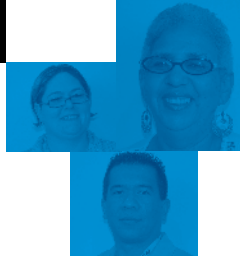




Arkansas PARADE of LIGHTS

Draws Media Attention and Public Support



If you're looking for a fun way to celebrate EMS Week and draw positive attention to EMS in your community, throw a parade!



Each year, the Arkansas Department of Health & Human Services Emergency Medical Services Office conducts an annual Parade of Lights in Little Rock, Arkansas.

"This is our chance once a year to go out and show off a little bit," said EMS Section Chief David Taylor. "We do this to try to get EMS folks to come together as a whole. It's just an amazing sight when you see all of the vehicles lined up and making their way down the road."

The parade honors and recognizes first responders, EMTs, paramedics, firefighters and police officers for their service above and beyond the call of duty and attracts attention from everyone in the community, including the media.

"We usually don't have problems getting coverage when we have the Parade of Lights, especially from the television stations," he said. "All of them pick it up. They have to put it on the news because people are always calling, asking the stations what's going on."

The Arkansas Department of Health & Human Services issues a statewide press release to make all the media aware of the parade. "Many of the media will show up and even do on-site interviews with the EMTs," said Taylor. "It generates great publicity."

Parade Logistics

The annual Arkansas EMS parade begins from a staging area at the War Memorial Stadium (home of the Arkansas Razorbacks) and proceeds to the state Capitol building. It includes 30 to 50 ambulances, fire vehicles, police cars and hazmat vehicles. The vehicles take about 15 minutes to cover the five-mile stretch of road between the stadium and the Capitol steps. Following the parade, a ceremony is held on the Capitol steps to honor emergency services personnel.

Various dignitaries, including the state governor, are invited to speak. Star of Life participants are recognized. After

the speeches, participants recognize any EMS line-of-duty deaths from the past year and have a moment of silence. The ceremonies conclude with a flyover by air medical services.

Taylor said that a parade and recognition ceremony is a good way to reach out to the community. "It shows that all of the first responders, emergency medical technicians and firefighters are there to support the community," he said. "It also helps the funding streams recognize that we utilize those streams to help protect and serve the community."

Planning Is Key

It takes a great deal of hard work to plan the parade, according to Taylor. He recommends that any EMS Week planner who would like to start a parade begin planning early.

"We notify the ambulance services about 90 days out," Taylor said. "We ship them the EMS Week kit and within that kit, we include the invitation asking them to join us."

The parade also is advertised on the state Web site and the state EMS association Web site. About 30 days from date of the parade, another reminder is mailed.

The logistics of the parade, including choosing the route and length, should be planned far in advance as well. Taylor advised organizers to apply for a parade permit early. And if you want to do a flyover, make sure you can do a flyover in your air space, especially if you're holding a ceremony at a government building.

One final piece of advice that Taylor has for EMS managers is to assign several people to oversee the planning process. "It's a lot of work and you need people to stay on top of it to be successful," he said.

