

The Forgotten Hazard

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We spend countless hours training; preparing ourselves for the expected hazard whether it comes at us from a passing vehicle on a highway or a precarious live wire dangerously close to our emergency scene. ‘Scene safety,’ ‘Scene Size up,’ and ‘Incident Command,’ are terms we hear time and time again in every class taught, in every article read, and in every drill run. Since the attacks on the World Trade Center, the emergency service community has focused much of its attention on terrorism and emergency preparedness for large scale incidents. Our efforts are not in vain, and countless lives have been saved as a result. But what about the danger that waits for you during the ‘routine call’? We must not forget to train and prepare ourselves for the ‘forgotten hazards’ and not become complacent because we respond to these calls everyday.

Over the last ten to fifteen years violent behavior has steadily increased in every community. Violence can strike at any moment, often when you least expect it. Just last month a young EMT was hit by two bullets as he drove an ambulance on Interstate 64 in St. Louis, MO. The shots were fired from a car that had pulled up alongside his rig. In Canton, OH a paramedic was kicked and punched by a patient as he was attempting to transport the man to the hospital. In Nevada, an accident victim fired a handgun while firefighters worked to free him from the wreckage. As emergency responders, these people were called to help those in need and did NOT expect to have to defend themselves against the very people they swore to protect.

To best protect yourself and your crew from becoming a victim of violence, you must utilize the “Four A’s” of self-defense.

- ✓ **Attitude:** Do not allow yourself to become complacent. There is no such thing as a ‘routine call.’ Stay alert and remember that even the most basic call could become a violent incident at a moments notice.
- ✓ **Awareness:** Think about your environment. Do not assume you are safe as you enter someone’s home because they called 9-1-1 for your help. Look around your surroundings and ask yourself, ‘What here could be used to hurt me or my crew?’
- ✓ **Avoidance:** Look for warning signs. Know when to stage in the area to await law enforcement or when it is safe to approach the scene.
- ✓ **Action:** If you become caught in a difficult situation you must be prepared to take action to survive.

Remember, it takes seconds for a situation to take a turn for the worse. Discussing scenarios and developing a plan before the alarm sounds will decrease the chance that you or a member of your crew will be caught off guard in a violent situation. For more information regarding this topic, contact ESIP’s customer service hotline, 1.800.822.3747 ext 176 and ask about our VIPER program (*Violence Intervention by Prevention for Emergency Responders*).