

What's your justification for not wearing PPE on accident scenes?

By Julius Fleischman and Neville van Rensburg,
World Rescue Organisation (WRO) assessors and members

Are we lazy, unworried or maybe just unwise when it comes to wearing our personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times?

When an accident occurs at an accident scene and an emergency medical technician (EMT) official gets hurt, a quick assessment of the situation might find the EMT wasn't wearing proper PPE or wasn't following procedures. This could lead the accident investigators to conclude that the EMT in question needs to be reminded about complying with safety policies.

So! We haven't always used our issued personal protective equipment when we should. Even worse, we don't have any excuses for those incidents when we didn't properly or completely wear our PPE.

As EMTs, we received excellent training from our training academies and instructors that constantly repeated and stressed the importance of using the proper PPE for every situation; emergency or non-emergency.

- Forgot your helmet near the burning building? Ten push-ups please.
- Self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) waist straps dangling unbuckled? Ten push-ups please.



- No gloves while packing a hose? Ten push-ups please.

Therefore, we quickly learnt our lesson and always wore the correct PPE during our training. But we forgot that significant lesson soon after graduation and we practice, perform and knowingly place ourselves in dangerous incidents with less PPE on.

We have to realise that wearing all our PPE, all the time, is an absolute requirement if we wanted to have a safe, healthy and happy life further beyond the emergency rescue services.

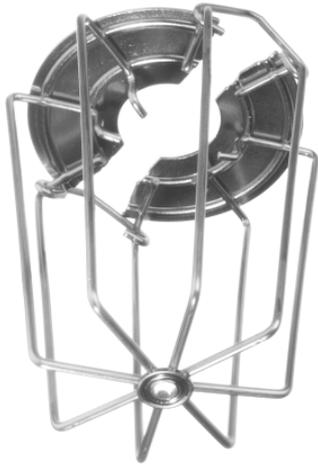
Sometimes we forget this important detail because we're in such a rush to save lives that we can't spare a minute to properly don all our gear or it doesn't look 'cool' to wear the chinstrap of the helmet. Don't be unwise, don't make excuses and use your PPE the right way, every day!

We are all intimately familiar with the phrase "Safety for me, safety for my crew and safety for my patient", which is ingrained onto our consciousness during every aspect of training. Nevertheless, every year some people die trying to save the lives of others, many others are hurt or injured and almost all emergency personnel will be able to recall a lucky escape from some kind of injury. What goes wrong and how do you prevent such incidents?

In theory, accidents can be prevented by ensuring a safe working place and a safe working practice. If this truly were possible, then personal protective equipment ie PPE, helmets, goggles, etc should be unnecessary. Unfortunately, at accident scenes both safe working place and safe working practice can



Tyco EG-25 sprinkler guard from Johnson Controls is first listed guard to meet FM Global design guidelines



Johnson Controls announces that its Tyco EG-25 Sprinkler Guard is the first FM-approved guard on the market to meet FM Global design guidelines and National Fire Protection Association

(NFPA) requirements for using a listed guard in areas where sprinklers are exposed to potential damage.

The new sprinkler guard is designed for use with TYCO ESFR-25 pendent

sprinklers. These sprinklers provide suppression load performance with ceiling-only fire protection for a wide variety of commodities and storage arrangements, enabling building owners to lease to the widest range of occupiers. When used in in-rack applications, such as the FM Global design guidelines, the ESFR-25 can be combined with the EG-25 guard to help protect the sprinkler from damage that is common to in-rack sprinklers.

The guard's welded assembly is fabricated from carbon steel, providing protection from mechanical and/or physical damage, including the installation of rack storage sprinklers. The guard does not require any regularly scheduled maintenance; however, proper installation of the EG-25 should be verified during the annual visual inspection of the sprinkler. ⚠

► be unavoidably compromised, so appropriate PPE is essential.

The first few minutes of any complex scene, especially a motor vehicle collision, are critical. Emotions are high and the environment is extremely unforgiving. The priorities we address or fail to address in those first few moments, guide the direction of the scene for the duration of the call.

When uninformed EMT personnel fail to wear proper gear, over time, they become either overly confident in or form overly critical of the need for them to wear full PPE. The personnel start feeling either invincible or laid-back towards PPE, thinking, "I haven't been hurt after everything, so why waste time gearing up".

Making a statement like that virtually guarantees that something will go wrong, eventually. Remember,

the EMT profession is a risky and dangerous business.

No one wants to get hurt or injured.

The yahoos who believe they can get away without properly using all PPE available, have never been hurt or injured. If they had, they'd be humming a different tune. Those who have been injured never want to be hurt again.

Overconfidence provides a false sense of security that can and has, ended in tragedy. Constant training and education related to policies as well as current events related to EMT personal injury and death can minimise the negative outcomes caused by negligence.

As a community of medical rescue practitioners, each of us has that call you think of when you quietly said under your breath, of the patient, "Idiot!" This is that scene, with some

variation of circumstances, where a person operating a piece of equipment decided after working with it for a long time, that they are experienced enough and the risk therefore is low enough, for them to go and stick their hand into the moving parts (I've done it a 100 times before...). Sound familiar..?

When it comes to the EMT's safety and well-being, it may be as simple as properly wearing your PPE.

Unsafe behaviours do cause many accidents but EMTs for the most part aren't ignoring safety procedures because they are lazy or don't care about safety. In most cases there are many legitimate reasons that unsafe behaviours and conditions exist and it's your job to figure out what those root causes are.

Once we do, we will be on our way to creating a more effective safety environment for ourselves and the patient. ⚠