



Performance Audit:

Atlanta Fire Rescue Department

Inventory Management of Medical Supplies

What We Found

Poor recordkeeping prevented the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department from accurately and completely tracking drugs and medical supplies, including controlled substances from purchase to disposal. We identified control weaknesses in both field and airport locations. Three to five vials of Versed, a controlled substance, were unaccounted for in field locations due to missing or incomplete log entries. The controlled substances log entries at airport locations were missing transaction dates which made inventory tracking impossible.

Emergency medical services at both field and airport locations maintained a significant number of expired drugs and medical supplies on hand. Over 80% of controlled substances at the airport were expired. The department has neither specified in its procedures on how to dispose of expired medications nor has it defined the frequency of disposal. We recommend that the department update its policies and procedures.

Federal and state laws require emergency service providers to track controlled substances from purchase through disposal, store drugs securely, perform inventory counts, track amounts administered and disposed of, and maintain accurate and complete records. Without complete records, drugs and medical supplies, particularly controlled substances, are susceptible to theft or diversion.

To mitigate risks that drugs or medical supplies may be diverted, lost, or stolen, we recommend that the department implement an electronic inventory management system. Airport locations purchased part of an inventory system but has yet to implement it. Until a system is implemented, we recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department conduct a 100% inventory count of all drugs and medical supplies at emergency medical services locations. The department should also enforce completion of all required documents, including the controlled substances logs, medication used forms, medication bag check-offs, and transfer of custody forms to track medical inventory.

Why We Did This Audit

We undertook this audit following our 2018 investigation of theft of fuel involving the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department, which identified weak inventory controls. Several fire stations operate advanced life support vehicles that carry medical supplies, including controlled substances. Because of the weaknesses in controls over fuel, we chose to audit current inventory controls over medical supplies.

What We Recommended

To strengthen safeguards against drug and medical supply diversion and to improve inventory management, the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department should:

- update its policies and procedures to include procurement and disposal procedures
- equip all emergency vehicles with locked compartments for medication bags
- require dual controls to access controlled substances storage
- review controlled substances logs and medications used forms monthly for completeness and accuracy and address any discrepancies
- consolidate procurement to help decrease the amount of excess inventory
- implement an electronic inventory management system to mitigate inventory control risks

Management Responses to Audit Recommendations

Summary of Management Responses		
Recommendation #1:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department update its policies and procedures to include specific language that describes procurement and disposal procedures.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The standard operational procedures for pharmaceutical bag replacement and EMS supplies ordering and inventory are in draft.	Agree
Timeframe:	July 2019	
Recommendation #2:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department provide field locations with assigned medication bags and store controlled substances in a clear case in a separate compartment from other drugs and medical supplies.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The EMS division has identified a clear container to store controlled substances that will fit into our existing medical bags. Once ordered the containers will take several weeks to arrive, stock, and distribute throughout the department. The department asks that the recommendation to provide field locations with assigned medication bags be modified as it is like recommendation 3 (to discontinue decommissioning bags in the field). The department agrees with the recommendation to store controlled substances in a clear case.	Partially Agree
Timeframe:	June 2019	
Recommendation #3:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department discontinue bag decommissioning in field locations.	
Response & Proposed Action:	Due to the logistical resources needed to support field operations, in addition to security concerns regarding the transport of controlled medications to supply thirty-one fire station locations across the City, the department must continue to decommission bags in field locations.	Disagree
Timeframe:	N/A	
Recommendation #4:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department ensure all emergency vehicles are equipped with locked compartments to store medication bags.	
Response & Proposed Action:	An apparatus audit determined that there are eight units in Field Operations that will require locking solutions. Field Ops has checked the lock numbers and will coordinate with fleet services for replacement keys. Airport Operations has four units that will require locking solutions. The Airport Division is coordinating with Fleet Services at the airport to request a vendor quote for lock installation.	Agree
Timeframe:	July 2019	

