The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Ground Ambulance Crashes

April 2014
Objectives

The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of roadway ambulance crashes in the U.S. and show how the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA):

- Uses databases to record/analyze Ambulance Crashes
- Investigates Ambulance Crashes
- Documents and Reports on Ambulance Crashes
The Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS)

Mission Statement

To reduce death and disability by providing leadership and coordination to the EMS community in assessing, planning, developing, and promoting comprehensive, evidence-based emergency medical services and 9-1-1 systems.
The NHTSA Approach to Ground Ambulance Safety

- Collect comprehensive traffic crash data and conduct research
- Collaborate with national organizations & Federal partners to provide EMS leaders with the information they need to improve ground ambulance safety
- Foster consensus around strategies to promote safe EMS systems
- Support projects of national significance to accelerate improvements in ground ambulance safety
Comprehensive Traffic Crash Data

Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)
- FARS is a nationwide census of fatal traffic crashes within the 50 states and DC and Puerto Rico*

National Automotive Sampling System General Estimates System (NASS GES)
- NASS GES data are obtained from a nationally representative probability sample selected from police-reported crashes

Data collected can be used to:
- Identify highway safety problem areas
- Provide a basis for regulatory and consumer information initiatives
- Evaluate cost and benefit analyses of highway safety initiatives
- Identify behaviors involved in crashes and develop countermeasures to deter unsafe behaviors

*Data from Puerto Rico are not included in this presentation
NHTSA and Ground Ambulance Crashes

- **Analyzing**
  - Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)
  - National Automotive Sampling System General Estimates System (NASS GES)

- **Investigating**
  - Special Crash Investigations (SCI)
  - Supports an EMS worker nonfatal injury survey conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health using the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System work supplement (NEISS-Work).

- **Documenting and National Reporting**
  - Model Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria (MMUCC)
  - Annual NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts
An Overview of Ground Ambulance Crashes in the US

Between 1992-2011 (20 years), there were an annual estimated mean of 4,500 motor vehicle traffic crashes involving an ambulance.

Of these crashes:
- 65% resulted in property damage (only)
- 34% resulted in an injury/injuries
- <1% resulted in a fatality/fatalities

*Injuries and fatalities include occupants in all cars involved in a traffic crash involving an ambulance

Estimated Annual Traffic Crashes involving an Ambulance 1992-2011

*bar represents mean number of crashes over 5 years  *Injuries and fatalities include occupants in all cars involved in a traffic crash involving an ambulance

Analyzing Ambulance Crashes

- Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)
- National Automotive Sampling System General Estimates System (NASS GES)
Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)

Provides the data required to support the development, implementation, and assessment of highway safety programs.

Obtained from many documents including:

- Police Crash Reports
- Medical Examiner Reports
- State highway Department Data
- Other Records
Crashes involving ground ambulances can be analyzed by elements such as crash severity, person type, and emergency use.

Below is an example of how ground ambulance crashes are represented in the 2011 NHTSA publication *Traffic Safety Facts*

### Persons Killed in Crashes involving an Ambulance by Person Type and Crash Type, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person Type</th>
<th>Crash Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>In Emergency Use*</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>In Emergency Use*</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>In Emergency Use*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single Vehicle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple Vehicle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>In Emergency Use*</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>In Emergency Use*</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>In Emergency Use*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance Driver</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance Passenger</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupant of Other Vehicle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedalcyclist</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Refers to a vehicle traveling with physical emergency signals in use (red lights blinking, sirens sounding, etc.)

Source: FARS 2011 (ARF)
Between 1992-2011 there were an annual mean of 29 fatal ambulance crashes and 33 fatalities (includes occupants and non-occupants of all vehicles involved)

National Automotive Sampling System
General Estimates System (NASS GES)

Used to estimate how many motor vehicle crashes of
different kinds take place, and what happens when they
occur.

Data are obtained from police reported crashes only.

- Collected from more than 400 police jurisdictions in 60
  sites around the US
- Randomly sample about 57,000 police crash reports per
  year
  - Estimates from NASS GES can be based on fewer than 50
    crashes per year.
Estimated Ambulance Crashes resulting in Injured Persons 1992 - 2011

Between 1992-2011 there were an estimated annual mean of 1500 injury crashes involving an ambulance and 2600 injured persons* (includes ambulance occupants and occupants of all other vehicles involved)**.

---

*bar represents mean number of crashes and injuries over 5 years
**does not include data on non-occupants of a vehicle (pedestrians and pedalcyclists) in injured persons
Sources: National Automotive Sampling System (NASS) General Estimates System (GES), 1992-2011
People in Ambulance Crashes

Ambulance Driver
- Person driving Ambulance

Ambulance Passenger
- Includes all occupants in the Ambulance – EMS personnel, patients, and passengers

Occupant of Other Vehicle
- All occupants of vehicles involved in the crash – driver and passengers

Non-Occupant
- Includes all non-car occupants, such as pedestrians and pedalcyclists


- Ambulance Driver: 17%
- Ambulance Passenger: 29%
- Occupant of Other Vehicle: 54%

N = 10,400

*data represent mean number of crashes and injuries over 5 years
**does not include data on non-occupants of a vehicle (pedestrians and pedalcyclists) in injured persons
Sources: National Automotive Sampling System (NASS) General Estimates System (GES), 1992-2011
Emergency Use in Crashes involving a Ground Ambulance 1992-2011

- Of the annual mean 29 fatal crashes involving an ambulance:
  - 58% while in emergency use
  - 42% while in non-emergency use

- Of the estimated annual mean 1,500 injury crashes*:
  - 59% while in emergency use
  - 34% while in non-emergency use

- These percentages do not account for proportion of time ambulances spent in emergency vs. non-emergency mode.

