



**NASEMSO Monograph**  
**June 2008**

# **State EMS Director Turnover:**

**Depletion of Experience in  
State Emergency Medical Systems  
Leadership Positions**

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***National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials***

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**National Association of State EMS Officials**

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June 18, 2008

Greetings,

On behalf of the National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials, I am pleased to present our latest monograph, “State EMS Director Turnover: Depletion of Experience in Emergency Medical Systems Leadership.”

Each of the states and all U.S. territories have emergency medical services systems. Each has a governmental unit responsible for various elements of system development and maintenance. The person with top administrative authority within these state EMS offices may be referred to as a Bureau Chief, Manager, Supervisor, Executive Director, or other title.

This is the first effort we know of to attempt to identify both the quantity and reasons for the turnover in these positions. The job of a state EMS Director is complex with a long learning curve, no matter the education or background experience of the person at the helm.

This monograph represents extensive work over the past year in instrument design, information gathering and data analysis.

We hope you will find the monograph useful in furthering the ongoing development of emergency medical services systems locally and nationally.

Sincerely,

Fergus Laughridge  
President, NASEMSO

**“The only source of knowledge is experience.”**

*– Albert Einstein*

## Introduction and Background

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In the United States and its territories, there are 56 EMS Director positions. The specific responsibilities of these positions differ with locality, but generally encompass the highest level of administrative responsibility for the oversight of the emergency medical services system at the state or territorial government level.

Anecdotally, it has been understood for some years that the turnover in these positions is high. This report constitutes the first effort to quantify this turnover nationally and to capture the general reasons for turnover in this field.

There is no universally accepted method for calculating the costs associated with turnover. Data from other studies place the cost between 50 percent and 150 percent of the individual's base salary, with the majority of this cost attributed to vacancy expense and lost productivity.

Some degree of turnover in any organization is necessary, and there is doubtlessly a lower boundary at which turnover is beneficial. It is well understood that high turnover is costly and deleterious to productivity. It can also be safely assumed that a complex and technical job is more difficult to fill and will have a steeper learning curve than positions that are less so.

The knowledge, skills and abilities required of a State EMS Director are numerous. The learning curve is steep. Education and experience in other areas may not be readily transferable to the highly specific and technical nature of the EMS environment.

This report is based on analysis of data from two sources:

1. The first is a survey of director members (a copy of the survey instrument is provided in the appendix); and
2. An analysis of NASEMSO membership roster data, which shows the year each director member became a State EMS Director.

The former instrument attempts to obtain information regarding the number of vacancies in the EMS Director position over a five year period, and the general reasons for those vacancies. The latter analysis simply characterizes the number of years each existing member has served as an EMS Director, contrasted with roster information from five years earlier. From this, we can calculate the years of experience of each director, and the group.

For the survey, fifty of fifty-six eligible entities reported. This is a response rate of approximately 89%. The jurisdictions that did not respond to the survey are: California, Hawaii, Kentucky, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, and the U.S Virgin Islands.

With respect to the analysis of the membership roster, tenure information is included on all fifty-six eligible states and territories.

## Comparison of 2002 and 2007 Tenure Data

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The membership rosters of the National Association of State EMS Officials list the year each director member assumed the position of state or territorial director. In this section, we compare data from the 2002 roster with that of the 2007 roster to gauge the changes in the experiential composition of the director population over a five year period.

The population of directors can be broken down into three experiential cohorts: *Nascent Directors* (those with experience of five years or less), *Veteran Directors* (those with experience of six to fifteen years), and *Career Directors* (those with experience of over fifteen years).

Interestingly, the cohorts exist in similar proportion in both the 2007 roster and the 2002 roster:

**Nascent Directors** were 64% of the total director population in both 2002 and 2007;

**Veteran Directors** dropped from 30% to 27% of the total director population between 2002 and 2007; and

**Career Directors** increased from 5% to 9% of the total director population between 2002 and 2007.

The cumulative years of experience was *identical* – in both 2002 and 2007, the combined years of experience of the whole population was exactly 306 years. These figures give the impression of a relatively static population. In fact, had the population been truly static, the cohort distribution would be markedly different. The cumulative years of experience in 2007 would have been 586 years instead of 306. This represents a loss of 280 potential years of cumulative experience.

