

**Ambulance Services in Washington Parish**

**Comprehensive Review and Recommendations  
To Washington Parish Government and its Council**

**November 27, 2006**

**By**

**James M. Coleman ENP <sup>1</sup>**

### ***Executive Summary***

*This study presents a comprehensive review of the current status of Ambulance Services in Washington Parish and makes a number of recommendations to the Washington Parish Government and its Council.*

*The recommendation made herein, if implemented, will form the foundation for the future of EMS (Emergency Medical Services) in Washington Parish.*

*The recommendations are equally applicable to a multi or to a single agency private system.*

*The findings of this study are summarized as follows :*

- *Since ambulance services in Washington Parish are not required to respond to 9-1-1 calls, even if a unit is available, the public does not have an adequate level of protection.*
- *Since ambulance services in Washington Parish are not required to operate a minimum number of ambulances, the public does not have an adequate level of protection.*
- *Since Paramedic level EMT's are not required to respond to 9-1-1 calls by the State of Louisiana, and there are no local guidelines or requirements, the public does not have an adequate level of protection.*
- *Average response times of ambulances in Washington Parish are on the high end of CAAS (Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services) recommendations.*
- *Dispatch of the closest ambulance is not currently being utilized in Washington Parish thereby slowing response times.*
- *Technology utilized in the majority of Louisiana parishes to lower response times is available but not in use in Washington Parish.*

*Recommendations for improvement include :*

- *Enact comprehensive ordinance which sets minimum standards for ambulance operations in Washington Parish.*
- *Form Washington Parish Ambulance Board to set goals, monitor performance, and monitor corrective and preventive actions of agencies in the EMS system.*
- *Encourage increased utilization of the volunteer fire service to provide first responder EMS services to the citizens of their districts.*
- *Increase the funding of the volunteer fire service by a combination of commercial ambulance service permit fees, contributions of equipment and supplies, and an aggressive parish wide grant process.*

1. James M. Coleman, Emergency Number Professional (ENP), Chairman, Washington Parish Communications District. The Review and Recommendations herein contained are based on the author's observations and study as an independent consultant and do not represent the views of the Washington Parish Communications District.

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### **Washington Parish Ambulance Services – General Comments**

Ambulance services (EMS) are currently being provided to the citizens of Washington Parish by two, advanced life support trained and equipped organizations.

Southland Health Services, Inc, of Vernon, Alabama, dba (doing business as) Emergystat Ambulance Service, currently serves the parish with approximately two, full time ambulances.

Northshore EMS, of Bogalusa, Louisiana, currently serves the parish with approximately five, full time ambulances.

While both ambulance companies respond to 9-1-1 emergency calls, neither company is actually required to do so by ordinance or contract. Both services chose to respond to 9-1-1 calls but are free to decline service if they so chose.

Either ambulance service can chose to decline to respond to a 9-1-1 call for operational or business related reasons. Depending on the circumstances, an ambulance service may either decline in advance from 9-1-1 service for a certain period of time or simply decline to respond at the time a request for assistance is made.

Many ambulance services in the country chose to limit themselves to medical transports between hospitals, nursing homes, doctor's offices, dialysis units, and other medical facilities and therefore decline to respond to emergencies. This choice is generally based on the system within which it operates.

“Transport only” ambulance services usually operate in areas where dedicated “emergency only” ambulances respond to 9-1-1 calls. Such “emergency only” ambulance systems are predominately publicly funded agencies such as Baton Rouge EMS and St. Tammany Fire Protection District 4, Mandeville, Louisiana.

Since there is no such “emergency only” ambulance service in Washington Parish, any commercial ambulance service choosing to operate in the parish should be required to respond to 9-1-1 calls.

To eliminate the potential problem of ambulance services in Washington Parish declining to respond to emergency 9-1-1 calls due to business related issues, it is recommended that all ambulance services in Washington Parish be required to respond to 9-1-1 calls whenever requested by 9-1-1 dispatchers, if a staffed, equipped ambulance is available. Patient or crew safety issues are reasonable exceptions to this mandate. Examples of such safety related issues include weather, road conditions, equipment failures, and civil unrest.

See Section 1.01 of the attached recommended ordinance for enabling language.

### **Washington Parish Ambulance Services - Locations**

In parishes or counties which are serviced by privately owned ambulance companies, the ambulance crew quarters are generally chosen with strong cost component considerations. In this type of system, ambulances are commonly based at rented or leased buildings.

In parishes or counties serviced by publicly funded fire departments or municipal ambulance services, the chief consideration is response time. Ambulances are generally based at fire stations in this type of system. Fire station locations have historically been chosen to insure an adequate response to emergencies.

Washington Parish ambulance companies generally follow the private model, with the one exception being crew quarters being maintained by Northshore in Pine, Louisiana, which is half way from the two population centers of Bogalusa and Franklinton. It is located in Pine primarily based on response time considerations to the middle of the parish and its ability to “swing” to either Bogalusa or Franklinton on an as needed basis.

