

Why You Should Know Your State's EMS Regulations

By Steve Tafoya, MLS, MBA, CCP

With new regulations starting to take effect, EMS professionals should take a moment and look beyond the rigors of shift work, protocol updates and equipment checks. A crucial shift in EMS is happening quietly, with long-term impact: legislative changes that can alter the way we work, respond and even exist as a system.

State EMS statutes and administrative codes form the legal backbone of prehospital care. Many providers may only use these frameworks when applying for an initial license or renewal. The EMS provider should be aware of the whole chapter; the statutes establish the requirement to form an EMS agency, how a provider becomes certified/licensed and the requirements for a medical director, along with enforcement, if something goes wrong.

State EMS oversees topics unrelated to EMS agencies or providers in some states, such as trauma centers, DNRs, AEDs and special events. These other topics are EMS-adjacent and can still impact your day-to-day life as a provider.

Most legislation affecting EMS does not originate with politicians. Instead, it is often crafted by working professionals in our field, EMS advisory committees, EMS agencies, fire chiefs' associations, medical directors, rural health collaboratives, hospital coalitions and more. Professionals identify challenges or gaps and propose changes designed to improve safety, clarify legal authority, increase funding or expand the scope of practice.

Once a bill is introduced, it may become law; with it, the daily rules of EMS operations will shift. Recent legislation in many states has tackled issues like community paramedicine, alternate destinations for transport, licensure reciprocity and behavioral health crisis response. EMS advocates, who see firsthand what works and what does not, often push these changes forward.

WHERE SHOULD YOU START?

Take time to review your state EMS statutes. These are typically listed under your state's broader legal structure, in sections dealing with health, public safety or emergency services.

In Nevada, EMS is governed by Nevada Revised Statutes 450B, while in Arizona, it is under Arizona Revised Statutes Title 36, Chapter 21.1. The regulations outline everything from provider licensure to the administration of opioid antagonists.

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Most statutory frameworks are implemented through administrative codes, which are the day-to-day rules set by state EMS offices and health departments. These codes add operational detail to broad statutes. For instance, while a statute might say an EMT must be certified to practice, the administrative code will spell out the training hours, renewal timelines, CEU requirements and disciplinary procedures.

It is also helpful to know that states organize their laws differently. Not all states have “revised statutes”. Other states like Tennessee or Georgia use terms like “code annotated,” as the laws may include notes, references or legal commentary. States like California and New York use broader “codes” like the Health and Safety Code or Consolidated Laws.

While the names are different, they all serve the same purpose: to lay out the legal rules for EMS practice in the state. Knowing what your state calls its laws and where to find them can make it much easier to stay informed and involved.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Whether you are a frontline EMS provider or an agency director, staying informed encourages proactivity in this profession. It is a means to equip you with the ability to question policies that don’t make sense or support the ones that do. And perhaps, most importantly, it places you in a better position to advocate for change.

Legislative processes are not closed loops. Most states have public comment periods, advisory boards with open seats and working groups seeking real-world input. If you have ever said, “They should change this”—know that *you could be that change*.

As EMS evolves into a more integrated part of public health and community safety, our voice in shaping the rules must also grow. Read the statutes. Know the regulations. When the next bill is proposed, be one of the professionals helping move the system forward, not just responding after the fact.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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