The experiential composition within the cohorts also changed from 2002 to 2007, with directors in two of the three groups having less mean and cumulative experience.

**Mean and Cumulative Years of Experience by Cohort (2002-2007)**

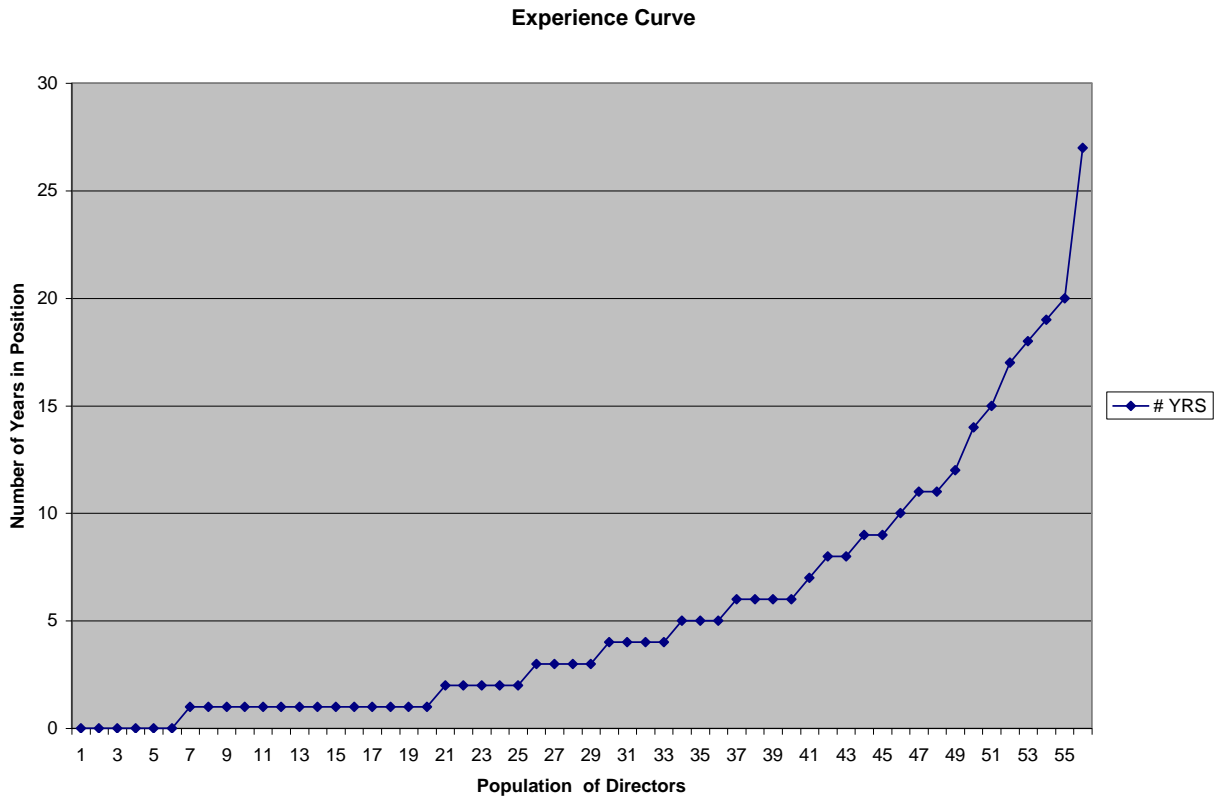
Table 1.	Nascent		Veteran		Career	
	Mean	Cumulative	Mean	Cumulative	Mean	Cumulative
<b>2002</b>	<b>2.28</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>9.76</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>19.33</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>2007</b>	<b>1.86</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>9.20</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>20.20</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Net Change</b>	<b>-0.42</b>	<b>-15</b>	<b>-0.56</b>	<b>-22</b>	<b>+0.87</b>	<b>+43</b>

For the current population of EMS Directors, experience ranges from the low of less than one year to a high of 27 years in office.