As an example of the strong influence of cost/revenue considerations in Washington Parish, it must be remembered that previous ambulance stations being utilized by Emergystat in Mt. Hermon, Angie, and the Isabel/Sun area could not be sustained due to a poor revenue/cost ratio.

It is apparent that 9-1-1 ambulance call volume is concentrated in the Bogalusa and Franklinton urban areas. Currently, the eastern portion of the parish generates approximately 60 percent of 9-1-1 ambulance transports and the western portion of the parish generates approximately 40 percent.

It is recommended that, at a minimum, all ambulance services located in Washington Parish should maintain a presence in both the eastern and western portions of the Parish.

This minimum presence will help to ensure appropriate response times to both eastern and western Washington Parish.

See Section 1.01 of the attached recommended ordinance for enabling language.

Without this minimum requirement in place, present or potential ambulance services may attempt to “cherry pick” their area of coverage based on profitability rather than parish wide response issues.

While mandating service areas for ambulance services in Washington Parish above this minimum requirement may be desirable for response time considerations, such is not recommended at this time due to a lack of computer modeling and reliable input data.

The load balancing of multiple ambulance services over multiple service areas requires computer modeling utilizing operations research based queuing theory. Such modeling capability is not currently available for use by this author.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, at this time, ambulance location in excess of the recommended minimum is best left to the empirical decision making of the ambulance companies. While location mandates can be negotiated by contracts, such can not be realistically mandated by ordinance without further study.

Even if in the future, ambulance locations were to be mandated, there will always be areas in Washington Parish to which ambulance response times will be poor. It is therefore suggested that the “Public / Private” EMS model be aggressively implemented in Washington Parish.

This “Public / Private” EMS model is already in use in the Mt. Hermon area through the efforts of Washington Parish Fire District Nine. It is also utilized in other Districts in the Parish, but not by all. In these areas, volunteer first responders, EMT’s, and paramedics respond to both trauma and medical emergencies to render emergency medical services prior to the arrival of the commercial units.

In this “Public / Private” model fast initial response times are maintained while at the same time enabling commercial ambulance services to control costs by the utilization of centralized crew quarters. Cost control for commercial ambulances services is imperative for business longevity, not matter how large the ambulance company may be.

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2. Ball, M.O., Lin, F.L., A Reliability Model Applied to Emergency Service Vehicle Location, *Operations Research*, 41, 18-36, 1993

First responder support by volunteer fire districts does, however, bring a cost with it for equipment and supplies. While funding for equipment and supplies has occasionally been made available by the Washington Parish Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness for first responder EMS activities, the majority of support is for fire fighting.

It is recommended that (a) Washington Parish Fire District Boards approve first response by their personnel to both trauma and medical emergencies, (b) commercial ambulance services adopt line item amounts in their yearly budget to make available equipment, supplies, and training for all fire districts including helicopter landing zone set up and control, (c) the Washington Parish Ambulance Board monitor and coordinate the parish wide implementation of the "Public / Private" EMS model of service and (d) once established, that 9-1-1 operators routinely dispatch the appropriate Fire District to the scene of an EMS emergency.

It is hoped that these recommendations are implemented on a voluntary basis, and thus, are not included in the specific language of the ordinance. It is suggested that the Washington Parish Ambulance Board issue a periodic report as to the effectiveness of this voluntary program.

A minimum level of financial support from government for this badly needed service from all Washington Parish Fire Departments is established, however, as part of the recommended ordinance.

*See Section 4.03 of the attached recommended ordinance for enabling language.*

### **Washington Parish Ambulance Services - Staffing**

The two ambulance services in Washington Parish accomplish both medical transports as well as 9-1-1 emergency calls. Both services determine their level of staffing based on their historical call volume of both emergent and non emergent calls.

Emergent and non-emergent ambulance call data is held privately by the two ambulance services. It is estimated, however, to be approximately 700 transports per month. From a business perspective, it is generally held that approximately 100 to 120 transports per month per ambulance is the minimum required to justify the expenses of an ambulance.

Ambulance expenses have a high personnel cost component. Ambulance crews must be paid whether or not they are engaged in patient care activities that generate revenues. Personnel salaries, given the post Katrina shortage of medical personnel, have escalated faster than otherwise expected.

Based on this rule-of-thumb, the seven ambulances based in Washington Parish is the appropriate number for the call volume *on the average*.

Both ambulance companies are appropriately staffed based on their present average call volumes. One would not expect otherwise, given the cost sensitive nature of the business.

Response to emergency 9-1-1 calls requires, however, that a certain amount of “extra capacity” be available to absorb spikes in call volume. Emergency calls can not be scheduled or delayed in order to average out ambulance loading. The nature of emergency calls requires that the system be over equipped.

With five, full time staffed ambulances, Northshore EMS has a certain amount of extra capacity to absorb spikes in call volume over both the eastern and western coverage areas. Additional units, quickly available during regular business hours, provide additional extra capacity.

