I. PURPOSE:

To provide guidelines for patient handling, lifting, moving, and for maintaining patient safety in the ambulance.

II. GUIDELINE:

It is the policy of LCEMS to safely handle, lift and move patients to prevent injury to the patient, EMS crew and public. All personnel will be trained in the proper use of patient handling, lifting and moving equipment and methods prior to patient use.

III. GUIDELINES:

The actual procedures used may vary slightly from those listed below, depending on the methods of training, the required movement, the location of the patient, personnel and materials available.

General

- All equipment in the back of the ambulance should be secured while the ambulance is in motion.

- Any child or infant being transported in the back of the ambulance should be secured in the built in child safety seat or be transported using the PediMate device, secured to the stretcher.

- Patients will always be secured to the moving device, including ambulance stretcher, using all safety straps.

- When taking a patient on the ambulance stretcher from a hospital, skilled nursing facility or private residence, etc., the patient will be turned on a level surface and brought up head first to the waiting ambulance.

- Use caution when moving the ambulance stretcher across uneven terrain. Keeping the stretcher in a lower position helps prevent overturning it.
Consider the use of a stair chair when carrying patients down stairs. If the stretcher has to be used, the patient always travels head first when sitting up, and feet first when lying flat.

Remember the ambulance stretcher adds weight to the lift. Carrying it up and down stairs is not always the easiest / safest way to move a patient.

If the employee does not think he or she can handle the lift, the employee is instructed to call for assistance. Don’t risk injury to the patient or yourself.

When loading the stretcher into the ambulance assure that the safety bar is able to engage the catch before lifting the stretcher. When unloading the stretcher be sure that the safety bar has engaged the catch before pulling the stretcher further out of the ambulance. Assure that the stretcher has locked before putting weight on it. This assures that the head end of the stretcher will not fall from the ambulance.

Employee Safety

The key to employee safety regarding the use of lifting equipment and the movement of patients is proper body mechanics. Before lifting the patient, the attendant should evaluate the situation, make certain they are aware of what needs to be done and assure that they have the necessary equipment and assistance to accomplish the task.

The equipment is positioned by placing the wheelchair, stretcher or other equipment, as close to the patient as possible and in proper alignment for the shortest and easiest transfer. Necessary adjustments are made by raising or lowering the equipment to bed level or vice versa, and lowering any handrails or side rails. This minimizes the amount of lowering or lifting required. The wheels on the chair or bed must be locked.

Holding the patient close helps balance and reduces strain on the arms and back. Keeping the feet apart provides a stable base, helps maintain balance, and leaves more energy for lifting. Employees use their arms and legs in proper proportion. Bending the elbows to hold the patient close makes the lift easier.

Lifting is always performed in unison. When working with others, everyone must know what to do in advance and move at the same time. Counting out loud may help (e.g., “1-2-3 Move”). Sudden, jerky movements must be avoided. Good team communication is important.

Balance - It takes a certain amount of effort just to balance the weight of one’s own body. Keeping a low center of gravity over a stable base expends less energy balancing the load, and more energy is available for lifting and carrying.
- Pull or Push When Possible - Less energy is used to pull or push than to lift an object. When lifting or carrying, the force must be overcome and the load balanced at the same time. By pulling or pushing, it is only necessary to overcome the friction between the object being moved and the surface on which it rests. Whenever possible, push rather than pull.

- Think Ahead - Attendants should always think ahead and be sure to assess each patient’s medical condition, strength, mobility, etc. before attempting to lift or carry. The patient should be informed exactly as to what is going to happen, so as to calm any fears and encourage their cooperation.

- Don’t Guess - Only those procedures with which the employee is familiar are to be used. Guessing the correct procedure, improvising, or failing to exercise proper caution when lifting or moving a patient may be harmful to both the patient and the attendant. If at any time an employee feels uncomfortable with a lifting situation, they will call for additional assistance.

- Avoid Twisting - If it is necessary to turn while lifting or moving something, it is better to change the position of the feet than to twist at the waist. By moving the feet, it is possible to balance the load being carried and minimize the strain on the back and abdominal muscles.

- Using a Draw Sheet - There may be times when a draw sheet is the only device practical or available when moving a patient. When using a draw sheet to move a patient, the attendants stand on either side of the patient and grasp the draw sheet at the patient’s shoulders and hips. A third attendant or assistance may be needed to support a patient’s legs. Pulling the draw sheet tight, the attendants move the patient across the bed to the stretcher. When reaching across the bed, brace your torso with one hand.

- Stretcher Lifting Technique - Lifting can be done safely by following these simple steps: One foot is next to the stretcher and the other foot behind. The back is kept straight, chin tucked in, so the head and neck continue the straight back line. A firm grip on the lower stretcher bars with the palms of the hands is necessary, because the palms are stronger than the fingers alone. Both partners must be properly situated by drawing the stretcher close, with arms and elbows tucked under the sides of the bodies to keep body weight centered. Staff should use teamwork and a standard “1-2-3” count, lifting straight up using the strength of their legs.