



**Department of Public Health  
Emergency Medical Services Agency**

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This policy supersedes any other existing policy on this subject.

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Subject: **EMERGENCY AMBULANCE DISPATCHING**

Authority: California Health and Safety Code, Division 2.5, Section 1797.220

Definitions: **EMD** - Means an Emergency Medical Dispatcher, who is an individual trained and certified to receive emergency medical calls for assistance and, through the use of key questions, establish a priority dispatch for the responding emergency medical field personnel while remaining on-line with the calling party to provide pre-arrival medical instructions.

**Priority Dispatching** - Shall mean Level Two Priority Dispatching, which is characterized by the use of an approved priority dispatch card system, containing key medical questions which are used to establish the nature of a medical emergency and effect the correct system response, as well as pre-arrival instructions which provide medical guidance to the calling party until the arrival of the emergency medical response team(s).

**Priority One** - Shall mean potentially life-threatening emergencies. A code three (lights and siren) ALS ambulance response shall be effected concomitantly with a code three response from the first response agency responsible for the area of the emergency call.

**Priority Two** - Shall mean non-life-threatening emergencies. A code three (lights and siren) ALS ambulance response shall be effected concomitantly with a code three response from the Merced County Fire Department within their areas of responsibility.

**Priority Three** - Shall mean non-emergency calls. A code two (no lights and siren) ALS ambulance response, without first responders, shall be effected.

**PSAP** - Public Service Answering Point.

**Recognized First Response Agency** - Shall be limited to duly authorized Public Safety Agencies operating within Merced County or any incorporated political subdivision thereof.

Purpose: To establish the mechanism by which ambulances shall be dispatched to emergency medical requests for service within the jurisdiction of the Merced County EMS Agency, as well as establish the means for upgrading or downgrading the ambulance response priority or the canceling of an ambulance responding to a medical emergency.

APPROVED:

ON-FILE

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Policy:

1. Establishment of the Dispatch Priority

- A. Ambulances responding to emergency medical requests for service within the area of jurisdiction of the Merced County EMS Agency shall be prioritized based solely on the presumed medical need utilizing the approved EMD Priority Dispatch Card System. The priority for the dispatch shall be determined by the EMD with responsibility for the incident.
- B. For those incidents in which the Primary PSAP does not transfer the calling party (e.g. MVA's, Shootings, etc.) the dispatch priority shall be established by the Primary PSAP in coordination with the EMD responsible for the medical incident.

2. Down-grading the Dispatch Priority

- A. The EMD may down-grade a dispatch priority for a response in progress only as provided for below:
  - 1) As further information becomes available from the scene of the incident concerning a change in the patient's condition, or clarifies a previously uncertain patient condition.
  - 2) An update from a recognized first response agency which has personnel on-scene confirming the patient's condition. In each case where a recognized first responder down-grades a Priority 1 or Priority 2 ambulance, the EMS Dispatch Center shall confirm the First Responder Agency responsible for the Down-grade.
    - a) If, at any time, the EMD has reason to suspect the accuracy or validity of the down-grade advisement, s/he shall continue the ambulance at their originally dispatched priority response.

3. Up-grading the Dispatch Priority

- A. Up-grading of an ambulance dispatch priority shall occur when the EMD is presented with any of the following:
  - 1) Further information becomes available advising of a change in the patient's condition, such that first responders should be utilized (based on the EMD Dispatch Priority Cards, e.g.: Priority 1 upgrade from an original Priority 2 dispatch). This up-grade priority shall be established by utilization of the EMD Dispatch Priority Cards.
  - 2) An update from an authorized PSAP.
  - 3) An update on the patient condition as provided by any other reliable source, as deemed appropriate by the EMD.

4. Canceling the Responding Ambulance

- A. Ambulances responding for emergency requests for service may only be cancelled as provided for below:
- 1) A call-back from an authorized PSAP advising that their on-scene unit has confirmed that there is no medical need for the ambulance, or that they are unable to locate a patient. If the cancellation is due to no medical need, the EMD Dispatch Center shall confirm the agency canceling the ambulance.
  - 2) An update from a recognized first response agency advising that there is no need for the ambulance, or that they are unable to locate a patient. If the cancellation is due to no medical need, the EMD Dispatch Center shall confirm the first responder agency canceling the ambulance.
  - 3) Information from a reporting party on-scene advising that there is no longer a need for the ambulance.

5. Dispatching and Cancellation of Mutual Aid Ambulances

- A. A mutual aid ambulance shall be dispatched as follows:
- 1) Whenever the Ambulance Provider responsible for an EMS area where an emergency request for service occurs is unable to immediately affect an ambulance response, with a shorter ETA than the closest mutual aid ambulance, as required by the Agency.
  - 2) Whenever the Ambulance Provider responsible for an EMS area where an MCI occurs has insufficient units to manage the number of patients.
- B. Should the ambulance provider responsible for the area in which the mutual aid ambulance is responding subsequently be in a position to respond a properly equipped and staffed ambulance which has made radio contact with the dispatch center and advised of their available status, the EMD shall only cancel the mutual aid ambulance upon confirmation of a shorter ETA from the responsible ambulance provider's unit. All mutual aid responses that are cancelled by this mechanism shall generate a Merced County EMS Agency Situation Report which shall include, at a minimum, the incident number, date, dispatch priority including the patient's chief complaint and all incident times.

6. Dispatching and Cancellation of Back-up Ambulances

- A. Back-up ambulances shall be dispatched to EMS incidents as provided for below:
- 1) As additional ambulances are indicated by the nature of an incident, as described to the EMD by reporting parties.
  - 2) As requested by an authorized PSAP.
  - 3) As requested by recognized first response, law enforcement, or ambulance personnel who are on-scene at an EMS incident where multiple victims are identified.

- B. Back-up ambulances may only be cancelled as provided for below:
- 1) As requested by an authorized PSAP.
  - 2) As requested by a recognized first response or law enforcement agency with personnel on-scene who are confirming that there is no need for additional ambulances, or as requested by an on-scene ambulance crew.
7. Under no circumstances shall any individuals, other than those identified and provided for in this policy, be allowed to alter, amend, or otherwise effect any change in ambulance dispatching procedures or dispatch priorities, particularly relating to the down-grading or cancellation of ambulances responding for medical emergencies. All concerns relating to the appropriateness of dispatching procedures for a particular incident shall be investigated retrospectively, through the EMS Agency Situation Reporting procedure. Any violation of this policy shall be reported immediately to the EMS Agency for investigation and possible disciplinary action.

8. ALS Ambulance Downgrade or Cancellation Criteria for BLS Personnel

ALS Ambulances may be downgraded or cancelled for patients meeting the following criteria:

A. Mental Status:

The patient must be conscious, alert and oriented to person, place, time and purpose. For patients with pre-existing, diagnosed altered mental status (post CVA, dementia, etc.) the patient's mental status must be confirmed as normal for them by a knowledgeable individual on-scene, e.g. family member, caretaker, etc.

B. Physiologic Status:

***The patient must be free from shortness of breath, chest pain, abdominal pain or other acute, undiagnosed pain. The patient must not be either acutely hypotensive or hypertensive, nor shall the ambulance be either cancelled or downgraded if the patient exhibits signs or symptoms of shock, e.g. pale, cool, moist skin; tachycardia, tachypnea, orthostatic findings, etc. The patient should be free from obvious substantive injuries, e.g. extremity deformity, excessive blood loss, etc. There is no hard and fast rule for this assessment; it requires good judgment on the part of the on-scene personnel. Error to the side of the patient and continue the ambulance without change when in doubt.***