



SQUAD COMMANDER HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your assignment to the Squad Commander position! You are now engaged in a critical role within the Virginia Beach Department of EMS (VBEMS). You are responsible for the leadership and direction of your squad/team. As the department's primary agent at this level, the Chief of EMS has empowered you with a number of important responsibilities. This handbook is designed to provide reference material for the most common topics affecting a squad commander. Policies and procedures are always evolving, so this manual often references specific VBEMS policies rather than providing a full text of the policy. While all officers should have a working knowledge of departmental policies, some scenarios can be complex. Even the most seasoned officers routinely go to the department's website to review a specific policy before taking action on something.

You should also be familiar with regional and state regulations. Virginia EMS regulations and regional protocols are all available on the internet. The following websites will be useful to you:

Virginia Beach Department of EMS: www.vbems.com
City of Virginia Beach: www.vbgov.com
Tidewater EMS Council: www.tidewaterems.org
Virginia Office of EMS: www.vdh.virginia.gov/oems

You are also encouraged to ask questions of your chain of command and EMS Administration any time.

EMS Headquarters and Training Center
4160 Virginia Beach Blvd.
Virginia Beach, VA 23452
(757)385-1999

Questions about this manual and/or questions about the role of the Squad Commander should be directed to your Assistant Chief or the Deputy Chief of Operations.

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Section 1: Department of EMS Mission, Vision Values

Mission

The mission of the Department of Emergency Medical Services is to provide services to the community which preserve life, improve health and promote the safety of citizens and visitors who live, learn, work and play in our community.

This mission is accomplished through a systems approach focused on providing timely responses; high quality patient care services; public awareness and education; proactive safety interventions; and all hazards readiness.

Vision

We are a leader in the emergency medical services field and the community is confident in our services.

Values

Quality Customer Service

Serving customers is the fundamental reason the Department of Emergency Medical Services exists.

Volunteerism

Volunteers are an integral part of the department. There is no differentiation between career and volunteer members in terms of performance standards, certifications and input to the organization.

Teamwork

Organizational goals are attained when members and customers work together.

Leadership and Learning

Learning at every level of the organization creates opportunities for leadership experience and for members to continuously expand their capacity to create a quality organization.

Integrity

Integrity creates the trust essential to Quality Service and long-term personal and organizational growth.

Commitment

Commitment is the necessary mechanism enabling members to focus their behavior on attaining organizational goals.

Openness and Respect

Members must be truthful and open with each other and with customers to grow responsibly and effectively.

Quality Work Life

A quality work life influences the degree of members' satisfaction which enables the accomplishment of the department's mission.

Section 2: Role and Duties of the Squad Commander

The Squad Commander is single-handedly the most influential officer in the VBEMS organization. The Squad Commander is the first line supervisor of the department's most important resource--our volunteers. He/she is responsible for the overall leadership and management of a rescue squad or special operations team. Effective operations and good morale starts with the Squad Commander.

VBEMS has training courses available to assist you in your development as an effective and informed leader. All personnel are encouraged to attend this training. The department holds regular officer meetings in order to keep everyone informed. And of course, there is a cadre of chief officers ready and willing to assist you.

The Squad Commander is appointed by the EMS Chief and serves at his pleasure within a designated chain-of-command. Even though a Squad Commander may have been nominated as a result of a Rescue Squad Captain election, the actual Squad Commander title is only given via appointment. The Squad Commander is considered a department agent and is responsible for implementation of all policies and directives of the department. The Squad Commander's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring maximum participation of members for optimum staffing
- Corrective personnel actions
- Leave approval
- City policy implementation and enforcement
- Regulatory compliance
- City facility care taking and maintenance
- City equipment maintenance
- Mentoring junior officers
- Agency advocate

While a Squad Commander may also hold the title of Rescue Squad Captain, all actions taken as a City/VBEMS agent must be taken in the capacity as Squad Commander. Unless specifically stated otherwise in VBEMS policies, individual squad by-laws or procedures are not recognized for operational and personnel matters.

