



Emergency Management and Response Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC)

INFOGRAM 29-10

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NOTE: This INFOGRAM will be distributed weekly to provide members of the Emergency Services Sector with information concerning the protection of their critical infrastructures. For further information, contact the Emergency Management and Response- Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EMR-ISAC) at (301) 447-1325 or by e-mail at emr-isac@dhs.gov.

MRSA Hazards for Responders

A recent [study](#) by the University of Arizona revealed that Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infections result in approximately 19,000 deaths a year in the United States, according to an article at FireRescue1.com. The article further reported that emergency responders are often exposed to both community and hospital-acquired MRSA, which causes higher risk of infection when combined with their communal lifestyles in fire/emergency medical services (EMS) stations and facilities.

Upon reviewing this research, the [Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center](#) (EMR-ISAC) noted the frequency of MRSA and other bacterial indicators on the various surfaces in fire/EMS stations, offices, and training sites. Researchers found the highest prevalence of MRSA bacteria on the couches, classroom desks, and commonly touched office surfaces. Therefore, the EMR-ISAC provides the following suggestions—obtained from multiple sources—to protect responder personnel from potentially life-threatening infections:

- Replace cloth surfaces with hard surfaces wherever possible. For example, remove carpeting in favor of any hard flooring; replace upholstered furniture fabric with material that can be cleaned with disinfectants; replace kitchen counters and tables with stainless steel.
- Apply cleaning agents correctly to control MRSA. Check the product's label to verify it is a disinfectant, and follow directions specifying the time necessary on the surface to kill MRSA.
- Ensure stations have positive air pressure compared with the apparatus bay. Research shows that hospitals cut the incidence of infection by regularly filtering the air.
- Regulate turnout gear storage and cleaning by confining turnout gear, which can carry MRSA, to work areas, and comply with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1581, [Standard on Fire Department Infection Control Program](#) (PDF, 385 KB).
- Reduce the risk of carrying MRSA on boots and uniforms from the work site to family homes by keeping station wear at the station and laundering it after use. According to researchers, a clothes dryer running for at least 28 minutes on a high-heat cycle will kill MRSA. (Energy-efficient cycles do not generate enough heat needed to kill bacteria.)
- Consider having 9-1-1 dispatchers ask if patients have a cough, fever, or any known diseases. If any answer is yes, first responders should enter wearing gloves, goggles, and masks. They should wear added protection when in high-risk environments, such as nursing homes, jails, or shelters.
- Maintain the station as a "clean zone." Encourage hand-washing and keeping contaminants out of communal areas by having sinks in apparatus bays if possible, or by placing disinfectant hand-gel dispensers at access points between bays and the station. Do not share hand towels.

More recommendations for emergency responder organizations can be seen at "[Basic Infection Control Procedures](#)."

Responder Protection Measures

When collecting and analyzing infrastructure protection, resilience, threat, and vulnerability information for relevance to Emergency Services Sector (ESS) departments and agencies, the [Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center](#) (EMR-ISAC) has observed what appears to be increasing attacks against [law enforcement](#), [firefighter](#), and [emergency medical](#) personnel in some parts of the nation.

To enhance the protection of ESS responders, particularly police, from criminal assault when on-duty as well as off-duty, the EMR-ISAC offers the following measures that were abridged from an article at [PoliceOne.com](#):

- Arrange to have home phone numbers unlisted.
- Evade the use of home addresses whenever possible.
- Consider efforts to remove personal information from public sources and web sites.
- Look around for anyone or anything suspicious when entering or departing homes and stations.
- Request neighbors to watch for suspicious persons or vehicles in the immediate residential area.
- Eliminate first responder-related deliveries (e.g., magazines, gear) to homes by using a P.O. Box.
- Avoid parking an emergency vehicle within sight when necessary to drive it home.
- Change to civilian clothing before driving home.
- Avoid apparel (e.g., hats, tee-shirts, jackets) that identify the wearer as a first responder.
- Vary the route taken when driving to and from work.
- Remain always observant to those in vehicles behind, beside, or ahead.
- Maintain situational awareness and attempt to think like someone who is seeking to do harm.

For related information, see the article: "[Police Uniform No Longer Guarantees Officer Safety.](#)"

Amateur Radio Operations Assist Emergencies

Recognizing the criticality of emergency communications during any major disaster, the [Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center](#) (EMR-ISAC) examined the variety of roles performed by amateur radio operations. In an article at [EmergencyManagement.com](#), the EMR-ISAC learned that amateur radio operators can perform communication duties that allow public safety officials to maximize their resources, "including facilitating communications; providing emergency managers with on-scene situational awareness; and helping manage large-scale events."

There are two groups of volunteer radio operators assisting emergency personnel: [Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service](#) (RACES) and [Amateur Radio Emergency Service](#) (ARES). RACES operators, who are registered with state and local governments, are activated after an emergency declaration. They usually operate from state emergency operations centers. ARES members provide emergency communications before an emergency has been officially declared. Many radio operators participate in both organizations.

The [American Radio Relay League](#) (ARRL), a U.S. organization of amateur radio operators, has memorandums of understanding with numerous organizations, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, American Red Cross, National Weather Service, and Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International. As a result of these agreements, the ARRL trains with and works to develop these organizations' amateur radio communications capacity. It also builds relationships with these organizations to collaborate during disasters.

Additional examples of how amateur radio operators have become capability multipliers during emergencies can be seen at the Government Technology [web site](#).

Emergency Communications Forum

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [Office of Emergency Communications](#) (OEC) contacted the [Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center](#) (EMR-ISAC) and requested dissemination of information regarding Volume II of the Emergency Communications Forum (ECF) [newsletter](#) (PDF, 441.3 KB). “The ECF engages and informs emergency responders; policy makers; and federal, state, local, and tribal officials about issues and events that directly affect everyday nationwide emergency communications.”

Volume II of the ECF newsletter highlights the work of emergency responders who participated in the Haiti response. It also provides an overview of the 700 MHz Broadband Public Safety Demonstration Network and details OEC Technical Assistance tools.

The OEC invites interested personnel to subscribe to the ECF by sending e-mail to OEC@hq.dhs.gov. Those who wish to submit an article pertaining to emergency communications in the field, best practices, and lessons learned can send their information to the same electronic address.

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REPORTING NOTICE

The National Infrastructure Coordinating Center (NICC) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Infrastructure Protection is the central point for notifications regarding infrastructure threats, disruptions, intrusions, and suspicious activities. Emergency Services Sector personnel are requested to report any incidents or attacks involving their infrastructures using at least the first and second points of contact seen below:

- 1) NICC - Voice: 202-282-9201, Fax: 703-487-3570, E-Mail: nicc@dhs.gov
- 2) Your local FBI office - Web: www.fbi.gov/contact/fo/fo.htm
- 3) EMR-ISAC - Voice: 301-447-1325, E-Mail: emr-isac@dhs.gov, fax: 301-447- 1034, Web: www.usfa.dhs.gov/emr-isac, Mail: E-108, 16825 South Seton Avenue, Emmitsburg, MD 21727