Emergystat Ambulance is, however, not appropriately staffed to adequately respond to 9-1-1 calls in both the eastern and western coverage areas due to its inability to absorb these spikes in call volume.

Ambulance services which attempt to cover parish wide emergencies with two ambulances, one in the Franklinton area and one in the Bogalusa area, will consistently find themselves unable to adequately respond to an emergency whenever a single ambulance is occupied by a patient.

It is therefore recommended that the minimum staffing for any Washington Parish based commercial ambulance service should be three units. Such staffing will allow the third unit to swing to either side of the parish depending on unit loading and will minimize the occurrence of a “no coverage situation”.

*See Section 1.01 of the attached recommended ordinance for enabling language.*

Of course, all ambulances operating in Washington Parish should be staffed by appropriately trained and certified personnel. The state of Louisiana requires certain minimum certifications. Paramedics are not required by the state.

The State of Louisiana, as per Revised Statutes, Title 40, Chapter 5, Part VII, Subpart C, Paragraph 1235, requires that,

A.(1) No person or individual shall conduct, maintain, or operate an ambulance on any street, alley, or public way or place in the state unless the ambulance is staffed with a minimum of two persons, one of whom shall be a certified emergency medical technician.

(2)(a) No person or individual shall provide services in any capacity on any ambulance unless he is a certified first responder, a certified emergency medical technician, a licensed registered or practical nurse, or a physician.

It is recommended that within Washington Parish, all ambulances responding to 9-1-1 calls be staffed by at least one paramedic. Response by paramedic ambulances to the scene of an emergency has become the expected level of care by the public and thus, should be so required in Washington Parish.

Additional responding ambulances to the scene of an emergency may be staffed at a lower level, but still within the minimum requirements set by the State of Louisiana.

*See Section 3.0 of the attached ordinance for enabling language.*

### **Ambulance Equipment, Supplies, Drugs, and Treatment Protocols**

The State of Louisiana, as per Revised Statutes, Title 40, Chapter 5, Part VII, Subpart C, Paragraph 1235, requires the Department of Health and Hospitals to set the minimum required medical and safety equipment which shall be carried as part of the regular equipment of every ambulance.

No person shall conduct, maintain, or operate an ambulance which does not carry with it, in fully operational condition, all of the equipment included in the list, which shall be consistent with the scope of practice for emergency medical technicians established in R.S. 40:1234 and which shall be based upon the recommendations of an advisory committee known as the Ambulance Standards Committee.

In Part E of Paragraph 1235, it states that,

E.(1) In a case of a life-threatening situation as determined by a certified emergency medical technician-intermediate or an emergency medical technician-paramedic, when voice contact with a physician or when telemetered electrocardiogram communication is delayed, not possible, or when the delay in treatment could endanger the life of the patient, such a person may render services, in accordance with a protocol that shall be established by the emergency medical services committee or the executive committee of the parish or component medical society, or its designee, until voice or telemetered electrocardiogram communication can be established at the earliest possible time.

It is therefore recommended that appropriate approval of the Washington Parish Medical Society of Ambulance Equipment, Supplies, Drugs, and Treatment Protocols be required to operate an ambulance within Washington Parish.

See Section 4.04 of the attached ordinance for enabling language.

### **Washington Parish Ambulance Services – Call Volumes**

Data collected from the three law enforcement PSAP's (Public Safety Answering Points) reveal that 169 emergency ambulance transports occurred during the thirty day period of mid October to mid November, 2006.

During this same period of time there were 2,224 calls to 9-1-1 for some sort of assistance. This is a typical month's 9-1-1 call volume. Calls for help averaged 74 per day during this time period, as compared to a low of 58 calls per day in January, 2006, and 83 per days during the busiest 2006 month of March.

Based on the October - November data, approximately 7.6 % of 9-1-1 callers are transported by ambulance. The remaining 9-1-1 calls are predominately law enforcement related.

In addition, given that the average total number of transports during a thirty day period is approximately 700, it is apparent that emergency transports from 9-1-1 calls represent approximately 24 % of the ambulance transports in Washington Parish.

Also based on this data, it should be expected that during a typical year, 28,000 calls for assistance will be received by 9-1-1 and that 2,128 patients will be transported by ambulance. During this same year, an additional 6,272 non 9-1-1 related patients will be transported for a yearly total of 8,400 transports.

When analyzed on an "account collectable basis" the number of transports from 9-1-1 calls for which the ambulance services actually get paid falls from 2,128 to 1,064 based on a fifty percent collection rate.

If the collection rate is 80 % for pre-approved transfers between hospitals, nursing homes, doctor's offices, dialysis units, and other medical facilities, the number of non-emergent transports for which the ambulance services actually get paid falls from 6,272 to 5,017.