The *median* tenure in office is three (3) years. Forty-five percent (45%) of the population has less tenure than this. The *mean* tenure of office is five (5) years. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the population has less tenure than this. The mode is one year in office. One-fourth of *all* directors in 2007 have only one year of experience in the position.

Chart A illustrates the experience curve of the 2007 population of State EMS Directors. The vertical (Y axis) shows the number of years in the position in five year increments; the 56 positions on the horizontal (X axis) represents the individual directors. Note how far to the right the line proceeds before rising above five years of experience for the director population. The area under the blue line describes the collective experience of the current population of directors.

**Chart A**

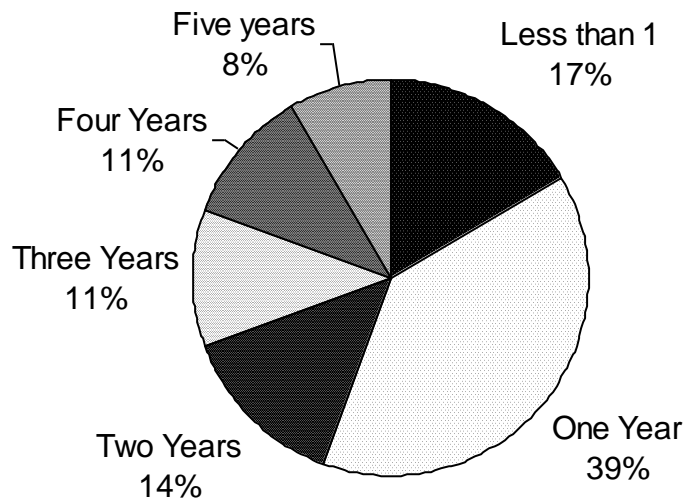


***Experiential Cohorts***

**Group 1: Nascent Directors (Tenure of 0-5 Years)**

This cohort comprises the bulk (sixty-four percent) of the total population of State and Territorial EMS Directors. As illustrated in Chart B, fifty-six percent of the 2007 group has less than two years of tenure. In 2002, directors with less than two years of tenure represented 39% of the Nascent Directors, compared to the 56% seen in 2007.

Chart B – Distribution of Experience in 2007 Nascent Director Cohort



The cumulative years of experience for this cohort is 67 years. In 2002, the same cohort had a cumulative of 82 years of experience. This illustrates an 18% reduction in cumulative experience for the cohort that makes up 64% of the entire population of directors.

Twelve of the thirty-six directors that comprised this cohort in 2002 are still in office. Twenty-four of them are no longer EMS Directors. Ten of the twelve who remain in this capacity have ascended into the Veteran Director Cohort.

**Group 2: Veteran Directors (Tenure of 6-15 Years)**

This cohort comprises the second largest group of directors at 27% of the total population in 2007. Sixty-seven percent of this cohort has less than ten years of tenure.

In 2002, this cohort constituted 30% of the population. The cumulative years of experience for this cohort is 138 years. In 2002, the same cohort had a cumulative of 160 years of experience. This illustrates a net cumulative reduction of 22 years of experience for this cohort.

Nine of the seventeen directors who comprised this cohort in 2002 are still in office. Eight of them (47%) are no longer EMS Directors. Four of the nine who remain in this capacity have ascended into the Career Director Cohort.

### Group 3: Career Directors (Tenure of More than 15 Years)

This constitutes the smallest cohort at just nine percent of the total population. Just five of fifty-six directors currently serving have more than 15 years experience, and only one Director currently serving has a tenure in office greater than 20 years. This is also the only cohort that saw growth over the last five years, nearly doubling the class from 5% to 9% between 2002 and 2005.

