

## EMS & Ambulance Stretchers Buying Guide

A decision walkthrough for buying EMS and ambulance stretchers: which measurements decide rig fit, how to weigh rated load against unit weight, when the lighter transfer class is the wrong buy, and what to confirm before a purchase order goes out.

### Start With the Rig, Not the Stretcher

Every failed stretcher purchase traces back to a measurement nobody took. Before comparing models, record three numbers from the vehicle itself: floor height at the loading door, patient compartment length and width including the loading path's turns, and the fastener or mount system already installed. A stretcher is bought into that envelope. Crews replacing a unit should also note what the outgoing stretcher got wrong, because the complaint log of the old equipment is the sharpest specification document a service owns.

### Transfer Class or Full Ambulance Cot: Decide the Duty First

The class question comes before any brand question. Transfer stretchers are light, simple and priced accordingly, built for moving stable patients between locations and for event work. Full ambulance cots carry taller adjustable frames and structures built for the loading cycle, thousands of rolls in and out of a rig. Buying the transfer class for full ambulance duty is the most common mistake in this category, and it surfaces as frame wear and crew complaints within the first year. Match the class to the busiest week the service runs, not the average one.

### Read Rated Load and Unit Weight as One Number Pair

Rated load is the manufacturer's ceiling for everything riding the deck: patient, clothing, immobilization gear, the oxygen bottle. Services specify one class above their expected population to keep margin. Unit weight is the other half of the pair, because the crew carries the whole frame whenever wheels cannot roll. A heavy adjustable frame earns its weight at the rig door; a light manual unit earns its on the stairs. The right buy reads both numbers against how the service actually runs calls, and both sit in every specification table.

### Height Adjustment: What the Mechanism Is Really Buying

An adjustable frame buys the crew's backs. Every load into the rig without a matching deck height is a lift, shift after shift, and lifting injuries are the quiet budget line of every EMS operation. Multi-position frames let the deck meet the rig floor and let one crew serve mixed vehicles. Manual fixed-height units remain the right answer for transfer work and tight budgets, provided the deck height genuinely matches the vehicle it serves. The mechanism is a per-call labor decision dressed up as a feature.

## Compare the Accessory Ecosystem, Not Just the Frame

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Two stretchers identical on paper diverge the day a strap frays. Before choosing, price the working configuration: restraint straps, mattress pad, IV pole, side rails and storage, because one manufacturer bundles what another line-items. Then ask the longer question: are replacement wheels, straps and pads orderable years from now? A stretcher line with a living parts catalog stays in service through inspection findings; one without becomes a disposal problem at the first failed strap. MSEC stocks the accessory layer for the MS3C line for exactly this reason.

## Fleet Buying: Standardize Before You Multiply

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A fleet of one model is cheaper to own than a fleet of three, in ways the purchase order never shows: one training curriculum, one spare parts shelf, one inspection procedure, straps and pads that interchange across every rig. Multi-unit purchases are the moment to consolidate, even if it means retiring an odd unit early. Quote the fleet as one order with consolidated freight and delivery scheduled together, and put the spare parts starter stock on the same PO so the maintenance program exists from day one.

## The Mistakes That Cause Returns

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Four repeat offenders account for most stretcher returns and regrets. A deck that misses the rig floor height, discovered at first loading. A folded or overall dimension that fails the compartment or the doorway mid-path. A rated load specified to the average patient instead of the heavy end of the real population. And the missing-strap delivery, where the working configuration was never quoted as one. Every one of them is preventable with the measurements and the configuration quote described above, before money moves.

## How MSEC Quotes This Category

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Send the rig make and model, the patient compartment measurements if the rig is nonstandard, the expected load class and the unit count, by phone toll free at 877-706-4480, local 713-706-4480, or email [inquiry@mseccompany.net](mailto:inquiry@mseccompany.net). The team cross-checks candidate models against the vehicle, returns a written quote with per-unit pricing, the complete working configuration and consolidated freight, and accepts purchase orders. MSEC is a GSA contract holder for municipal and government services.

## PRE-ORDER CHECKLIST

- ☐ Rig floor height, compartment dimensions and mount system recorded
- ☐ Duty class decided: transfer stretcher or full ambulance cot
- ☐ Rated load specified one class above the expected patient population
- ☐ Unit weight acceptable for the carries the service actually runs
- ☐ Working configuration quoted complete: straps, pad, IV pole, rails, storage
- ☐ Replacement parts availability confirmed for the line
- ☐ Fleet standardized on one model; spare parts starter stock on the same PO
- ☐ Delivery dates aligned across the order

Product specifications are supplied by the manufacturer. Confirm current pricing and lead times with the MSEC team before issuing a purchase order. Purchase orders accepted; GSA contract terms available for government and public-sector buyers.