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Transport Policy Change

On March 19th, 2007 at 0833 Rock City Falls Volunteer Fire Department was dispatched to a residential carbon monoxide alarm in a local mobile home park. The first arriving unit was Car 53 staffed by Chief Joe Spofford, followed by Rescue 536. They found two adults and two children inside the mobile home, each complaining of headaches and nausea. Initial readings from our portable gas meter indicated a CO level of 215 ppm. The patients were immediately moved outside.

Once in the fresh air, we used the Rad-57 Pulse CO-oximeter to screen the patients. Their SpCO readings were 28%, 24%, 14% and 12%. Based on the elevated readings, EMS personnel from Community Emergency Corp. decided to transport all four patients to Albany Medical Center instead of the closer, smaller community hospital.

At the ER, an ABG was drawn for each patient. The hospital CO-oximeter results confirmed the readings obtained by the Rad-57. Thus the hospital decided to transport the patients to Westchester Medical Center for treatment in the hyperbaric chamber. All four patients were treated and released the next morning and are doing fine today with no side effects from the exposure. It was determined that a faulty furnace and chimney were the cause of the high readings in the residence.

Before the Rad-57, we based decisions like mode of transport and patient destination on the parts per million reading of carbon monoxide and the patient's presentation. At best, this was an educated guess. With the Rad-57, we now have a more solid foundation to make decisions on.

Without the Rad-57 on this scene, just based on their presentation, we would not have considered flying the patients directly to a hyperbaric center or even transporting to the bigger hospital. However, after review of this incident by all agencies involved, it was determined that it would have been appropriate to air lift the patients directly from the scene to Westchester Medical Center. Based on the reliability of the Rad-57, it will now be standard procedure to air lift patients with elevated blood CO levels to a hyperbaric hospital.

We are one of the first, if not the first, agency in our area to have purchased a Rad-57, the department now has two. As a result of the effectiveness of the Rad-57 in this incident, we have been asked by neighboring agencies to respond with our CO-oximeter if they have a CO call with illness to assist them in evaluating the patients.

The Rock City Falls Volunteer Fire Department provides Fire/Rescue & EMS protection for a 28.5 square mile area in the town of Milton, New York in Saratoga County. The department is entirely volunteer with 55 active members serving 12,000 residents. We respond with three engine/tankers, one heavy rescue, one rescue, one brush truck, one - 4,000 gallon tanker and two chiefs' vehicles.