All Squad Commanders must meet with the Chief and Deputy Chief upon initial appointment and annually thereafter.

Section 3: Virginia Beach EMS Organization

The basic VBEMS structure consists of a Chief, two Deputy Chiefs, three Division Chiefs and four Assistant Chiefs that manage daily department activities. Each division has various line and staff personnel to support ongoing organizational functions.

Chief Ed Brazle directs and oversees all activities of the department. He reports directly to the City Manager. Chief Brazle's radio call-sign "EMS Chief 1"

Deputy Chief Jason Stroud is responsible for the management of all EMS operations. He oversees the Regulations & Support Services division, the EMS operations staff, as well as the four volunteer Assistant Chiefs. Chief Stroud's radio call-sign is "EMS Chief 2"

Deputy Chief Tom Green is responsible for the management of EMS training and department administration functions. He oversees all training, administrative and support staff. Chief Green's radio call-sign is "EMS Chief 3"

There are four Assistant Chiefs appointed by the Chief. These Assistant Chiefs report to Deputy Chief Stroud and each oversee an assigned group of rescue squads and/or specialty teams. The Assistant Chiefs serve in a supervisory role to the Squad Commander; in addition, they also serve as a liaison and mentor to the volunteer members of the rescue squads. The Assistant Chief assignments are as follows:

EMS Chief 21 – Bill Walker

Rescue 14, Rescue 17 and liaison to the MRT

EMS Chief 22 – Steve Long

Rescue 16, Rescue 9 and liaison to the MCI and SAR Teams

EMS Chief 23 – Ellen McBride

Rescue 1, Rescue 2 and Rescue 4

EMS Chief 24 – Nick Askew

Rescue 5, Rescue 6, Rescue 13 and liaison to the Volunteer Field Supervisor Team.

Division Chief John Bianco serves in Operations as the Division Chief responsible for emergency operations and field services. His duties include oversight of the EMS role in special events, the Medical Friendly Shelter program, emergency management matters and EMS capital improvement projects. Chief Bianco's radio call-sign is "EMS Chief 5".

The Administration Division is led by Division Chief Bruce Nedelka. His team provides the administrative services of the department including human resources, recruiting, retention and general office management. Of note, this division is

responsible for the ambulance attendant-in-charge (AIC) program. Chief Nedelka's radio call-sign is "EMS Chief 6"

The Regulations & Support Services Division is led by Division Chief Kevin Lipscomb. He is responsible for all vehicle matters as well as compliance and enforcement of all regulations for city, rescue squad and private EMS agency. Chief Lipscomb serves as the department's Chief Medical Officer who oversees the Medical Oversight and Review Board, as well as the CQI program. This office also includes the department's logistics, storekeeper and supply functions. Chief Lipscomb's radio call-sign is "EMS Chief 7".

The day-to-day operations carried out by ambulances, zone cars, specialty apparatus, etc. is under the oversight of a Command Duty Officer (CDO) known as "EMS Chief 10". The CDO is in charge of all EMS operations as a direct representative of the Deputy Chief of Operations. Whereas the Squad Commander has the important role of leading and managing their individual rescue squads, the CDO and the EMS Field Supervisors, lead and manage all on-duty resources and personnel regardless of station affiliation(s).

Section 4: Regulation and Compliance

The Regulations & Support Services Division Chief is your best reference for agency compliance. Feel free to contact him when you need guidance. While you can call the Virginia Office of EMS directly, you are highly encouraged to ask your question locally first. If we don't know the answer, we would be happy to work with the state or region to get you the information you need.

Agency Licensure and Coordination

Each rescue squad holds its own EMS Agency license. As such, they must comply with all Virginia Department of Health regulations. They must meet other requirements set at the local, regional, state and even national level. The Virginia EMS Regulations Manual is available online.

Your agency must meet required standards for equipment, training and records. While DEMS covers many of the administrative and medical control requirements on your behalf, there is no escape from equipment and supply standards. You must carry the required equipment and supplies on your vehicles. DEMS does not have adequate stocks to keep your vehicles in service. We will help when possible, but ultimate responsibility rests with the Squad Commander.

