



# National EMS

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## **SAFETY COUNCIL**

**National EMS Safety Council**  
*Balancing Safety with Shared Accountability*

### **Position Statement on a just culture in EMS**

Culture plays a foundational role in any organization as it shapes the attitudes and perceptions of leaders as well as frontline coworkers. The National EMS Safety Council understands that developing and cultivating a culture of safety is critical. In addition, an organizational culture should embrace the concepts of shared accountability and balanced responsibility. It should recognize that human errors offer the opportunity to learn and improve an organization's safety when fostered in a non-punitive environment. While this approach is commonly referred to as "just culture," the Council recommends an organizational approach based on developing the best safety behaviors and processes in a non-punitive learning environment.

A just culture environment provides benefits for patients, EMS practitioners, and EMS agencies:

Patients: When practitioner mistakes are recognized and not hidden through fear of punishment, a just culture environment allows individuals and organizations to learn from mistakes, thus promoting improved services and higher standards of patient care. This in turn leads to a safer system for both patient and practitioner.

Practitioners: Through the establishment of a just system which provides shared accountability that is neither punitive nor blame free, individual practitioners, EMS agencies, healthcare systems, and regulators learn how to improve the quality of care and minimize the impact of human error and undesirable behavioral choices.

EMS Agencies: By creating an environment of internal transparency around risk, system components and behavioral choices leading to increased risk can be identified and managed more effectively. As adverse events occur, the agency has an objective framework for a fair and constructive response to human errors, behavioral choices, and events.

**The Strategy for a National EMS Culture of Safety recognizes the importance of a similar cultural approach that encourages the reporting mistakes for a proactive approach to safety without the fear of punitive action.**

The Strategy envisions a Culture of Safety within EMS that embodies values inherent in a just culture. Widely adopted throughout healthcare, aviation and a growing number of other fields, just culture is an open-source, non-proprietary approach that embodies fairness and accountability. It describes an organizational environment that encourages individuals to report mistakes so that the precursors to errors can be better understood in order to fix system issues.

### **Adopting a just culture for greater safety**

Safety is a philosophy and process that transcends any one group, organization or business model. The goal of the National EMS Safety Council is to engage any and all willing partners to improve safety as well as drive awareness around this important area, including those providing care as well as those we serve in EMS. The National EMS Safety Council encourages all EMS agencies take all necessary steps to establish a just culture environment.

### **References:**

Agency for Health Research and Quality Patient Safety Primers – Safety Culture

<http://www.psnet.ahrq.gov/primer.aspx?primerID=5>

Just Culture for EMS Managers™ - Marx, David (2011).Just Culture Training For EMS Managers Workbook. Plano, Texas: By Your Side Studios.

NAEMT Position Statement Just Culture in EMS

[http://www.naemt.org/docs/default-source/advocacy-documents/positions/Just\\_Culture\\_in\\_EMS.pdf?sfvrsn=0](http://www.naemt.org/docs/default-source/advocacy-documents/positions/Just_Culture_in_EMS.pdf?sfvrsn=0)

Strategy for a National EMS Culture of Safety

<http://www.emscultureofsafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Strategy-for-a-National-EMS-Culture-of-Safety-10-03-13.pdf>

To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System (2000), Institute of Medicine (IOM) TeamSTEPPS™. Teamstepps.ahrq.gov

Whack a Mole - Marx, David (2009). Whack-a-Mole: The Price We Pay For Expecting Perfection. Plano, Texas: By Your Side Studios.