Therefore, based on paid calls, 9-1-1 represents approximately 17.5 percent of an ambulance company's profits based on volume. Revenues based on treatments performed in route may somewhat alter this calculation.

It is therefore easy to understand that from a business standpoint, the higher collectable, non 9-1-1 transports have a higher impact on profitability than 9-1-1 calls. Thus, given a choice, ambulance services will transport non 9-1-1 patients.

To eliminate the potential problem of ambulance services in Washington Parish declining to respond to emergency 9-1-1 calls due to business related issues, it is recommended that all ambulance services be required to respond to 9-1-1 calls whenever requested by 9-1-1 dispatchers, if a staffed, equipped ambulance is available.

As previously mentioned, patient or crew safety issues are reasonable exceptions to this mandate. Examples of such safety related issues include weather, road conditions, equipment failures, and civil unrest.

*See Section 1.01 of the attached recommended ordinance for enabling language.*

### **Ambulance Response Times**

As a designer of EMS systems, Fitch & Associates, 303 Marshall Road, Box 170, Platte City, MO 64079, recommends urban transport ambulance response time benchmarks ranging from 8:59 to 12:59, depending on a variety of carefully considered system factors.<sup>3</sup>

The Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Standards (CAAS)<sup>4</sup>, which sets standards for the medical transportation industry, prescribes that for “life-threatening requests, the total response-time standard will be eight minutes and fifty-nine seconds, or less, 90% of the time.”

The Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS) was established to encourage and promote quality patient care in America's medical transportation system. Based initially on the efforts of the American Ambulance Association, the independent Commission established a comprehensive series of standards for the ambulance service industry.

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3. Dr. J. Fitch, PhD, Response Times: Myths, Measurement and Management, JEMS, September, 1998.

4. CAAS, 1926 Waukegan Road, Suite 1, Glenview, Illinois 60025-1770  
<http://www.caas.org/caas-standards>

First responders are expected to respond to emergencies more rapidly than ambulances. The National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), which develops standards and codes for fire-safety matters, recommends that fire agency first response time be no more than 4 minutes to arrive at a medical emergency, from time of dispatch to arrival on scene.

The NFPA established this response-time standard based on the American Heart Association's (AHA) recommendations that a cardiac arrest victim be administered CPR or early defibrillation no more than 5 minutes after cardiac arrest begins. Defibrillation consists of administering electrical shocks to the victim to restore the heart's normal rhythm.

According to medical studies, every minute that elapses from the beginning of cardiac arrest decreases the victim's chance of survival by 10%. While NFPA and AHA standards are not mandatory, they serve as useful guides and communities may adopt these standards for assessing first response systems.

Based on recent data from one of the two Washington Parish Ambulance Services, average response time averages approximately 11.1 minutes parish wide. This response time average is on the high end of the expected averages mentioned above.

It is therefore recommended, that a Washington Parish Ambulance Board be established to monitor response times and to set goals and criteria for improvement as part of a parish wide quality improvement effort.

It is a well proven management principle that the monitoring of performance against a set goal or objective will result in improved performance.

*See Sections 4.06 and 5.0 of the attached recommended ordinance for enabling language.*

### **Quality Assurance**

An EMS Quality Assurance program is responsible for ensuring that the level of emergency medical patient care and transportation provided by EMTs is done at a reliable and standard level.

By constantly evaluating patient management and documentation, Quality Assurance is able to recognize strengths and weaknesses in the system and respond as necessary.

An EMS Quality Assurance program helps establish a standard of care and identifies needs for training programs and education to ensure proper and professional care is provided at evolving levels.

The Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS) encourages EMS agencies to have a written continuous quality improvement program tied to its continuing education for all staff.

The Commission requires that reports be issued which identify problem areas, define a path forward for corrective action, and document effective root cause elimination.

The Commission requires that EMS agencies will further show how it tracks these developments for trends and how they analyze them for planned improvements and preventive actions.

Both ambulance services in Washington Parish follow basic quality assurance principles but there is no common monitoring of performance within the parish.

In addition, a common focal point for citizen inputs is not currently in place at a level lower than the Parish Council and Parish President.

It is therefore recommended, that a Washington Parish Ambulance Board be established to monitor citizen inputs, the Quality Assurance efforts of the ambulance services, plus response times. This Board would also identify critical criteria and set goals for improvement.

It is a well proven management principle that the monitoring of performance against a set goal or objective will result in improved performance.

*See Sections 4.06 and 5.0 of the attached recommended ordinance for enabling language.*

### **Washington Parish 9-1-1 General Comments**

In the current system configuration, emergency 9-1-1 calls for assistance are answered by the Bogalusa Police Department, the Franklinton Police Department, and the Washington Parish Sheriff's Office.

Landline 9-1-1 calls from Bogalusa are answered by the Bogalusa Police Department.

Landline 9-1-1 calls from Franklinton are answered by the Franklinton Police Department.

Landline 9-1-1 calls from areas outside the municipal boundaries of Bogalusa and Franklinton are answered by the Washington Parish Sheriff's Office.

