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Commissioner

# State of New Hampshire

## Department of Safety

Division of Fire Standards and Training and Emergency Medical Services  
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Perry E. Plummer  
Director

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Dear EMS Colleague;

As you are aware there are major changes happening to the EMT-Intermediate level at both the national level and in New Hampshire. I'd like to tell you about those changes and give you some explanations.

Every EMT-I who wants to practice at that level will need to successfully complete National Registry of EMT's certification as an Advanced Emergency Medical Technician (AEMT). And yes, this means having to take the computer-based cognitive exam (what used to be the written exam).

One thing up front - please understand the EMT-Intermediate/Advanced EMT provider is an important part of the NH EMS System, and it is our goal to get every current EMT-I to successfully convert to the Advanced EMT.

**BACKGROUND** - EMS education was developed beginning in the 1970's on a track that was much different from other health care professions. In fact the health care community didn't even really look at EMS as a health care profession. In the mid 1990's the EMS community took a look at our profession and said we need to change things, we need to make education of EMS providers similar to other health care providers.

That process has been ongoing for over ten years and is coming to completion. The new educational standards are a major shift in EMS education, and a major step forward. Each of the levels of EMS provider has an increase in knowledge and scope of practice in the new standards.

It's important for EMS to develop consistent standards throughout the country. Research shows there are over 30 different levels of EMS providers in the United States. There aren't 30 different levels of nurses. There aren't 30 different levels of respiratory care practitioners. There has to be a limit to the number of levels of EMS provider. National leadership has chosen the four levels: Emergency Medical Responder (EMR), Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Advanced Emergency Medical Technician (AEMT) and Paramedic.

**WHY ARE EMT-I'S BEING TREATED DIFFERENTLY FROM OTHER LEVELS?** - Why do the EMT-Intermediates have to go through the process of taking the computer-based test when the other levels don't?

The curriculum that NH uses for its EMT-I's was created more than 26 years ago. It mostly added the skill of IV therapy to treat trauma patients (which we found out years later isn't as helpful as we thought). In 1999 NHTSA introduced a new curriculum that added a lot of things to the EMT-I level, but there were complaints from providers across the country that it was too much. Individual states were allowed to decide whether to adopt the 1999 curriculum or stick with the 1985 curriculum. The EMS leadership in NH chose to stick with the 1985 curriculum.

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Ten years later the new education standards for the new levels of EMS providers again significantly upgrade the capabilities of the Intermediate EMT. The change isn't as extensive as the 1999 curriculum, but it is well above the 1985 curriculum. The National Registry of EMT's looked closely at the curriculum. They decided that the content of the new Advanced EMT level - the depth and breadth of underlying knowledge - was much different than the 1985 curriculum. They felt that to protect the public EMT-I 85's converting to AEMT's need to prove that they have the underlying knowledge base. The only way to definitively prove that is by passing the cognitive exam for the new level.

The other levels (EMR, EMT, Paramedic) did not have such a major change in the level of knowledge under the new standards, so a conversion course would be required, but not a cognitive test.

**WHY DON'T WE SIMPLY "GRANDFATHER" NH EMT-I'S?** - So why doesn't NH simply adopt a "grandfathered" state EMT-I instead of requiring a conversion to the Nationally Registered Advanced EMT?

Reason #1. We believe that the increase in the knowledge base and scope of practice of the intermediate EMT level is in the best interest of the citizens of NH.

Reason #2. We believe that national standards for EMS levels are important, and that EMS provider levels in NH should be consistent with national standards. That is historically what we have done, and we need to stick with it.

Reason #3. It is clear to us that using the National Registry as our certifying agency saves significant public funds. The Registry does all the paperwork of credentialing on new and recertifying EMS providers. They have the staff, the knowledge and the system to do it. For the State to begin maintaining the credentials of NH state EMT-I's is not a good use of taxpayer dollars.

Reason #4. Having two levels of Intermediate provider - NHEMT-I level and a NRAEMT level - would require an additional level of protocols to develop and maintain for decades.

**THE PROCESS** - Let's talk about how this is going to work. First let me confirm that this doesn't have to happen overnight. It must be completed between 2012 and 2015 or 2016 (based on the EMT-I's expiration date).

The process will include what we are calling a "conversion course". We intend to build this conversion course into the EMT-I refresher course, so that it won't require any more hours than what is currently spent in the 24 hour EMT refresher and 12 hours of ALS hours. Let me repeat that - **NO SEPARATE COURSE** - it will be a part of the refresher.

We also don't think that this course will be more expensive to attend than what current refresher programs cost.

Hands-on practical skills that are new to the AEMT scope of practice will be checked during this course, but there will NOT be a state practical exam of these skills. Most of them are skills that EMT-I's in NH are already trained in. I know what you're going to say, "If we're already doing them and have been trained in these skills, why do we have to take the cognitive exam?" Again, it's all about validating the underlying knowledge.

**THE EXAM** - Once an individual has completed the refresher/conversion course, they are approved to take the computer based AEMT exam. For most folks the conversion course will be enough to prepare them for the exam. Others will need to study the material on their own, study with others, or make use of modules we plan on providing.

The exam costs \$70. If someone fails the exam they can take it up to 5 more times (\$70 each time). We are trying to figure out if the Division can somehow help with all or part of the cost of the exam. Those

who are not able to pass the exam, or decide not to go through the process will receive an EMT certificate from the National Registry. They will need to license and practice at the EMT level in NH.

I know people are intimidated by the cognitive exam. I've been told by many individuals "I don't do well with written tests". I've been told there is anxiety over the setting of the computer testing sites, and I've heard a half dozen other worries. We have to get past those. I can't change the process, but the Division truly wants to reduce the pain and increase each individual's chance for success.

**PLANNING** - Please understand that we have no intention of just making this difficult decision, and leaving it up to you to figure out how to get there. We want to partner with the EMS instructors and the EMT-I's themselves to make this happen.

There is a task force of individuals from a wide area of NH EMS that is working on different options to help EMT-I's pass the exam and bring down costs. That planning process will be going on for the next few months, and we will be putting plans into effect beginning in 2012.

There will be a special section on our website to address questions that arise during this period. Please refer to that site if you have questions, or contact me at [clay.odell@dos.nh.gov](mailto:clay.odell@dos.nh.gov). I really hope you will begin to see this process as an opportunity to move your profession forward, and do your part to keep the State of New Hampshire in a position of leadership in EMS.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CO", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Clay Odell, Chief  
Bureau of EMS