In 2002, this cohort consisted of only three individuals, two of whom were replaced over the five-year period. This left only one in the class, to be joined eventually by four others ascending from the Veteran Director category.

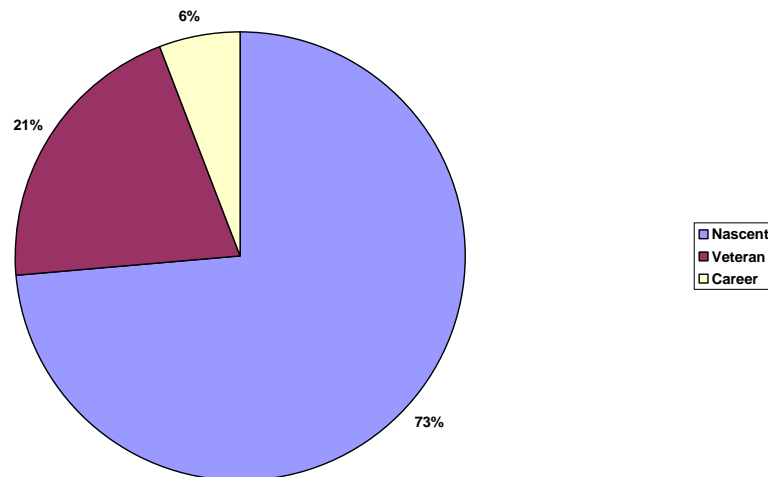
This small but significant expansion of the class accounts for the offsetting growth in both the mean and cumulative years of experience illustrated in table 1.

### Demography of the Replaced

What is known of the directors who were replaced? In examining NASEMSO records from 2002 and 2007, we see simply who was there in 2002 who was still there in 2007. However, in looking at the distribution of tenure in the known vacancies from the roster analysis, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that most of the vacancies occur early in the directors' careers. Chart C shows the distribution, by cohort of the directors from 2002 who were replaced by 2007.

**Chart C.**

Cohort Distribution of 2002 Directors Replaced by 2007



Thirty-four directors who appeared on the 2002 roster do not appear on the 2007 roster. Twenty-five (about 73%) of these were from the 2002 Nascent Director cohort of thirty-six individuals. Eight (about 21%) of the replaced directors were from the 2002 Veteran Director cohort of seventeen individuals. Two of the three directors from the 2002 Career Director cohort were replaced.

## Survey Results

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Of the 50 states responding to the survey, 49 vacancies were reported for the five year period from July 01, 2001 to June 30, 2006. Twenty seven (55%) of respondents reported one or more vacancy during the reporting period. The membership roster of the National Association of State EMS Officials lists the year each director member became a member. From this data, we can determine whether or not there was at least one personnel change in the study period.

For the cohort of the study population that responded to the survey, this yields a five-year turnover rate of 98% (49/50), or an average of 19.6% annual turnover.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics collects information relating to job turnover for many job sectors, including state and local government. The highest annual turnover rate (total separations) reported for the “State and Local Government sector” for the years 2001-2006 was 15.7%, in 2006, and the average turnover for the whole period is 15.0%.

Expressed another way, the most optimistic estimation of annual turnover among State and Territorial EMS Directors is about 3.9% higher than the *highest* average annual turnover among state and local government positions.

Of the states reporting vacancies, 40.7% reported a single vacancy, 37% reported two vacancies, and 22.2% reported three vacancies in the position in the five-year period. No respondents reported more than three vacancies for the period in question.

For the next section, the survey instrument asked whether the vacancies were voluntary, involuntary or both. The instrument asked “both” in the event that more than one vacancy occurred, where one may have been voluntary and one involuntary.