Wireless (cell phone) calls are answered by the law enforcement agency assigned to answer the calls received by the tower receiving the cell phone's transmissions. Radio

waves are utilized by cell phones to establish contact with tower. Radio waves are influenced by weather, the time of day, and by other randomly occurring factors.

It is therefore possible that two 9-1-1 calls made from the same house, one from a land line, and one from a cell phone, may arrive at different law enforcement agencies.

Each of the two law enforcement agencies receiving these calls for help operates independently and will most probably not know of the other's call. Therefore, two sets of emergency responders can easily be dispatched to the same location, thereby needlessly tying up valuable resources that may be needed elsewhere.

The Washington Parish Communications District is aggressively pursuing funding to construct a facility located in the center of the parish which would allow centralized 9-1-1 call taking to occur.<sup>5</sup>

Such a facility would help eliminate the confusion inherent in multi-agency ambulance dispatching.

This facility is, however, not expected to become operational before 2008. Thus, the dispatching of ambulances by the current three law enforcement PSAP's will continue for approximately 24 months.

### **Washington Parish 9-1-1 Technology**

In mid 2004, the Communications District, knowing that the parish's 9-1-1 system needed replacement, rebuilt the parish's 911 system from the "ground up" in the existing multiple agency locations.

This new equipment replacement gives the various agency dispatchers modern, capability to (a) answer incoming 9-1-1 calls, (b) transfer 9-1-1 calls to other agencies, (c) automatically detect and answer TDD calls from the hearing impaired, and (d) instant recall recording of 9-1-1 calls.

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5. J.Coleman, <http://www.wpcde-911.com/Katrina/Wash%20Parish%20Proposal.pdf>

In addition to the basic equipment replacement program, the Communications District implemented a cellular phone location, and digital map system. Washington Parish was the fourth parish in the state to have such a capability.

In the first quarter of 2006, the system was further upgraded to provide location data for land based telephone calls. Aerial photography which had already been integrated into the system to provide additional information for the dispatcher was also updated in early 2006.

The Washington Parish Communications District, understanding what the future needs of the parish would be, made sure that the new system could be easily modified to plot the real time location of emergency response vehicles such as ambulances using a combination of GIS and AVL technology.

Fitch & Associates, well known ambulance consultants, went on record in 1998 saying “True progress (in improving ambulance response times) requires working with people, refining work processes and fully using technology. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and automatic vehicle location (AVL) should be required in most areas to facilitate sending the right vehicle to the right call and in the right response mode.”<sup>6</sup>

This visionary statement in 1998 turned out to be “right on the money’ based on more current data.

Seven years later in 2005, a survey of the 200 most populous cities in the United States, conducted by the Journal of Emergency Medical Services (JEMS), revealed that 47 per cent of all EMS systems in 2005 had equipped their ambulances with AVL.<sup>7</sup> In Louisiana, 52% of the parishes are served by ambulances equipped with GPS units.<sup>8</sup>

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6. Dr. J. Fitch, PhD, Response Times: Myths, Measurement and Management, JEMS, September, 1998.
  7. Williams DM. "2005 JEMS 200-city survey: A snapshot of facts & trends to allow you to make benchmarks for your service.". JEMS February, 2006; 44 – 101.
  8. Acadian Ambulance Service, <http://www.acadian.com/aboutus-servicearea.html>

As an example, according to the Mayor's Office of Operations, the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) began outfitting ambulances in November of 2005 with automatic vehicle locators (AVL) and all ambulances were equipped by the end of the fiscal year. The Department expects to realize improvements in ambulance response times with AVL because it provides real-time updates on units' locations, allowing for more efficient dispatching.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly progressive EMS systems are utilizing GPS technology to improve response times.

Response is often slowed by the confusion of not knowing exactly at what address help is needed at, and not knowing how to get there.

Not being able to understand an emotional caller's speech in a stressful situation contributes to the confusion of not knowing exactly at what address help is needed.

While the law enforcement dispatcher is able to read the address on the 9-1-1 screen, the ambulance company representative who receives the forwarded 9-1-1 call, does not have the same type of modern equipment found at the main 9-1-1 answering points. Thus, ambulance personnel can not read the address and response times are slowed.

Once the address is known, the location must be manually found by ambulance personnel on hard copy maps which are often not current. During the past nine months approximately 50 new road names have been established in Washington parish.

Road changes are quickly added to the parish's electronic 9-1-1 maps but updates to commercial paper maps usually take a year or more to be published.

Not knowing how to get to the scene of an emergency slows ambulance response times. This confusion can exist both at the ambulance company's dispatch location and in the ambulance itself.

Since average response times in Washington Parish are longer than optimum based on CAAS standards, improvement efforts by utilizing improved technology is warranted.

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9. Nicholas Scoppetta, "Fire Department", Mayors Management Report 2006, 119 – 121.

