DOCUMENTO ORIGINAL EN MAL ESTADO

Trends in Triaging

A Random Survey of Triage Tags Used in the United States

AFTER COMPLETING a random survey of the types of triage tags used throughout the U.S., EMERGENCY PRODUCT NEWS discovered that a wide variety of tags are presently being employed by the nation's emergency medical workers. The following synopsis of our findings describes many of the features designed into the tags along with what emergency personnel look for in a triage tag.

Triaging is defined as the sorting out and classifying of casualties in a disaster to determine treatment priority. To help medical personnel easily recognize a patient's medical condition, the triage tag is used by a triage team to indicate which patients must be treated immediately and which patients will not suffer if treatment is delayed.

In conducting the random survey sampling, EMERGENCY PRODUCT NEWS discovered that many areas either do not have or have not found a triage tag that adequately provides for their disaster needs. Many organizations are experimenting with different types of tags, and some who have not found a tag that suits their needs have designed their own.

Triage tags currently in use in this country run the gamut from simply designed tags, which indicate only basic patient information, to more elaborate tags, which provide space for more specific patient information and the type of medical assistance rendered at the scene. Even within the same state, county or municipality, however, a common triage tag is often not used. Determining the type of triage tag an emergency organization will use usually comes after many

aster exercises when the pros and is of a particular tag are evaluated The EMS workers may then either decide to use the tag to refine the tag or to renew their search for a more suitable tag

For these reasons, a cut and dried survey of which organization uses what type of tag was not feasible But some definite trends in triage tag design can be seen and many useful features have been developed

Many EMS systems use color-coded tags so that patient classification may be recognized easily at a distance by emergency workers Although the colors chosen to indicate the various treatment priorities differ from area to area, at least four main categories are used for color coding These include Immediate, Secondary, Delayed and Deceased Highly visible colors are chosen including red, green, yellow blue grey, black and white

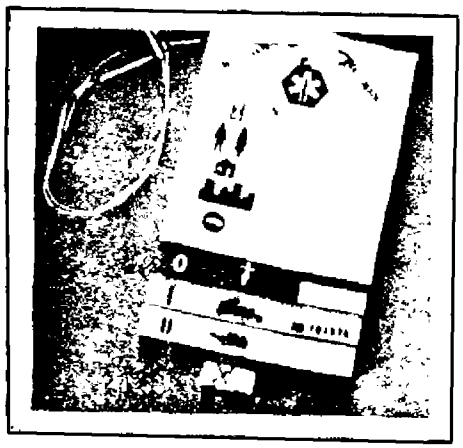

Figure 1

Some areas use several individual colored cards while others use a single multicolored card.

No matter what color or word is chosen to indicate a priority, all emergency service personnel are trying to communicate the same message Patients tagged "Immediate" have life-threatening injuries and should be transported first to a medical facility Secondary" indicates that the patient should be given second treatment priority Patients tagged 'Delayed" have minor injuries which do not need immediate attention and these patients may not need to be transported With a special tag for deceased patients, emergency workers know that they do not have to tend to these individuals until all other living patients have been treated and transported

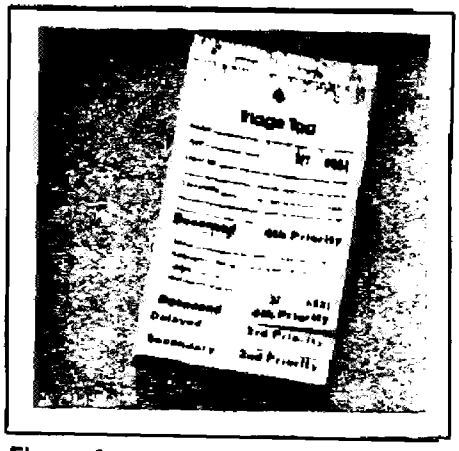

Figure 2

Along with color coding, some EMS organizations also use corresponding numerals or words to enable the color blind emergency worker to quickly determine treatment priority and to eliminate confusion in the meaning of a color

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Some areas have developed individual colored cards — one colored card for each priority while other areas use a single multicolored card with perforated tags that may be torn off as needed. Still other tags that are not color coded often use a smaller color coded sticker that may be affixed to the tag to denote priority.