While there are ten independent rescue squads in the City of Virginia Beach, each is part of the Virginia Beach Emergency Response System. This system relies on joint policies and procedures. For example, any qualified member can function onboard any ambulance. The notion of a single system is not only vital for effective service, but is also required for regulatory compliance. Squad commanders should be familiar with the Department of EMS Response Plan. This document is updated prior to bi-annual agency inspections and is signed by all squad commanders.

In terms of minimum equipment and supplies, VBEMS has some requirements which exceed the Department of Health requirements. For example, all ambulances must carry CPAP masks and cricothyrotomy kits. We also require that all durable equipment such as defibrillators be uniform across the entire rescue squad system. You are not authorized to purchase new types of medical equipment without approval of the department and the Operational Medical Director. The required equipment is covered in the department's policies and the Medical Oversight and Review Board (MORB) is charged with reviewing and recommending any new equipment or changes to patient care practices.

Special Operations Captains should consult with their Brigade Chief regarding equipment and vehicle regulations for their team. No medical supplies can be added without permission of the Deputy Chief of Operations.

New vehicles must be approved by VBEMS **prior to purchase**. Once a new apparatus is delivered, the Regulation and Enforcement Chief will assist you will obtaining the necessary Department of Health permits.

The Virginia Department of Health Office of EMS inspects all ambulances and squad trucks every two years. We participate in a consolidated inspection process where all vehicles and records are delivered to a central location for checks. It is the responsibility of each squad to prepare and participate in the inspection process. A regional inspector also has the authority to spot check your vehicles any time. Violations are handled via a citation either to your agency or the member directly.

IV and Drug Boxes

IV and Drug boxes are actually property of the Tidewater EMS Council and area hospitals. We participate in a regional exchange system. Padlocks and keys are provided by DEMS, and DEMS manages the routine inventory reporting process on your squad's behalf.

Infection Control

VBEMS and all rescue squads follow the City of Virginia Beach Infection Control Plan. Chief Lipscomb is the department's Infection Control Officer. In the event of an exposure, notify an EMS Field Supervisor.

Patient Care Reports

All pre-hospital patient care reports are submitted via a centralized electronic medical records (EMR) process. VBEMS staff monitors reports for completeness and quality. Data is ultimately forwarded on your behalf to the Department of Health. Rescue squads are not authorized to maintain separate medical records at their station.

Section 5: Human Resources

Criminal and Driving Charges

All members are required to promptly report criminal and traffic charges. If a member contacts you, be sure they notify EMS Administration immediately. You will receive notification of any incident which impacts a member's ability to function in the field.

EEO or Harassment Complaints

Contact an EMS Field Supervisor immediately for events in progress. For events you learn about after the fact, contact the Chief of Administration for support. The City of Virginia Beach EEO Policy will apply.

ID Cards

ID cards are issued at the EMS Headquarters and Training Center. There are a number of card designs for specific purposes. If you have ID card questions, contact Lynette Dimitry.

Leave and Return to Duty

The status of all members is maintained in the OSCAR system and City databases. Squad commanders are empowered to grant leave (medical or other inactivity). You may also approve temporary reductions in duty requirements. All status changes are entered in to the OSCAR system. Once an entry is made, the update is transmitted to the member and EMS Administration. Squad commanders should make changes as they occur as well as take a look at their entire roster at the beginning of each month.

When a member has been inactive for greater than 90 days, the VBEMS Return to Duty Policy applies. Your member may need to complete retraining or other clearance steps. Be sure to review the Return to Duty Policy prior to approving a member's return from extended leave.

Members suffering from a debilitating illness or injury that renders them unfit for duty may need to be cleared by the City's Occupational Health Office prior to returning to duty. Consult with Shalonda Niskey or Lynette Dimitry for further guidance on these returns.