It is thus recommended that the Washington Parish Communications District set voice and data communications criteria to allow operability and interoperability with other Washington Parish agencies including 9-1-1. This criteria will specify equipment options to be installed both in the ambulance and at the ambulance company's dispatch facility.

Once set, the criteria must be met by ambulance services wishing to operate in the parish.

See Sections 4.05 of the attached recommended ordinance for enabling language.

### **Ambulance Dispatching**

While there have been some short term changes in procedure, each law enforcement agency (called a PSAP in 9-1-1 terminology) has historically assigned an emergency ambulance 9-1-1 call to an ambulance company on a rotating basis.

Paul Linee of GeoComm, Inc., in his 2003 report to the Washington Parish Communications District said, "With all three PSAP's involved in EMS (Emergency Medical Service) response assignments without any coordination between PSAP's, there is apparently a current inability to effectively coordinate their response in the present system and process. This is a liability risk and may occasionally delay the response of ambulances to emergencies."<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Linee went on to say, "Because two EMS providers are competing for service in the parish, with no apparent jurisdictional boundaries present, such EMS calls are handled on a "rotation basis", much like some PSAPs coordinate try and "spread the business around" for local tow companies."

The report continues, "The obvious difference between tow trucks and EMS responders is the importance of a timely response to patient outcome. Because of this EMS provider rotation arrangement (in conjunction with three PSAPs attempting to follow their own rotation scheme) no single PSAP is presently able to necessarily ensure that the closest EMS unit responds to medical emergencies. AVL or Automatic Vehicle Location could be a particular aid in these areas."

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8. Paul Linee ENP, "Consolidating the Public Safety Answering Points in Washington Parish, Louisiana, 2004: pg 9.

If Mr. Linee's recommendation is adopted to dispatch the closest ambulance to an emergency call, the various dispatch agencies must (a) be able to understand on a real time basis where ambulances are located and whether or not they are available to respond, and, (2) be able to administratively handle the documentation inherent in the process.

The ability to furnish the law enforcement dispatcher with real time ambulance location data to enable a judgment to be made as to the nearest ambulance is currently achievable with modest equipment additions in the ambulances and at the 9-1-1 dispatch positions.

In addition, the improved system will automatically record ambulance locations throughout the day and thus, will serve as a record which will prove useful in the quality assurance efforts of all concerned.

Average response times can be reduced by dispatching the closest available ambulance, and thus, such is recommended with some "common sense tweaking" to allow for flexibility when such is warranted.

Providing 9-1-1 dispatchers and ambulance company personnel with real time ambulance location data is provided for in Section 4.05 of the attached recommended ordinance.

It is further recommended that the Washington Parish Communications District provide dispatch agencies with "Standard Operating Guidelines" to be used in the handling of 9-1-1 calls and the dispatch of secondary agencies such as Fire Departments and Ambulance Services.

*See Sections 4.05 of the attached recommended ordinance for enabling language..*

## **Summary**

This study presents a comprehensive review of the current status of Ambulance Services in Washington Parish and makes a number of recommendations to the Washington Parish Government and its Council.

The recommendation made herein, if implemented, will form the foundation for the future of EMS (Emergency Medical Services) in Washington Parish.

The recommendations are equally applicable to a multi or to a single agency private system.

The findings of this study are summarized as follows :

- Since ambulance services in Washington Parish are not required to respond to 9-1-1 calls, even if a unit is available, the public does not have an adequate level of protection.
- Since ambulance services in Washington Parish are not required to operate a minimum number of ambulances, the public does not have an adequate level of protection.
- Since Paramedic level EMT's are not required to respond to 9-1-1 calls by the State of Louisiana, and there are no local guidelines or requirements, the public does not have an adequate level of protection.
- Average response times of ambulances in Washington Parish are on the high end of CAAS (Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services) recommendations.
- Dispatch of the closest ambulance is not current being utilized in Washington Parish.
- Technology utilized in the majority of Louisiana parishes to lower response times is available but not in use in Washington Parish.

Recommendations for improvement include :

- Enact comprehensive ordinance which sets minimum standards for ambulance operations in Washington Parish.
- Form Washington Parish Ambulance Board to set goals, monitor performance, and monitor corrective and preventive actions of agencies in the EMS system.
- Increase the utilization of the volunteer fire service to provide first responder EMS services to the citizens of their districts.
- Increase the funding of the volunteer fire service by a combination of commercial ambulance service permit fees, contributions of equipment and supplies, and an aggressive parish wide grant process.

**WASHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL  
ORDINANCE No. 07-000**

**Introduced by :**

**Introduced on :**

**Public Hearing Date :**

An ordinance authorizing Washington Parish government to set standards for the operation of ambulances within the parish and to require permits based on the criteria contained therein.

