Fire Departments – Reducing Back Injuries Related to Patient Handling

Does your department face patient handling and mobility-related injuries? In your industry, back and upper extremity injuries are the leading cause of workplace accidents. Many of these are directly related to handling patients at an emergency scene or simply a transport from one location to another. One way to reduce this injury exposure is to practice safe patient handling and mobility. Many of the patient handling and mobility techniques firefighters use today were taught to them years ago when the adage was, “this is the way we always do it”. In today’s world, equipment manufacturers have come a long way with cot safety, stair chair enhancements, lighter long boards and scoop boards. When purchasing new equipment, consider the many options available and the benefits they can provide by decreasing the physical workload.

Immediate action can be taken to focus on injury prevention. Do the following:
1. List some patient handling and mobility tasks that are high risk for injury.
2. Break down each task step-by-step. Lay out how the process is currently done and then look for areas for improvement. What is best practice?
3. Would some type of patient handling and mobility equipment provide assistance in this task?
4. Consider ergonomics while performing this task. Could body mechanics be improved?
5. If any areas for improvement are noted, use the information to train. Frequent trainings, multiple times per year, on brief topics/tasks are more beneficial than annual refresher courses.

The job requirements of Fire and EMS positions are physically demanding. If you hurt yourself, you limit your ability to serve the community and individual patients. One major injury can change your career and your personal lifestyle.

Utilize the information in this article to familiarize yourself with equipment that is available to assist you. Refer to the reference section below for a list of websites containing various resources available to reduce injuries related to patient handling and transfers.

Ergonomics for EMS – Solution Ideas for SPH

SPH & Training Program Information
http://hcergo.org/EMS.htm#Guidelines0

SPH Equipment Vendors
http://ems.stryker.com/products/cot-fasteners/power-load
http://www.stryker.com/en-
us/products/PatientHandlingEMSandEvacuationEquipment/EmergencyCotsChairs/index.htm
http://www.fernoems.com/
http://transaferamps.com/