Transfers

Members may request a transfer to another rescue squad. They should contact Jahmelle Sherman at EMS Administration to initiate the paperwork. Forms will be forwarded to both the original and receiving rescue squad leadership. Members are obligated for all ambulance duties while in the transfer process.

Members wishing to transfer to a different membership classification (i.e. operational to administrative) should contact Jahmelle Sherman for guidance.

Records/Personnel Files

The official personnel and training file for all members is maintained at EMS Administration. Squad commanders and members should forward documents that need to be retained in a permanent file.

The VBEMS files will serve as records required by the Virginia Office of EMS for agency compliance.

Resignations

When a member resigns, notify EMS Administration and update OSCAR. Forward any documentation to Jahmelle Sherman. As feasible, retrieve all squad and City property, including ID cards.

Section 6: Discipline and Grievance

All disciplinary actions taken by a Squad Commander must fall within the DEMS Corrective Action Policy. This includes all associated progressive steps and grievance procedures. Any deviations from the DEMS policy could likely result in the corrective action being nullified due to procedural errors. DEMS cannot recognize the actions of separate boards, disciplinary panels or procedures established by an individual rescue squad corporation. We can only accept actions taken in accordance with City policies with you as Squad Commander acting as a City agent.

All disciplinary actions must be in writing. Non-punitive counselling may be verbal, but it is strongly recommended that the discussion be logged in some manner. Counselling letters/memos are encouraged.

The member's personnel file at EMS Administration is the file of record. Documents related to any corrective action should be forwarded to the VBEMS for filing. Likewise, you as a City agent have access to review your subordinates' personnel files.

Sample correction letters can be found below. Officers are encouraged to use these letters as templates for their own activities.

Sample Counseling Letter

Date: <Insert>
To: <Insert Member Name>, Rescue Squad Member
From: <Insert Officer Name>, Squad Commander
Subject: Official Counseling

You failed to report for scheduled duty on _____ (DATE). As we discussed prior yesterday, I understand that you had a work conflict. However, you should have notified me or an EMS Field Supervisor as soon as you were aware of the event. You must notify appropriate officers whenever you cannot stand a scheduled duty.

Any unexcused absences within the next 12 months will result in disciplinary action.

Sample Disciplinary Letter

Date: <Insert>

To: <Insert Member Name>, Rescue Squad Member

From: <Insert Officer Name>, Squad Commander

Subject: <Insert action taken>, {i.e. reprimand}

You failed to stand duty on _____ (DATE) without an advance excuse. According to my records, this is the second duty you have missed within two months. You were counseled on this matter on _____ (MONTH) following the missed duty on _____ (DATE).

Any Additional unexcused absences within the next 12 months will result in _____ (SPECIFIC CORRECTIVE ACTION).

If you feel this <CORRECTIVE ACTION> is inappropriate you may initiate grievance to your immediate supervisor within twenty (20) consecutive days of this action. Please refer to the Department of EMS Corrective Action and Grievance Policy for your specific grievance rights.

Section 7: Scheduling Process

VBEMS is required to maintain a minimum level of ambulances citywide. Certain stations are required to be staffed at all times. Career medics are used to augment staffing where necessary. Occasionally, volunteers may be assigned to run at locations other than their home station in order to meet minimum staffing goals.

VBEMS uses a centralized scheduling process. All member availabilities must be submitted into the OSCAR scheduling database no later than the 10th of the month for the subsequent month's schedule. Each squad develops their own schedule based on initial inputs. The scheduling officer, squad commander or other representative must coordinate their scheduling efforts with the VBEMS Chief Scheduling Officer. The VBEMS Chief Scheduling officer approves and published the final schedule.

Duty schedules will change due to illnesses, status changes, new qualifications, etc. You or your scheduling officer must be prepared to make adjustments throughout the month. Vacancies should be filled whenever possible. The OSCAR system must be kept updated by the Squad Commander or his/her designee.

Students and interns are scheduled directly by VBEMS staff. Once qualified, they will be assigned to their rescue squad for AIC-driver scheduling.