**WHEREAS** State Law, as defined in Louisiana Revised Statutes 40:1231 et seq., Emergency Medical Service, sets EMS standards in Louisiana,

**WHEREAS** State Law as defined in Louisiana Revised Statutes and 33:4791.1 Regulation by Local Governing Authorities of ambulance services, emergency medical services, and aspects attendant to ambulance operation, provides that :

Municipalities and other local governing authorities may regulate privately operated ambulance services, the furnishing of emergency medical services, and any and all aspects attendant to ambulance operation.

**WHEREAS** the Washington Parish Council finds and declares the following:

- (1) The provision of consistently high quality emergency medical care, and any and all aspects attendant to ambulance operation to be provided within a medically acceptable response time is essential to the health, safety, and welfare of the parish and its people.
- (2) Privately operated ambulance services providing patient transportation service or emergency medical services fulfill a vital health and safety need within the parish. The operation of such ambulance services operated within its jurisdiction enables the parish to provide the benefits of privately operated, demand-responsive ambulance services to its people.
- (3) The economic viability and stability of such privately operated ambulance services are consequently a matter of parish wide importance.
- (4) The policy of this parish is to promote medically acceptable and reliable, privately operated ambulance services, the furnishing of emergency medical services, and any and

all aspects attendant to ambulance operations in order to provide the benefits of that service to its citizens.

**WHEREAS** In furtherance of this policy, the parish recognizes and affirms that the regulation of such privately operated ambulance service is an essential governmental function.

**WHEREAS** Any municipality or other local governing authority is authorized to carry out the provisions of Louisiana Revised Statutes and 33:4791.1 as acts of government on behalf of the state as sovereign.

**WHEREAS** All immunity of the state of Louisiana from liability under antitrust law is extended to any municipality or other governing authority acting within the scope of authority contained in Louisiana Revised Statutes and 33:4791.1 and, when so acting, a municipality or other local governing authority shall be presumed to be acting in furtherance of state policy.

**WHEREAS**, it is necessary protect the public health, safety, and welfare by licensing, controlling, and regulating by ordinance or resolution privately operated ambulance services, the furnishing of emergency medical services, and any and all aspects attendant to ambulance operations within the jurisdiction of the governing authority.

**THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED** by Washington Parish Government, through its Council, duly convened as required by applicable federal and state law and regulations, that it does hereby enact the following ordinance.

## **Section 1.00 - Adoption of State Law Concerning Emergency Medical Services**

State Law, as defined in Louisiana Revised Statutes 40:1231 et seq., Emergency Medical Service, and Louisiana Revised Statutes and 33:4791.1 Regulation by Local Governing Authorities of ambulance services, emergency medical services, and aspects attendant to ambulance operation, are hereby adopted by this governing authority.

### **Section 1.01 - Parish Standards for Service Providers**

No ambulance service, or emergency medical service shall be granted the right to operate medical transportation vehicles in Washington Parish unless they are duly authorized and permitted by Washington Parish.

Providers of this service are required to respond to 9-1-1 calls for assistance when dispatched to do so, if a staffed, equipped ambulance is available by the provider; unless crew or patient safety issues are present to make such response unsafe.

Providers of this service are required to stage ambulances in the both the Eastern and Western portions of Washington Parish as a minimum.

Providers of this service are required to operate a minimum of three ambulances on a 24 hour and day, seven day a week basis unless an incident considered an "Act of God" occurs. An "Act of God" is defined as a natural event, not preventable by any human agency, such as flood, storms, hurricanes, snow, lightning, or fire.

## **Section 2.00 - Definitions**

(1) "Ambulance" means any authorized emergency vehicle, equipped with warning devices, designed and operated as a part of a regular course of conduct or business to transport a sick or injured individual or which is advertised or otherwise held out to the public as such. "Ambulance" shall not mean a hearse or other funeral home vehicle utilized for the transportation of the dead.

(2) "Ambulance service" or "ambulance provider" means any person, firm, association, or government entity owning, controlling, or operating any business or service which furnishes, operates, conducts, maintains, advertises, engages in, proposes to engage in, or professes to engage in the business or service of transporting, in ambulances, individuals who may need medical attention during transport. However, "ambulance service" and "ambulance provider" shall not include any of the following:

- (a) An agency of the federal government.
- (b) A volunteer nonprofit organization or municipal nonprofit organization operating an invalid coach or coaches.
- (c) An entity rendering assistance to a licensed ambulance or ambulances in the case of a major disaster.
- (d) A licensed hospital providing non-emergency, non-critical inter-hospital transfer and patient transportation for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes when such transportation originates at a licensed hospital.
- (e) An entity operating an ambulance or ambulances from a location outside of the state to transport patients from a location outside of the state to a location