### *Voluntary Separation*

For purposes of the survey, voluntary separation was defined as follows: Voluntary resignations, retirement, or other separation resulting from the employee’s (not the employer’s) decision. This criterion does not include transfers, demotions, or retirements that are leveraged in any way, or chosen as an alternative to involuntary separation, termination or other discipline. 78% of the vacancies reported during the study period were voluntary separations. Of these:

- 28% were attributed to voluntary retirement
- 14% were attributed to promotion
- 41% were attributed to transfer
- 17% were attributed to other voluntary actions (i.e., a move to the private sector)

As a proxy for job satisfaction and success, it is reasonable to use voluntary retirement and promotion; likewise, transfer and other voluntary actions likely (though not always) indicate some job dissatisfaction or frustration.

### *Involuntary Separation*

For purposes of the survey, involuntary separation was defined as follows: termination of either the employee or the position resulting from the employer's (not the employee's) decision. This criterion **includes** firing; elimination of a filled position by layoff, reorganizing, restructuring, or outsourcing; and "voluntary" resignation, transfer, demotion or retirement **if** the decision was made as an alternative to termination or other disciplinary action. 22% of the vacancies reported during the study period were involuntary separations. Of these:

- 37.5% were attributed to termination
- 0% were attributed to layoff
- 12.5% were attributed to reorganization
- 50% were attributed to other involuntary actions

### *Length of Vacancy*

The length of time it takes to fill a vacant position is one element that is of value in determining the costs associated with turnover. The shortest amount of time reported that was required to fill the vacancy was 0 days, and the longest was one thousand four hundred and sixty (1460) days. The average time to fill the position was 207 days, and the median time required was 150 days.

### *Recruitment*

Respondents were asked to identify whether the position of EMS Director had been traditionally filled by recruitment from within the organization, outside the organization, or both. The majority of respondents (29) indicated recruitment from both inside and outside the organization. Eleven respondents indicated the position had traditionally been filled by recruiting outside the agency, and seven indicated the position had been filled traditionally by recruitment from within.

### *Pay Grade*

The cost of living varies widely between jurisdictions, so requesting a dollar amount relating to salary could be less than useful. Instead, the survey requested information on the pay grade of the respondent, how many grades were above and below and in the same class, and whether there had been any adjustment in the pay grade for the EMS Director over the past five years.

The average organization appears to have about 19 pay grades. The average EMS Director is at pay grade 14 on that scale, and there is an average of 35 persons at the same pay grade within their departments. This information provides a general sense of the organizational value of the EMS Director position.

With respect to movement in the pay grade, 63% of the respondents indicated their pay grades had not changed in the five year period, 35% indicated their pay grade had increased, and 2% indicated a decrease in pay grade.

### *Obstacles to Retention*

Respondents were asked to identify the biggest issue regarding retention of personnel in this position. Not every respondent answered this item, and some few indicated that retention issues were not applicable or unknown. Of the 28 comments received regarding retention issues:

**46%** indicated salary insufficiency;

**36%** indicated political issues either with department administration, elected officials, or the regulated community as a significant retention issue; and

**18%** of the comments singled out a unique “other” factor. These included: finding qualified personnel; ongoing challenges with limited resources and staff; and a cumbersome hiring process.

## ***APPENDIX***

### **I. Turnover Survey Instructions and Data Definitions**

### **II. Turnover Survey Instrument**

## **I. Turnover Survey Instructions and Data Definitions**

NASEMSO, with support from NHTSA EMS is preparing a monograph on state EMS director turnover. This is the first effort we know of to attempt to identify both the quantity and reasons for turnover in these positions.

Please take a moment to complete the attached survey instrument. It is provided in a Microsoft Word on screen format. All you need to do is open the document, tab through the fields entering data, SAVE the changes and e-mail back to me. Depending on how long you have been in the position and your institutional knowledge of the last five years, you may need assistance from your personnel department.

### **IMPORTANT:**

We are aware that different states have different and in some cases unique nomenclature that relate to various terms we are using in this questionnaire. For purposes of consistency and clarity, please use these definitions when responding to the items in the survey.

#### **EMS Director**

The person with top administrative authority within the EMS office. In some instances, this person may be referred to as a Bureau Chief, Manager, Supervisor, Executive Director, or other sobriquet.

