



Paramedics in Peril: The Push to Improve Safety Inside Ambulances

Every day, ambulances across the UK are involved in at least one road traffic collision (RTC). While some of these incidents result in minor damage, others have led to serious injuries or even fatalities, affecting both paramedics and patients. Despite the risks, a troubling trend has emerged: many ambulance staff are neglecting to wear seat belts while working in the back of these vehicles, raising serious safety concerns.

The Unseen Risk

National ambulance forums have repeatedly sounded the alarm about this issue. The law mandates that everyone in an ambulance must wear a seatbelt, with exceptions only during critical moments of emergency care. However, this exemption is meant to be rare and temporary. Once the immediate care is completed, the staff member is required to buckle up. Yet, compliance with this regulation is inconsistent, putting both paramedics and patients at unnecessary risk.

Surveying the Problem

To address this growing concern, the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE) launched a comprehensive survey in late 2022, targeting frontline staff across UK ambulance services. The goal was to gather insights into current seat belt usage and to understand the barriers to compliance. The findings were eye-opening:

- Many paramedics were unaware that the driver bears the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that everyone in the vehicle is secured before the journey begins.
- A significant number of staff admitted to not wearing a seatbelt during their most recent ambulance trip.
- A surprisingly low percentage reported wearing a seatbelt throughout the entirety of their last shift.

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Setting the Standard: EN1789:2020

EN1789:2020, a European standard for medical vehicles, underscores the importance of seatbelt use in ambulances. It mandates that all occupants, including medical staff, patients, and any other passengers, must be secured while the vehicle is in motion. Adherence to this standard is crucial for minimising the risk of injury during a collision and ensuring the safety of everyone on board.

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The #SafeInTheBack Campaign

In response to these alarming findings, the AACE launched the #SafeInTheBack campaign. The initiative aims to increase awareness about the dangers of not wearing seat belts in the back of ambulances and to boost compliance with safety regulations. The campaign is designed to resonate from the highest levels of ambulance services down to the frontline workers, emphasizing that safety is a shared responsibility.

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Innovative Solutions for Safer Care

One of the challenges highlighted by the survey is the difficulty paramedics face in accessing essential equipment while remaining seated and belted. The configuration of ambulances varies across the UK, and this lack of standardization can make it hard for staff to operate devices like defibrillators without unbuckling. This need for mobility often leads to paramedics taking risks by not wearing their seat belts.

Addressing this issue, the German manufacturer Corpuls has developed the corpuls3 defibrillator/monitor, a modular device that enhances safety and accessibility. Unlike traditional single-unit monitors, the corpuls3 can be separated into three wirelessly connected modules: the Monitor, the Patient Box, and the Defibrillator. This setup allows paramedics to perform up to 95% of their tasks from the safety of their seat.



By positioning each module optimally within the ambulance—such as securing the Patient Box to the stretcher, the Defibrillator on the trauma wall and the Monitoring unit with the paramedic—paramedics can remain seated and belted while providing high-quality care, undertaking 95% of their standard tasks. This innovative approach not only improves safety but also ensures that paramedics can quickly and effectively respond to patient needs without compromising their own well-being.

Conclusion

As the #SafeInTheBack campaign gains momentum, it serves as a vital reminder that safety in the back of an ambulance is not just a personal choice but a legal and ethical obligation. By adopting new technologies and adhering to established safety standards, the goal is to create a safer environment for both paramedics and patients during what can be life-or-death journeys.

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Words by John Rumsey, Executive Chairman The Ortus Group

Resources: [Association of Ambulance Chief Executives](#) - [#SafeInTheBack Campaign](#)