*7% unknown if in emergency use/non-emergency use

Emergency Use in Fatal Ambulance Crashes* 1992 - 2011

Limitations of the Analysis

- Only includes crashes that occur on a road way customarily open to the public
- Not all vehicle crashes in the country are reported to the police
- Police may not record ambulances accurately on crash report
- Does not distinguish between ambulance types
- Does not determine when the crash occurred (en route to scene, en route to hospital)
- Does not collect data showing the proportion of time an ambulance is on the road
- Does not currently differentiate ambulance occupants in the passenger seat or patient compartment of the ambulance
Analyzing Ambulance Crashes: Summary

Between 1992 – 2011 (20 Years)

- Annual estimated mean of 4,500 crashes involving a ground ambulance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>29 Fatal Crashes*</th>
<th>1,500 Injury Crashes**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33 Fatalities</td>
<td>2600 Injured Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 4% Ambulance Driver</td>
<td>• 17% Ambulance Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 21% Ambulance Passenger</td>
<td>• 29% Ambulance Passenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 63% Occupant of Other Vehicle</td>
<td>• 54% Occupant of Other Vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 12% Non-Occupant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58% Emergency Use</td>
<td>59% Emergency Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42% Non-Emergency Use</td>
<td>34% Non-Emergency Use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*all fatal column data are annual means  
**all injury column data are annual estimated means  
*** injured persons data does not include non-occupants

Investigating Ambulance Crashes

- Special Crash Investigations (SCI)
- EMS Injury and Illness Surveillance-National Electronic Injury Surveillance System Work Component (NEISS-Work)
NHTSA Special Crash Investigations (SCI) Program

NHTSA Special Crash Investigations (SCI) investigate many roadway ambulance crashes that result in significant or fatal injury to occupants inside the ambulance.

- The SCI investigates:
  - Pre-crash activities of the persons involved
  - Contributing factors to serious/fatal injuries sustained in crash
  - Environmental/Roadway factors
  - Vehicle/Equipment factors
NHTSA Special Crash Investigations (SCI) Program

- Since 2001 the SCI has investigated 38 ambulance crashes and published 32 reports from 20 different states.

- Data provided in the Ambulance SCI final reports is currently being analyzed to identify areas of concern for ambulance safety.
  - Analysis Report due in Spring 2014
EMS Injury and Illness Surveillance (NEISS-Work)

NEISS-Work collects data on work-related nonfatal injuries and illnesses treated in emergency departments (ED).

- Records data on EMS workers treated in a national sample of hospital EDs for an occupational injury or illness
- >95% of patients treated and released from emergency department

NEISS-Work characterizes the events associated with job injury/illness to EMS personnel

- 2011 NEISS-Work data indicates Transportation Incidents were associated with 9% of non-fatal, ED treated EMS worker injuries/illnesses

NHTSA
EMS Worker Injury and Illness Data is available at: http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ems/data.html
Documenting and National Reporting on Ambulance Crashes

- Model Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria (MMUCC)
- Annual NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts
The Model Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria (MMUCC) developed to help states improve and standardize motor vehicle crash data.

Guidelines suggest voluntary minimum criteria that police use for crash reports.

Data elements expanded in 2012 to include ambulance attributes:
- Emergency/Non-Emergency Transport
- Emergency Operation/Warning Equipment in Use/Not in Use
- Ambulance Seating/Positioning
### Example of Conventional Ambulance, MMUCC Seating Position Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Front seat row, left (driver)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Front, right (passenger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Second, middle (EMT seat at head of patient)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Second, right (patient reclining on bench seat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Third, middle (Standing, unseated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Third, right (Seated in forward most position on bench seat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fourth, left (EMT seat at side of patient)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fourth, middle (Patient on stretcher/cot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fourth, right (Seated in center position on bench seat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Other, right (Seated in rear most position on bench seat)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fatal crash data from FARS and nonfatal crash data from NASS GES.

Additional information can be found by contacting the National Center for Statistical Analysis.

To access the published FARS and GES files: 
What is NHTSA doing to Increase Ground Ambulance Safety?

- Ground Ambulance Safety Activities
NHTSA’s Ground Ambulance Safety Activities

- NHTSA Office of Special Crash Investigations
  - Ongoing investigations of ground ambulance crashes
- NHTSA Office of Defect Investigations
  - Track ground ambulance safety issues
- NHTSA Office of Emergency Medical Services
  - Collaborating with NIOSH in a 4-year effort to improve existing ground ambulance standards
  - Implementing the National Strategy for an EMS Culture of Safety
  - Distributing Safely Transporting Children in Ambulances
  - Participating as a non-voting ex-officio committee member on National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA 1917: Standard for Automotive Ambulances)
- NHTSA Office of Behavioral Safety Research
  - Analysis of special crash investigations involving ground ambulances
Resources