#### **Pay grade**

This is the designation (usually numeric) or classification of the pay range for a government job. For example, a grade 14 may have a pay range of \$16,000 – \$21,000, and there may be several different kinds of jobs in the same organization that are designated grade 14.

#### **Voluntary Separation**

Refers to voluntary resignations, retirement, or other separation resulting from the employee's (not the employer's) decision. This criterion does **not** include transfers, demotions, or retirements that are leveraged in any way, or chosen as an alternative to involuntary separation, termination or other discipline.

##### **Retirement**

A type of voluntary separation in which the employee vacates the position with the intention of drawing a retirement pension rather than seeking employment elsewhere.

##### **Transfer/Relocation**

A type of voluntary separation in which the employee quits for another job outside the agency, transfers to another job within the agency, or to another geographical location that makes continuance in the current position impossible or impracticable.

##### **Promotion**

A type of voluntary separation in which the employee accepts a position at a higher pay grade in the same cabinet-level department, or outside the department, but still within the state system.

**Involuntary Separation**

Refers to termination of either the person or the position resulting from the employer's (not the employee's) decision. This criterion **includes** firing; elimination of a filled position by layoff, reorganizing, restructuring, or outsourcing; and "voluntary" resignation, transfer, demotion or retirement **if** the decision was made as an alternative to termination or other disciplinary action.

**Termination for Cause**

A type of involuntary separation in which the employee is fired for violation of the employer's policies or for ethical or criminal misconduct.

**Reorganization/Restructuring**

A type of involuntary separation in which a filled position is eliminated or de-funded resulting from employer decisions to combine, consolidate, restructure, or reorganize.

**Technical Furlough/Layoff**

A type of involuntary separation in which a filled position is temporarily vacated as a result of budgetary concerns or staff reductions.

Thank you for your prompt assistance in this matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 623-826-5890.

Sincerely,

Stephen P. Hise  
NASEMSO Program Advisor

## II. Turnover Survey Instrument

### NASEMSO Survey: EMS Director Turnover

1. State/Territory:	2. Name of Person Completing Survey:
3. How many times between July 01, 2001 and June 30, 2006 has there been a vacancy in the position of EMS Director? (if indicating "none," skip to item 8 and complete the survey)	
<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> More than 4	
4. Were the vacancies the result of:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary Separation <input type="checkbox"/> Involuntary Separation <input type="checkbox"/> Both	
5. If any voluntary separations occurred, were they the result of: (check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Retirement <input type="checkbox"/> Transfer/Relocation <input type="checkbox"/> Promotion <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
6. If any involuntary separations occurred, were they the result of: (check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Termination for Cause <input type="checkbox"/> Reorganization/Restructuring <input type="checkbox"/> Technical Furlough/Layoff <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
7. What is the longest period of time in the last 5 years this position remained vacant?	
8. Is the position historically filled by:	
<input type="checkbox"/> promotion from within <input type="checkbox"/> recruiting from outside <input type="checkbox"/> both	
9. What has been the biggest obstacle to recruiting for this position?	
10. What has been the biggest issue regarding retention of personnel in this position?	
11. In the last 5 years has the pay grade (not salary) for the EMS Director position changed:	
<input type="checkbox"/> upward <input type="checkbox"/> downward <input type="checkbox"/> not at all	
12. How many other employees (in the same cabinet-level department <sup>1</sup> ) are in the same pay grade as the EMS Director?	
13. How many pay grades (in the same cabinet-level department) are above that of the EMS Director?	
14. How many pay grades (in the same cabinet-level department) are below that of the EMS Director?	
15. Comments/Clarifications:	

<sup>1</sup> Most EMS Offices are organizationally situated within a cabinet level department of the state (Public Health, Public Safety, etc...). If your EMS Office is not situated within a cabinet-level department of the state, and is instead a free-standing regulatory board or office reporting directly to the Governor or the Governor's designee, please answer items 12, 13, and 14 only for pay grades in the EMS organization.

