results in significant risk to life, permanent impairment, or requires immediate medical or surgical intervention to prevent long-term harm.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Identification of Sentinel Events:

- a. Any EMS clinician who identifies or suspects that a sentinel event has occurred shall immediately ensure the safety of all patients, personnel, and bystanders.
- b. Patient care shall remain the highest priority. All appropriate medical interventions shall be continued or initiated as indicated.
- c. Once immediate hazards are addressed, the clinician shall recognize the incident as a potential sentinel event based on established criteria.

B. Immediate Notification:

- a. The involved clinicians shall notify their on-duty supervisor as soon as practical, without unnecessary delay.
- b. Notification should be made via direct conversation or phone call.
- c. The initial report should include, at a minimum:
 - i. Unit identifier and personnel involved
 - ii. Incident location
 - iii. Brief summary of the event
 - iv. Patient status
 - v. Any immediate safety concerns

C. Events Requiring Notification to the Assistant Chief of EMS:

The following incidents require notification to the Assistant Chief of EMS upon completion of the incident:

- a. Significant deviation from Department policy or procedures
- b. Medication error or protocol violation
- c. Any injury sustained by a patient or clinician during transport

- d. Surgical airway procedures
- e. Needle chest decompression
- f. Rapid sequence intubation
- g. Bloodborne or airborne pathogen exposure
- h. Any other procedure or incident as determined by the Assistant Chief of EMS or Medical Director

D. Supervisor and Chain of Command Responsibilities:

- a. The on-duty supervisor shall respond to the scene when appropriate or ensure adequate oversight of the incident.
- b. The supervisor shall ensure all involved personnel are identified and available for follow-up as needed.
- c. The Shift Commander shall notify the Assistant Chief of EMS via phone or email, providing all pertinent details.

E. Administrative Notifications:

- a. The Assistant Chief of EMS shall notify the Medical Director, Director/Fire Chief, or other appropriate personnel as necessary.
- b. The Assistant Chief of EMS shall notify the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS), receiving hospitals, or other regulatory agencies as required.

F. Internal Review Process

- a. All sentinel events shall undergo a formal review coordinated by the EMS leadership and Medical Director.
- b. The review may include the following:
 - i. EPCR/EMEDS review
 - ii. Monitor/equipment data analysis
 - iii. Interviews with personnel involved
 - iv. Written statements
 - v. Departmental policy and MIEMSS EMS protocols.
- c. A Root Cause Analysis shall be conducted for all qualifying sentinel events.

IV. RECISSION

This Standard Operating Procedure rescinds all directives regarding EMS Sentinel Event Notification or similar content previously issued for personnel of the Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS.

V. RELATED STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES / DOCUMENTS

VI. ATTACHMENTS