The Mettag, a triage tag designed

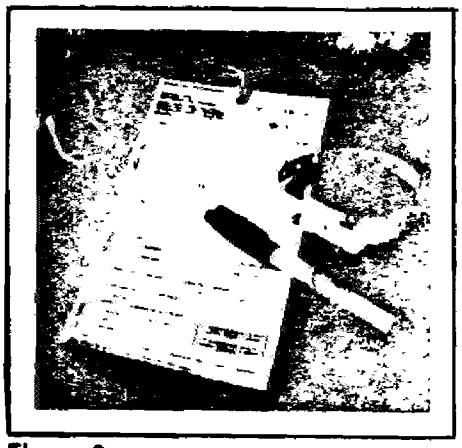

Figure 3

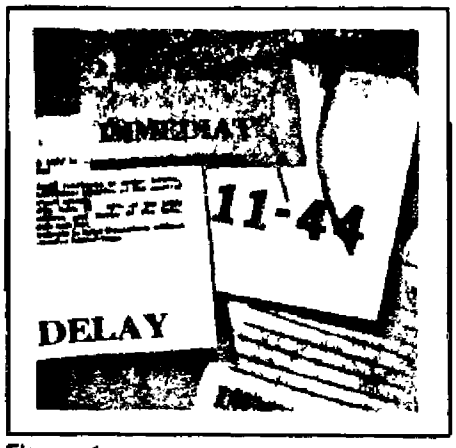

Figure 4

and available from the *Journal of Civil Defense*, which uses internationally recognized symbols instead of words, is designed with four perforated tabs of different colors. The emergency worker tears off the color(s) that does not apply, leaving the tab that corresponds with the patient's condition affixed to the tag. (See Figure 1.) The order of the tabs are Delayed, Secondary, Immediate and Deceased.

The triage tag developed by the State of Maryland, adopted by Delaware and Washington, DC, and proposed for use by Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia has been designed so that four different tags are joined together at the top with a perforated edge. The card that pertains to the patient's condition is torn off and attached to the patient. (See Figure 2.)

According to Charles Nabb, chairman of the Triage Tag Committee of the Mid Atlantic EMS Council, by adopting the same triage tag in all states in the HEW Region III area, all emergency workers in this Region will utilize the same triage tag regardless of state boundary lines.

"A common triage tag for states whose boundaries touch one another goes hand-in-hand in developing a systems approach to EMS," said Nabb. "We are trying to provide all ambulance personnel with the same training, and it only stands to reason that if ambulance personnel who assist in emergencies across state lines use a common triage tag emergency pro-

c[illegible]res will operate the same in those s[illegible]."

Patient information included on the tags to be filled out by the triage team also varies. Some tags include the name, address, age, sex and religion of the patients along with the date, time, tentative diagnosis, priority, the hospital to which the patient will be transported, treatment rendered at the scene, and the emergency worker's name. In contrast, other tags require only the patient's name, treatment and suspected injuries. As a supplement to the diagnosis, some tags include a diagram of the front and back of the human body for emergency workers to indicate suspected injuries.

To insure that the patient's personal effects and other patient information is coordinated with the appropriate patient, many triage tags are number coded and have corresponding number coded tabs which may be torn off and placed on personal property envelopes. These tabs may also be used for a total casualty count.

To remain legible in adverse weather conditions, some areas have developed or are using waterproof or [illegible]her resistant triage tags. The S[illegible]edi-Band designed by Precision Graphics is a highly reflective water resistant wrist band. The bands come with a waterproof marking pen to write patient information on the band. The Speedi-Band (developed by the Emergency Service Committee of the Hospital Council of Southern California) has been designed to be used alone or in conjunction with the Secureline triage tag also available from Precision Graphics. This single color disaster tag uses smaller tabs which indicate patient priority that may be affixed to the front of the tag. (See Figure 3.) If a triage tag is not water resistant, the patient's medical priority may be marked on the forehead with a grease pencil.

Other considerations for triage tags are their ease in handling and the method of attachment to the patient. Various methods, again, are employed. Many tags have a string which fits through a hole in the card and then may be tied or looped around the patient's wrist or neck. Some tags such as the Mettag have a reinforced hole to insure that the tag does not become detached. Other tags employ plastic cable ties in which one end of the tie fits into the other. The San Diego County Emergency Service Civil Defense office has developed a tag with a paper-covered wire called Twist N' Tye. (See Figure 4.)

A highly reflective tag that is visible in poor weather conditions or at night is also an important consideration. And in such conditions, very large writing of the patient priority is beneficial when the color cannot be determined as easily.

Determining the type of triage tag that best suits a particular community is not an easy task. Whatever features are chosen, however, emergency personnel must be sure that the triage tag is suitable for field use, easy to handle, and easy to recognize. Above all, the triage tag should clearly communicate the patient's treatment priority so that the EMS system may work as smoothly as possible and provide effective patient care in the disaster situation.

After learning what other emergency workers have included on their triage tags, you may want to incorporate some features listed in this article into your community's triage tag. And EMERGENCY PRODUCT NEWS would like to know what features our readers feel work together to make a good triage tag. Please fill out and return the following questionnaire, and we will summarize your ideas in a future issue. Only through sharing ideas for improvement can emergency personnel enhance their performance and increase EMS efficiency. ✱