



Fire Watch

Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter

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Los Angeles Fire Department
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Our Mission

"To Preserve life and property , promote public safety, foster economic growth through leadership, management and actions, as an all-risk fire and life safety response provider."

The Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter is published monthly by the Community Service Unit of the Community Liaison Office.

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LAFD EMS HISTORY

The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) is a full-spectrum life safety agency protecting approximately 4 million people who live, work and play in America's second largest City.

The LAFD's 3,376 uniformed personnel and 333 civilian support staff address multiple aspects of life safety, including fire prevention, firefighting, emergency medical care, technical rescue, hazardous materials mitigation, disaster response, public education and community service.

A professionally trained staff of 1,035 Firefighters (including 199 Paramedics) are on duty at all times at 103 Neighborhood Fire Stations strategically located across the Department's 471 square mile jurisdiction.



The Los Angeles Fire Department has provided emergency medical services (EMS) to the residents and visitors of the City of Los Angeles for decades. The first Fire Department ambulance was implemented in

1927. By 1931, there were six Fire Department ambulances serving the Metropolitan and Harbor areas of the City.

The City of Los Angeles has been providing a public sector emergency ambulance service since the early 1900's. The service originated as a program provided by the Los Angeles Police Department. In the mid 1930's, the service was transferred to the City's Receiving Hospital Department where it continued as the Police Ambulance Service, serving the metropolitan area of Los Angeles until July 1, 1970.

Private ambulance companies, under City contract, provided emergency service in the San Fernando Valley until 1957, and in West Los Angeles until July 1973. The Fire Department introduced rescue ambulance service in the San Fernando Valley in 1955 by staffing six rescue ambulances with firefighters. The Department introduced two-person Squad units in 1957 to respond to EMS incidents in many parts of the City.

Emergency Response, Saving Lives, Educating We Care!!!



On July 1, 1970, the Receiving Hospital Department was abolished, and the emergency ambulance service was transferred to the Fire Department. With the transfer of the ambulance service to the Fire Department came 121 employees.

In September 1970, the first LAFD paramedic ambulance went into service at Fire Station 53 in San Pedro staffed with dual-function firefighter-paramedics. Within 8 years, 37 paramedic ambulances were placed into service, each staffed with two single-function (non-firefighter) civilian paramedics.

In April 1973, the first Rescue Ambulance (RA) Drill Tower of civilian rescue ambulance personnel was held at Fire Station 40 on Terminal Island with Captain Donald Anthony, now a retired Deputy Chief, as the drillmaster. There would be a total of 33 civilian recruit classes between 1973 and 1990.

From 1973 through 1992, virtually all LAFD rescue ambulances and paramedic positions were staffed with single-function civilian EMT-I's and paramedics.

In February 1978, Department history was made when the first three females were hired as paramedic trainees — Carlesta Johnson (Wells), Sally Byrne (Finney), and Suzanne Tousseau (Ibers). All three females graduated from the paramedic drill tower.

In July 1980, the City Council authorized the hiring of a Chief Paramedic, a Senior Paramedic assigned as the Department's EMS Training Officer, and 24-hour field supervision by Senior Paramedics to improve the management and supervision of the Department's EMS Program.

Nine Senior Paramedics, assigned to the three Division offices and working a platoon-duty schedule, responded to major EMS incidents and assisted the Division Commanders with managing EMS activities. The Chief Paramedic and all Senior Paramedics were single-function civilian paramedics.

In December 1981, an emergency physician (Dr. Marshall Rockwell) was hired to assist with the management of EMS within the Department. The next Medical Advisor was Dr. Gregory Palmer. The current Medical Advisor is Dr. Marc Eckstein.

In December 1983, the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (BEMS) was established and the Chief Paramedic (Jon A. Fasana) became the Bureau Commander. The Ambulance Liaison Officer (Senior Paramedic II Douglas E. Brown) and EMS Bureau Adjutant (Paramedic III William N. Wells) were also assigned.

