



# STRETCHER GENERAL GUIDELINES



## Escambia County, Florida - ALS/BLS Medical Protocol

### Handling a Stretcher and "Packaging" a Patient:

All stretchers should always have a pillow, blanket (weight appropriate for the season) and sheet on them. Remember to utilize these items. Always cover your patients with the appropriate items to keep them warm and comfortable. If it is raining or very cold, wrap a towel around the patient's head. Keeping a patient warm and dry is one of the most basic and important things you can do.

Over the shoulder straps must be used in conjunction with the three (3) stretcher straps at all times. Do not store these straps under the mattress. They should always be accessible. When you have a patient on your stretcher, always do the following:

1. Cover the patient properly (sheet and/or blanket). During cold weather, utilize heavy blankets and cover the patient's head with a towel. **ALWAYS PROTECT EVERY PATIENT'S PRIVACY.**
2. Keep the patient as comfortable as possible.
3. Have two people attending the stretcher when it is raised or lowered.
4. Pull stretcher feet first whenever possible.
5. Put the head of the stretcher into an elevator first.
6. Pay attention to patient's hands and feet when moving them through narrow spaces or down stairs.
7. **NEVER LEAVE A PATIENT UNATTENDED.**
8. **KEEP STRETCHER AWAY FROM REAR BUMPER AND OPEN MODULAR DOORS EXCEPT WHEN LOADING/UNLOADING A PATIENT. (Remember the air-ride system will damage the stretcher frame if the rear doors and/or bumper gets caught on the stretcher.)**


All of these may seem like small and trivial points, but if you have ever been on a stretcher, you know how important these things are to the patient's safety, comfort, and state of mind.



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Charles Neal, D.O. Medical Director



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### Stretcher Operation by Fire Department:

Define when and in what manner firefighters may operate or assist in the operation of Escambia County Bureau of Public Safety EMS (ECEMS) stretchers. For the purpose of this policy, the terms firefighter or fire personnel, do not include incumbent ECEMS employees who also function in a fire capacity.

### Responsibility for Operation:

Since the stretcher is a piece of ECEMS equipment on the ambulance, the ambulance crew bears direct responsibility for the safe operation of it. On single and/or multiple patient incidents, the ECEMS employee operating the stretcher is directly responsible for the safe operation of the stretcher while the patient is on it.

### Removal from Ambulance (no patient):

When initially instituting patient care it is often difficult for an ambulance crew member to leave a critical patient to retrieve the stretcher. Therefore, the assistance of firefighters is crucial. Due to there not being a patient on board the stretcher, it weighs significantly less and if the stretcher were to collapse, there is virtually no civil liability. In those instances when a firefighter is requested to retrieve the stretcher from the ambulance:

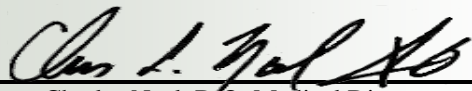
1. There will be a clear reason as to why a member of the ambulance crew cannot retrieve the stretcher.
2. A firefighter experienced in the operation of the stretcher will be requested to retrieve it. If no experienced firefighters are present, the firefighters will assist with patient care and a crew member will retrieve the stretcher.
3. If the stretcher is being retrieved over rough terrain, or will need to be transported up steps, a minimum of two personnel, whenever possible, will be utilized. One person will be at the "foot" of the stretcher, the other person will be at the "head".
4. The stretcher will be moved to a point as close to the patient as possible to minimize the need for the patient to ambulate and yet allow for the safe movement of the patient. If the stretcher cannot be placed close to the patient, the attending paramedic



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will be responsible for deciding whether the patient can ambulate or whether alternative means of moving the patient (such as: the stair chair, sheet carry, manual carry, etc.) will be utilized.

### Placing the Patient on the Stretcher:

The attending paramedic is responsible for patient care and will direct the safe operation of the stretcher and how a patient will be placed on the stretcher. A sufficient number of personnel will be utilized to safely place the patient on the stretcher and minimize the potential risk of injury to personnel. At all times, the patient will be restrained to the stretcher with a minimum of three straps (Ferno stretchers- 3 straps plus shoulder harness). On multiple patient incidents, the attending ECEMS employee will direct the safe placement of the patient and operation of the stretcher.

### Returning the Stretcher and Patient to the Ambulance:

Once the patient has been placed on the stretcher, and secured, the crew will direct the safe operation of the stretcher. Whenever the ambulance crew can safely operate the stretcher, on their own, they will do so. If assistance is needed, one ambulance crew member will be at the "head" and the other at the "foot" of the stretcher. **At no time will a firefighter be the only person at the "foot" of a stretcher transporting a patient. The firefighter will not operate the handle, which controls the stretcher.** Additional fire personnel will be placed at the corners of the stretcher, as needed, to safely move the patient. Any time a patient is being transported across rough terrain or up or down steps, the attending paramedic will be directly responsible for the safety of the patient and personnel.

### Loading the Stretcher and Patient into the Ambulance:


**At no time will a firefighter be the only person at the "foot" of the stretcher during the loading procedure.** The ambulance crew will direct the proper positioning and loading of the stretcher into the ambulance. The non-attending ECEMS employee will operate the stretcher during the "loading" procedure. Additional firefighters may be utilized at the corners or sides of the "foot" of the stretcher, as needed, to safely load the patient and minimize the potential risk of injury to all personnel. **The additional firefighters will not be positioned so as to potentially operate the handle, which controls the stretcher.**



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### Unloading the Stretcher and Patient at the Hospital:

The non-attending ECEMS employee will be at the “foot” of the stretcher and direct the safe unloading of the patient. **At no time will a firefighter or hospital personnel be the only person at the foot of the stretcher.**

### Documentation of Stretcher Failures or Injuries Associated with the Operation of an EMS Stretcher:


1. Any incident which results in either a stretcher failure (or collapse) or injury to any personnel while operating an ECEMS stretcher will be immediately brought to the attention of the on-duty Shift Supervisor. An Information Report, containing all relevant information with regards to the incident, will be completed by the crew and will be forwarded to the Shift Supervisor prior to the end of the shift. The initially informed Shift Supervisor will notify the appropriate personnel based upon the severity of the incident. Any stretcher, which is associated with a failure or collapse, will be immediately removed from service, tagged and replaced.
2. Any stretcher failure will be reported to the Training Coordinator. The failure of the stretcher constitutes a failure of a medical device and as such must be reported to the appropriate agencies. The Training Coordinator will review the documentation involving the failure, complete the necessary paperwork, and forward the summary to the appropriate agencies.



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