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REGION FIVE

Maine EMS SERVICE PROFILE: Houlton Sector Medical Response Team



Some travelers might be surprised to learn that in addition to keeping our borders secure, U.S. Border Patrol agents in Maine and across the country are trained and ready to help in a medical emergency.

In Aroostook County, Supervisory Border Patrol Agent George Ferland has been with the border patrol since 1997, and an EMT since 2003. The Houlton Sector Medical Response Team is a Maine-EMS licensed non-transporting service, he explains.

"The nature of our job requires that we are out in the field 24/7," said Ferland. "It's inevitable that we may be the first to happen upon a motor vehicle accident, a collision with a moose, or a logging worksite incident. The nearest transport-capable EMS providers may be 45 minutes or more away. As part of their patrol duties, Border Patrol Agents are trained to render emergency medical assistance at the scene, while awaiting EMS response."

Thanks to their ATVs, snowmobiles and four wheel drive vehicles, the border patrol also offers enhanced response capabilities to assist efforts by other agencies, such as the search and rescue operations orchestrated by the Maine Warden Service.

The Houlton Sector area of responsibility comprises 32,700 square miles, and covers the entire state of Maine. This area includes over 600 miles of international boundary, roughly half of which is land and half water, from the New Hampshire state line to the Atlantic coastline. There over 200 U.S. Border Patrol agents in Maine, as well as the CBP support staff. All border patrol agents are trained in basic first aid, as well as CPR, and AED (automatic external defibrillation). In Maine, there are ten agents who are not

only Maine EMS-licensed EMT's but also meet National Registry standards. In addition, all ten of these individuals have, or are currently earning, their Wilderness EMT certification with skills and training especially relevant for the challenges presented by Maine's rugged landscape and climate conditions.

The Houlton Sector agents maintain their EMS skills and knowledge by participating in Aroostook EMS trainings whenever feasible; occasional 24-hour refreshers are arranged to cover all aspects of basic emergency medical care, including re-certification in CPR and AED.

Houlton Sector is comprised of six stations in the state of Maine. These are located in Houlton, Van Buren, Calais, Fort Fairfield, Jackman, and Rangeley.

The Houlton Border Patrol EMS call volume varies from around a dozen to several dozen per year. The majority, as might be expected, are motor vehicle accidents. While the border patrol's first responder program has always been in place, the EMS program was started in the 1990s, originally in order to be better able to render aid to agents who were injured while on duty in remote areas. But because part of the U.S. Border Patrol's mission is to serve the communities in which they work, "We'll respond whenever we can, to any call for help," said Ferland. Gis agents have responded to everything from a cardiac incident at a residence, to a reported fall from a ladder at a local school.

"As border patrol agents it is our responsibility to render aid whenever we can to community members, as well as to partner with EMS and law enforcement -- and we're happy to do so," says Ferland.