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Tri-State Tells Fears, Goals Heading into Medication

Tri-State says it's proud of its service to La Crosse County, which is why they were concerned when city officials in La Crosse asked them into mediation. While they were initially confused over why they meeting was necessary, they are now going into Tuesday's "pre-mediation" with several suggestions to improve the La Crosse's Emergency Response System.

"Our initial thought when the city requested mediation with us was, what is there to mediate? There's not really a dispute or a specific issue," said Matt Zavadsky, Director of Tri-State Ambulance.

"Our workforce is very concerned," said Zavadsky. "They are in emergency medical services because they are health care providers and they want to see the quality of care continued."

Zavadsky and Tri-State worry most that the city of La Crosse will want to share paramedic's responsibilities with city firefighters. Mayor Johnsrud has told Newschannel Eight that this is a possibility. Zavadsky says according to the 2006 Journal of Emergency Medical Services 200-City Survey, a smaller number of well-trained paramedics is best for patient care.

"The more paramedics you have in a system, the worse your patient outcome. Paramedic skills are very difficult to maintain and having a core group of well-experienced paramedics, actually makes the patient outcome better," said Zavadsky.

La Crosse firefighters are already emergency response technicians, which takes about 110 hours of training. Zavadsky says firefighters are crucial for the first steps of emergency response, while they wait for paramedics to arrive. If La Crosse decides to share emergency response between Tri-State paramedics and city officials, additional training would be necessary.

"The paramedic training is totally different, the certification and the skills are totally different. The paramedic training is about 2,000 plus hours of training, including clinical time," said Zavadsky.

City Officials have promised to keep an open mind and say they have no proposals prepared for mediation, but Zavadsky is still going into Tuesday's meeting prepared. Tri-State has already made proposals to help improve response which have been turned into actions. Recently, they implemented Bicycle Medic Teams during special events with large crowds, placed ambulances at strategic locations on the streets around the region to reduce responses to calls, and began electronic patient care reporting on laptop computers with ambulance-based wireless connectivity to dispatch. For Tuesday's meeting, Tri-State is proposing a community health program for at-risk citizens, an independent governing board for future emergency response decision, and positioning fire units in the field to reduce response times as Tri-State has done.

"Let's get together, brainstorm, come up with the ideas we think would really work to benefit the community," said Zavadsky.

And bring together all people who would be impacted by the city's decision, including the surrounding areas. At last Tuesday's city council meeting, some council members expressed concern about whether outlying communities served by Tri-State would be affect by any changes.

"Because our service is 22-hundred square miles and covers 200,000 people, many of those

people have expressed a sincere concern about changes to the system," said Zavadsky.

Tuesday's closed meeting with the city is being called a "pre-mediation, mediation," Its agenda is to set the framework for where the different parties stand, and to decide whether or not to hold a formal mediation.



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