



Innovative “Davenport Kits” soothe jellyfish stings, win award

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If you were in Yorktown over the Independence Day weekend, you might have seen York County Department of Fire and Life Safety personnel smearing a white paste on numerous beachgoers, who probably seemed relieved to be receiving the medical attention.

What you might not have realized was that the emergency responders were actually treating jellyfish stings, using a new process that just won York County a National Association of County’s Achievement Award.

Ingredients for that white paste, which consist of sterile water, acetic acid, and baking soda, are now stocked on all emergency response vehicles that typically serve the Yorktown Beach area. When combined, these ingredients deactivate jellyfish nematocysts, or stingers, and alleviate the pain and discomfort of a jellyfish encounter.

“During the summer months, the waters off Yorktown Beach and other areas of the county are inhabited with jellyfish,” said Emergency Medical Services Battalion Chief Thom Schwalenberg. “In the summer, our call activity for jellyfish stings in the Yorktown area is significant. During this past Fourth of July celebration we treated over 100 attendees for jellyfish stings.”

With that demand for medical attention, Battalion Chief Schwalenberg and a team of the department’s EMS providers saw the need for a better way to handle the problem. Typically, jellyfish stings can be treated on-site by washing the area with sterile water, which provides little relief for the pain, or the patient can be transported to a local emergency room, which is time consuming and ties up resources that are then unavailable for other emergency calls.

“Looking at our options and the number of calls we respond to for this problem, we quickly recognized the need for a jellyfish sting protocol,” said Battalion Chief Schwalenberg. “So we developed a standardized method of treating this type of injury that was approved by our Operational Medical Director.”

The result of this effort was the “Davenport Kit,” named after York County EMS Supervisor John Davenport, an outspoken advocate for this initiative. In addition to the paste ingredients, each kit contains standard tongue depressors, which are then used to scrape away the deactivated nematocysts. Lastly, an anesthetic/antibacterial spray is applied to the injury to provide further pain relief and skin protection.

“Once the patient is evaluated and treated, the patient is observed for signs of an allergic reaction,” said Battalion Chief Schwalenberg. “If the patient is no longer exhibiting symptoms and is not at risk for an allergic reaction, the patient can then be on his or her way, without having to make a trip to the emergency room. The responding personnel are then able to return to service, making them available for other emergency responses, and eliminating an unneeded transport to the emergency room.”

“This has been a successful and innovative program,” said Fire Chief Steve Kopczyński. “Our staff recognized a need and spent time in research and development to find a viable way to

approach this problem. The result has helped us standardize our response to these calls, and the initial response from the public has been very positive.”

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