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# Paramedics get warning to record all vital signs

By Kelly Gilbert

City Fire Department officers are telling ambulance paramedics to take and record the vital signs of all patients, as required by departmental orders.

The re-emphasis of orders that have been in the ambulance Manual of Procedure for years is the result of a state evaluation last month that criticized the paramedics' performance in serious injury cases.

Evaluators said the ambulance paramedics are taking only five of every 10 critically injured patients to the right hospitals, the four specialized area trauma centers in the city.

The evaluation was made by the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, Shock-Trauma in Baltimore, which supervises critical trauma care statewide.

Deputy Chief George E. Webb said Fire Department officers who review ambulance run sheets have found the same kinds of reporting errors since the Shock-Trauma evaluation.

Some reports lack notations on vital

signs, he said, and others lack references to the paramedics' use of the city-wide Emergency Medical Radio Communications system that links ambulance crews to emergency physicians.

Chief Webb and Herbert W. Catterton, the acting city fire chief, said there is no excuse for a paramedic's failure to log patients' vital signs.

Shock-Trauma evaluators said city paramedics apparently failed to take patients' blood pressure and other vital signs in 65 percent of the serious traumatic injury cases they handled from Nov. 1, 1979, to Jan. 31, 1980.

Meanwhile, the ambulance paramedics took half their critically injured patients to the wrong hospitals, the evaluators said, and paramedics' failures to take vital signs may have contributed to those transportation errors.

"I'm not saying the paramedics did

not take vital signs," said Chief Webb. "Some have said they took vital signs and just forgot to put them on the run sheets. That can happen when you have two or three runs, one after another."

In addition, some paramedics have said they did not take vital signs of some patients in cold weather because they were reluctant to remove patients' heavy clothing, or because some patients became violent in their ambulances.

Chief Webb said none of the city's paramedics has been disciplined for reporting failures, "but we are re-emphasizing that they must take vital signs, and we're using that as a teaching tool."

Ambulance lieutenants, said Chief Webb, have been re-instructing paramedics who make run sheet errors, in an attempt to correct the reporting problems.