In October 1992, the Fire Department consolidated the ranks of Firefighter and Paramedic into a single civil service class that would be responsible for extinguishing fires, accomplishing physical rescues and providing all pre-hospital emergency care. This consolidation was the solution for a number of growing problems, including: morale problems; limited workload balancing options; limitations on management flexibility; legal and employee relations difficulties; delays in fielding new resources; and delays in implementing new programs. A single class of Firefighter would lead to unity of command and organizational efficiency.

On October 18, 1992, the single-function EMS personnel ranks were consolidated with existing firefighter ranks.

From 1992 to the present, all new LAFD employees would be Firefighter-EMT-I's, and have the opportunity to be trained as dual-function firefighter-paramedics. Over the next six years, 166 of the 360 single-function paramedics were cross-trained as firefighter-paramedics.

In October 1996, the Department began deploying paramedic assessment engines at fire stations without paramedic ambulances to reduce paramedic response times in remote neighborhoods of the City.

On August 4, 1996, BEMS and the Bureau of Fire Suppression and Rescue (BFS&R) were consolidated into the Bureau of Emergency Services (BES).

On October 16, 2000, a new EMS Assistant Chief position was created to provide management expertise in the coordination and oversight of EMS field activities, policies and procedures. An administrative EMS Division was established within BES with a staff of four.

By July 2000, the LAFD operated 83 rescue ambulances (56 ALS and 27 BLS), 97 Engine companies (27 ALS and 70 BLS), 48 Light Forces (truck and engine) (all BLS), and one paramedic air ambulance (helicopter). However, of the 103 neighborhood fire stations, 44 did not have a paramedic ambulance assigned, 28 did not have any ambulance (ALS or BLS) assigned, and 17 did not have any paramedic resource assigned.

EMS CRISIS IN LOS ANGELES

In September 2000, local newspaper headlines were declaring a paramedic staffing



crisis in the City of Los Angeles. The LAFD had over 100 paramedic vacancies for its 447 paramedic positions on fire engines and ambulances. Firefighter-Paramedics were working excessive and forced overtime to maintain the constant staffing of the resources. Paramedic response times in over a dozen neighborhoods averaged nearly ten minutes. The workload of over one-third of the rescue ambulances, including 22 paramedic ambulances, exceeded the Department's recommended workload guidelines of 350 responses per month. Firefighter-Paramedics were decertifying and requesting to get off the busy paramedic ambulances and back onto fire companies.

The Board of Fire Commissioners conducted four public meetings to study the paramedic staffing problems. City officials, Fire Department management, union leaders, firefighter-paramedics, and members of the medical community participated at the meetings and offered solutions. Within four months, the Fire Department had a plan.

LAFD EMS RESOURCE DEPLOYMENT PLAN

In January 2001, faced with mounting EMS problems, Fire Chief William R. Bamattre introduced a five-year Emergency Medical Services Resource Deployment Plan (EMS Plan). The EMS Plan addressed the Fire Chief's goals of increasing paramedic coverage, improving overall EMS service delivery, and providing a better working environment through reducing workload.

The EMS Plan would manage the significant number of new paramedics, deployment of additional EMS resources, and expansion of EMS field supervision. The five-year Plan would increase the number of paramedics and resources to meet the following objectives:

- Paramedic resource at every fire station
- Ambulance at every fire station
- EMS Captains in every Battalion



- Additional paramedic ambulances to provide workload relief for busy units
- Additional paramedic assessment engines for paramedic personnel rotation

The EMS Plan was endorsed and approved by the Mayor in January 2001. The EMS Plan included hiring and training 500 new paramedics over the next five years and increased EMS field supervision, resource deployment plans and workload relief plans.

