

Florida EMS Advisory Council meeting  
October 1-3, 2008-11:00am-1:00pm  
Naples, Florida

Open-Water Lifesaving constituency group minutes

Attendees:

Jim McCrady	USLA-SER, Ft. Lauderdale Ocean Rescue
Jay Moyles	Manatee County Marine Rescue
Luis "Dunga" Morizot	Miami-Dade County Fire Rescue/Ocean Rescue
David Thorne	Palm Beach County Ocean Rescue
Dennis Ward	USLA-SER, PBC Ocean Rescue
Corky Young	Bay County/Panama City Fire
Steve Canfield	St. John's County Fire
Vicki Grant	FL DOH-Medical Quality Assurance
Betsey Hines	FL DOH-Medical Quality Assurance
Julie Bacon	FL EMS for Children Advisory Committee, chair

Julie Bacon described the purpose for and history of the EMS for Children (EMSC) Advisory Committee, and their desire to create a mutually beneficial relationship with lifeguard agencies statewide. The EMSC was created to advise the Dept. of Health-EMS (as it relates to lifeguards) on preventive and pre-hospital medical care for children. The EMSC can provide education and training to lifeguards that focus on emergency medical care for children. Often lifeguards' medical training emphasizes care for adults, but pediatric emergencies involve different protocols and procedures. Julie encouraged the lifeguards to join her constituency group in order to stay abreast of the latest initiatives and programs available to better protect and care for children who get sick or hurt at our beaches. Having more "subject matter experts" (lifeguards) in her constituency group will help them advocate for improvements in lifeguards' responses to sick and injured children. They are meeting again in Orlando on November 11<sup>th</sup> and there may be "education scholarships" available to help lifeguards cover the cost of attending. Julie also emphasized the importance that lifeguards learn and support Florida's EMS Strategic Plan 2008-2010. Go to the DOH website [ [www.doh.state.fl.us/](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/) ] to learn more about that. Julie also advised us strongly to stay involved with the EMS Advisory Council as a constituency group, increase our participation, and don't be discouraged or overwhelmed by it. She's seen many constituency groups, including her own, start from scratch, like the lifeguards are doing, but earn tremendous successes in the years to come. She agrees that lifeguards have been long overlooked and have a lot to gain from the EMS-AC's expertise and influence. Julie answered many questions from attendees and discussion followed.

After Julie's presentation there was a lengthy discussion of the need for state standards for open-water lifeguards, (i.e., standard protocols, minimum certifications, flags, uniforms, continuing education credits, protections, benefits, uniform data collection, dispatch communications, appropriate physical requirements, disaster response). Jim mentioned the "experience gap" which occurs when the best lifeguards reluctantly choose to leave the beach for higher-paying fire-rescue careers, leaving lifeguard agencies spending an inordinate amount of time searching for qualified candidates who then need to be trained and monitored for competency and maturity.

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Promoting lifesaving as a profession/career would certainly help. It's Jim's experience, as well as others' that most of the lifeguards who leave lifeguarding for fire-rescue do so primarily for the special-risk retirement benefits. Dennis chimed in that special risk has been granted to some EMT-lifeguards (via the EMT statute 121.0515), but that many of the larger lifeguard agencies (such as Palm Beach County and Sarasota County) have not been granted special risk---even though EMT-lifeguards doing the same job in a neighboring county HAVE been granted special risk (Martin County and Manatee County, respectively). Local politics are causing inequities that are having a detrimental effect on assuring the protections and benefits many lifeguards (and the public) have long-since earned. Dunga described the many benefits (including the improvement of professionalism and level of care to the public) that have occurred since Miami-Dade County moved their Ocean Rescue department from the Parks & Recreation Dept. to the Fire-Rescue Dept. Betsey and Vicky agreed that lifeguards are doing the right thing by becoming involved with the EMS-AC and urged us to take every opportunity to educate. Educate whom? Everyone who will listen, but especially lawmakers and local politicians. They mentioned that there is a widespread misperception about lifeguards although the facts will quickly change anyone's mind. With the coming election there will be many new members of the legislature, as well as local politicians who need to be educated by the lifeguards. The lifeguards' goals are very reasonable and just but it's our responsibility to provide the basis for the political support. That doesn't take a lobbyist, just a few in-person meetings. Dunga said that Miami-Dade's lifeguards are treating every rescue as an ALS response (calling for medics) and are filling out a report for every first-aid, including minor injuries and stings. Betsey also suggested that the lifeguards get involved with the data committee because hard data is crucially important to justify significant changes in policies. Perhaps laptop computers should be placed in every tower to facilitate uniform data records. Our constituency group ran 30 minutes over our allotted time and we could have continued for much longer but many attendees had previously scheduled commitments (i.e., other constituency group meetings). We adjourned at 1pm.

*~submitted by Dennis Ward*