Recommendation #5:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department require dual controls when accessing the controlled substances storage in procedures to limit the risk of diversion.	
Response & Proposed Action:	Requesting a quote to install a S2 card reader with a keypad to provide additional monitoring and access control at Fire Station 7.	Agree
Timeframe:	December 2019	
Recommendation #6:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department update procedures to include a back-up person to witness waste in the event the emergency medical services supervisor is unavailable.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The draft policy has been updated to require an EMS Supervisor or another paramedic to witness the waste of medications. Due to fire engines not having the capability to transport patients to hospital emergency rooms and subsequently engaging with emergency room nurses and physicians, this provides a logistically advantageous solution for units to waste medications on site and remain in service.	Agree
Timeframe:	July 2019	
Recommendation #7:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department review controlled substances logs monthly to identify and address any inventory count discrepancies.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The draft policy has been updated to reflect a requirement for a monthly review to identify and address medication inventory discrepancies.	Agree
Timeframe:	July 2019	
Recommendation #8:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department require all fields be completed on the controlled substances log and medications used forms, and it document when no medications were administered at each station.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The Medications Used form has been updated to provide additional accountability by requiring the acting officer in charge to also sign the form to ensure that all fields are accurate, and the documentation is complete.	Agree
Timeframe:	May 2019	
Recommendation #9:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department ensure that all medications used forms are collected and reconciled with the controlled substances logs to ensure accuracy of inventory.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The draft policy has been updated to reflect a requirement for a weekly count to ensure accuracy of the Medications Used forms and the controlled medications inventory count.	Agree
Timeframe:	May 2019	

Recommendation #10:	We recommend the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department consider the feasibility of consolidating procurement to help decrease the amount of excess inventory and encourage the potential benefits of economies of scale purchasing.	
Response & Proposed Action:	Consolidating the procurement of medicine and emergency medical supplies to decrease excess inventory and the accumulation of expired medications and supplies is not consistent with the current practice of the separation of general fund (field operations) and enterprise fund (airport operations) processes.	Disagree
Timeframe:	N/A	
Recommendation #11:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department update procedures to include a routine disposal process for expired medical inventory and retrain all applicable staff.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The draft policy has been updated to reflect routine disposals quarterly.	Agree
Timeframe:	May 2019	
Recommendation #12:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department enforce the verification of expiration date of drugs and medical supplies daily.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The verification of medication and medical supplies expiration dates will be enforced. Additional accountability to ensure compliance will be monitored by requiring the acting officer in charge to also sign the daily EMS supplies check off sheets, <i>Medications Used</i> forms and EEMS providers checking the expiration dates of supplies and medications prior to use or administration.	Agree
Timeframe:	May 2019	
Recommendation #13:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department implement an electronic inventory management system. In the meantime, the department should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct a 100% inventory count of all drugs and medical supplies at emergency medical services locations • enforce completion of all required documents, including the controlled substances logs, medication used forms, medication bag check-offs, and transfer of custody forms to track medical inventory • perform and document periodic inventory counts and immediately resolve any discrepancies • establish a retention policy for all inventory records • incorporate the revised inventory procedures into the department's policy 	
Response & Proposed Action:	The Technical Services Division has identified an asset management system that will accommodate both airport and field operations. Field Operations is undergoing an inventory count and is expected to complete it no later than April 22, 2019. Airport Operations completed its inventory count April 15, 2019. COA Records Management has been contacted regarding an inventory records application for retention.	Agree
Timeframe:	July 2019	

Recommendation #14:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department collaborate with Atlanta Information Management (AIM) to fully implement an electronic inventory management system into airport operations.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The Technical Services Division has identified an asset management system that will accommodate both airport and field operations.	Agree
Timeframe:	November 2019	
Recommendation #15:	We recommend that the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department determine if an electronic inventory management system is feasible for field locations.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The Technical Services Division has identified an asset management system that will accommodate both airport and field operations.	Agree
Timeframe:	November 2019	