During the first year of the EMS Plan (2001/2002):

- Hired 145 new paramedics

- Hired four nurse educators to instruct paramedic continuing education
- Revised EMS dispatch protocols
- Trained LAFD uniformed dispatchers to the National Academy EMD standards

By the end of the first year, the total number of ambulances increased from 83 to 98, the number of paramedic ambulances increased from 56 to 67, the total number of paramedic units increased from 84 to 98, and the number of EMS Captains on-duty increased from 6 to 12.

Paramedic response times decreased from an average of 7.2 minutes to 6.9 minutes Citywide. The number of paramedic ambulances exceeding the workload limit was dramatically reduced from 22 to just 3. The number of fire stations where the

firefighter-paramedics could rotate between the paramedic ambulance and the fire company was increased from 4 to 8. The total number of EMS incidents for the year increased 5% from 261,619 in 2000/2001 to 274,341 in 2001/2002.

By the end of the second year, the total number of ambulances increased from 98 to 115, the number of paramedic ambulances increased from 67 to 72, the total number of paramedic units increased from 98 to 114, and the number of EMS Captains on-duty increased from 12 to 16.

Paramedic response times decreased from an average of 6.9 minutes to 6.8 minutes Citywide.



The number of fire stations where the firefighter-paramedics could rotate between the paramedic ambulance and the fire company was increased from 8 to 15. The total number of EMS incidents increased by 2% from 274,341 to 280,395.

In April 2003, the Department successfully achieved one of the EMS Plan's objectives by deploying at least one paramedic resource in every fire station district in the City.

In June 2003, the Department achieved another objective by deploying EMS Captains in every one of the 16 geographic Battalions, thereby improving EMS supervision, training and management of field personnel. The EMS Captains were assigned to the platoon-duty Battalion Commanders in their respective Battalions.

As of May 2, 2004, the total number of ambulances remains at 115, the number of paramedic ambulances has increased from 72 to 75, the total number of paramedic units has increased from 114 to 120, and the number of EMS Captains on-duty remains at 16.

Paramedic response times are projected to decrease from an average of 6.8 minutes to 6.7 minutes Citywide this year. The number of fire stations where the firefighter-paramedics could rotate between the paramedic ambulance and the fire company has increased from 15 to 26.

Budgetary approval from the City Council and the Mayor was required for each year of the five-year EMS Plan. Fire Chief William R. Bamattre initiated a labor-management executive committee to prioritize, market, and ultimately gain approval of each year's budget request. The labor-management executive committee consisted of members of the Fire Commission, Fire Department management, the firefighters' union (United Firefighters of Los Angeles City Local 112), and the fire chief officers' association (Los Angeles City Chief Officers Association).

EMS PLAN SUMMARY

Fire Chief William R. Bamattre, and the men and women of the LAFD, are pleased with the results of the EMS Plan. Paramedic personnel shortages are a thing of the past, paramedic attrition has been reduced from 15% to 8% annually, paramedic response times have been reduced in nearly every neighborhood of the City, the number of citizen complaints has been reduced, the number of patient lawsuits has virtually been eliminated, the revenue from ambulance transports has increased to over \$44 million annually, and the number of firefighters volunteering to attend paramedic school continues to grow.

The people who live, work and play in the City of Los Angeles are benefiting from the successful implementation of the LAFD five-year EMS Plan.

Currently, the Department has 115 rescue ambulances (75 paramedic and 40 BLS), 3 Paramedic Engines, 35 Paramedic Assessment Engines, 6 Paramedic Assessment Light Forces, 1 Paramedic Air Ambulance, 61 BLS Engines, 43 BLS Light Forces, 5 BLS Fireboats, and 16 EMS Battalion Captains on duty 24-hours a day.

William N. Wells, Captain II-Paramedic
Planning Section



**Captain William Wells has over 30 years experience as an Ambulance Driver, Paramedic, EMS Supervisor and Paramedic Captain with the Los Angeles Fire Department. He is a Past President of United Paramedics of Los Angeles (former LAFD Paramedic Employee Association). For the past six years Captain Wells has worked at Fire Department headquarters in the Planning Section overseeing the creation and implementation of the EMS Plan.*