Squad commanders and their scheduling officers are encouraged to have regular dialogue with the VBEMS Chief Scheduling Officer to facilitate seamless scheduling practices.

Section 8: Facilities and Vehicles

Facilities

Squad-owned buildings (Stations 1, 8 and 14) are maintained by the rescue squads themselves. City facilities are maintained by the City. If you need a general repair in a joint Fire-EMS station, contact the B-shift Fire Captain. He/she will submit the necessary work order. Requests for modifications or major repairs not covered under routine maintenance (i.e. install new electrical outlets) should be made to the Administration Division Chief.

You are not authorized to reassign any EMS/rescue squad spaces to the Fire Department or other outside agencies. Only the EMS Deputy Chief of Operations can approve transferring rooms, bay space or other facilities to another organization. If approached to rearrange rooms, parking arrangements or space access, forward the requestor to Division Chief Bianco. This same standard applies in reverse. Station Fire officers are not authorized to assign any Fire spaces to EMS without executive level approval.

Fuel Fobs

The department utilizes a fob system to access fuel from several sites around the City. Each vehicle has a unique fob that should only be placed on that unit. Key failures/lost keys should be reported to the Regulations & Support Services division.

Vehicles

Rescue squad and department-owned vehicles are covered by City of Virginia Beach insurance and maintenance. As such, all vehicles will have a City inventory number. The City Garage is open during business hours. Drop off and pick-ups can also be handled after-hours. Emergency towing and road service can only be arranged via an EMS Field Supervisor. Your best sources of information regarding City vehicle services is the Regulations & Support Services Division Chief.

Section 9: Accidents/Damage Reporting

All accidents involving City or rescue squad-owned equipment must be reported to an EMS Field Supervisor. Likewise, all injuries must be reported to an EMS Field Supervisor. A field supervisor will respond to complete required paperwork.

EMS field supervisors will follow criteria regarding damage inspections, drug tests or related immediate actions as they investigate accident/injury situations.

Subsequent tracking and management of medical claims will be coordinated by Shalonda Niskey at EMS Administration.

Section 10: Observers

VBEMS has an Observer Policy. As squad commander, you may approve observers riding onboard your ambulances. You are not obligated to approve every request. Observers should be there for a specific purpose other than just hanging out with a friend. You are also not obligated to approve last minute requests or assignments to a specific truck. If you have any questions regarding observers, contact the Administration Division Chief.

Observers must be at least 18 years old. High school students may not be scheduled for observer shifts by a Squad Commander or the rescue squad, even if they are 18.

Observers are NOT allowed on zone cars without approval of the Deputy Chief of Operations.

Members of the media may not observe without approval of the VBEMS Public Information Officer (PIO).

Section 11: Miscellaneous

Ambulance Loans – The City of Virginia Beach often provides loans to rescue squads for ambulance purchases. For information on loans, contact Division Chief Lipscomb.

Grants – All RSAF grants must be reviewed by the Department of EMS. Contact Division Chief Lipscomb as far in advance as possible to arrange a review.

Local Vehicle Registration Fee Waiver - Shalonda Niskey at EMS Administration can assist with forms related to Local Vehicle Registration Fee Waivers and “Rescue Squad” license plates.

Patient Complaints – Patient complaints or inquiries should be referred to the Division Chief Lipscomb.

Patient Reports – Requests for a copy of a patient care report should be referred to Tyra Fitch.

Radio Numbers (ALS) – The Department of EMS maintains a list of ALS radio numbers by squad (xx70-99). These numbers are issued by the Deputy Chief of Operations when a member gets released to general supervision by the Chief.

Radio Numbers (Rescue Squad Officer) – The only VBEMS-assigned numbers are squad commander and assistant squad commander (xx50 and xx51). All other 50-60 numbers may be issued by the individual squad commanders.

Subpoenas/Attorney Requests – Subpoenas should be served to the EMS Headquarters and Training Center. If one arrives at the station directly, forward it immediately to Tyra Fitch for processing.