

[<<Back](#)

Tri-State's Debate Over Emergency Response

Discussions about who will provide La Crosse's emergency response are drawing a passionate response from Tri-State Ambulance, even before mediation begins.

Officials have agreed to a mediation session on July 10th, for the county, Tri-State Ambulance, and area hospitals to discuss emergency response in La Crosse.

There is no formal proposal at this time, but city officials have expressed interest in the fire department taking over some of Tri-State's responsibilities. Tri-State says it doubts the city could match its quality and cost of service.

"I'm going on 14 years and there are plenty of people who have been here 10 to 15 years longer than I have," said Tom Tornstrom, a lead paramedic for Tri-State.

Tornstrom says an experienced emergency response team is crucial when someone calls 9-1-1.

"There's so much to know and so many types of patient conditions that is experience is probably, second to training, the most important thing," said Tornstrom.

Tri-State is worried that if La Crosse's emergency response switches over to the fire department, the quality and cost of response will be compromised.

"The citizens of the community need to understand how their emergency medical system works, how changes in the system may affect them, so they can become advocates for the patients that we serve," said Matt Zavadsky, Director of Tri-State Ambulance.

Fire Chief Gregg Cleveland says no proposal for change exists at this time, and the city only wants to discuss the possibility of change to ambulance response.

"We don't have any preconceived notions about what we want out of this whole process," said Cleveland. "I guess I'm a little bit concerned about the level of dedication to mediation and that is somewhat concerning because our goal is to go into this process with an open mind."

And even though discussion has yet to begin, Tri-State wants to make its opinions known.

Mayor Johnsrud emphasizes that right now the city is in an early discussion phase, and the upcoming mediation is to set parameters for future discussions.

Tri-State will be holding a public forum on the issue this Wednesday starting at 11:30 a.m. at the U-W-L Cleary Alumni Center.



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