- inside the state or to transport a patient or patients from a medical facility inside of the state to a location outside of the state.
- (f) An entity providing transportation to employees who become sick or injured during the course of their employment from a job site to the nearest appropriate medical facility.
- (3) "Certified emergency medical technician" means an individual who is certified as any one of the following:
- (a) A certified emergency medical technician-basic.
  - (b) A certified emergency medical technician-intermediate.
  - (c) A certified emergency medical technician-paramedic.
- (4) "Certified emergency medical technician-basic" means an individual who has successfully completed an emergency medical technician-basic training program developed and promulgated by the United States Department of Transportation and adopted by the bureau, who is nationally registered, and who is certified by the bureau.
- (5) "Certified emergency medical technician-intermediate" means any individual who has successfully completed an emergency medical technician-intermediate training program developed and promulgated by the United States Department of Transportation and adopted by the bureau, who is nationally registered, and who is certified by the bureau.
- (6) "Certified emergency medical technician-paramedic" means any individual who has successfully completed an emergency medical technician-paramedic training program developed and promulgated by the United States Department of Transportation and adopted by the bureau, who is nationally registered, and who is certified by the bureau.
- (7) "Certified first responder" means any individual who has successfully completed a training course developed and promulgated by the United States Department of Transportation and adopted by the bureau and who is certified by the bureau.
- (8) "Bureau" means the Department of Health and Hospitals, office of public health, bureau of emergency medical services.

### **Section 3.00 - Ambulance Staffing Requirement**

Any vehicle operated as an ambulance for transportation within Washington Parish on an emergency basis or dispatched through by a 9-1-1 Operations Center or law enforcement agency or called by a private individual shall meet all criteria established for emergency calls.

The staffing level must be at least one (1) EMT-Paramedic and one (1) EMT-Basic. A Louisiana certified First Responder may be substituted for the EMT-Basic, for the first two years of this ordinance.

(a) A second ambulance respondent to the same location or incident shall be staffed by at least two (2) persons certified as EMT-Basic. A Louisiana certified First Responder may be substituted for one EMT-Basic, for the first two years of this ordinance.

(b) An ambulance responding to a routine call or non-emergency call shall be staffed by at least two (2) certified as EMT-Basic. A Louisiana certified First Responder may be substituted for one EMT-Basic, for the first two years of this ordinance.

## **Section 4.00 - Ambulance Services Permit**

A permit shall be an authorization to operate an ambulance for transportation services within Washington Parish. A permit shall be necessary for any services in which point of origination and destination are within Washington Parish. It shall be granted to providers who hold applicable business permits to operate a business within Washington Parish, and this may be the owner, agent or authorized party representing the company.

### **Section 4.01 - Permit Required**

No person, either as owner, agent or otherwise, shall furnish, operate, conduct, maintain, advertise or otherwise engage in or profess to engage in providing medical transportation vehicle services in this Parish unless that person holds a currently valid permit to do so as issued by the governing body of Washington Parish.

### **Section 4.02 - Requirements for Ambulance Permit**

Application for permit for each ambulance shall be granted yearly by the Washington Parish Permit Office upon:

- (1) Provision of proof of current ambulance certification issued by the State of Louisiana;
- (2) Provision of proof of vehicle and general liability insurance;
- (3) Provision of proof of ability to meet regulations as set forth within this ordinance,

(4) No ambulance permit shall be issued prior to obtaining a letter from the Washington Parish Medical Society that the criteria within Section 403.04 of this ordinance have been met.

(5) No ambulance permit shall be issued prior to obtaining a letter from the Washington Parish Communications District that the criteria within Section 403.05 of this ordinance has been met.

(6) No ambulance permit shall be issued prior to obtaining a letter from the Washington Parish Ambulance Board that the criteria within Section 403.06 of this ordinance has been met.

### **Section 4.03 - Annual Permit Fee**

An annual fee of One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) for each permit issued shall be collected by the Washington Parish Permit Office. This fee shall be dedicated to the support of the Washington Parish Fire Department's EMS First Responder programs.

### **Section 4.04 - Medical Society Criteria To Be Met**

Any ambulance operating in Washington Parish shall meet criteria established by Washington Parish Medical Society as to treatment protocols and the minimum equipment, supplies, and drug list(s).

In no case shall the Parish Medical Society set minimums which are less than mandated by the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health, Bureau of Emergency Medical Services.

### **Section 4.05 - Washington Parish Communications District Criteria To Be Met**

Any ambulance operating in Washington Parish shall meet voice and data communications criteria established by the Washington Parish Communications District. These criteria set minimum standards for voice and data connections to the Washington Parish 9-1-1 system.

Washington Parish Communications District shall provide dispatch agencies with "Standard Operating Guidelines" to be used in the handling of 9-1-1 calls and the dispatch of secondary agencies such as Fire Departments and Ambulance Services.

## **Section 4.06 - Washington Parish Ambulance Board Criteria To Be Met**

Any ambulance operating in Washington Parish shall meet response time and quality assurance related criteria established by the Washington Parish Ambulance Board

### **Section 4.06 - Permit Not Transferable**

No certificated, provisional certification, permit, temporary permit, license or temporary permit, license or temporary license issued under this Section shall be assignable or transferable by the person to whom it is issued. It may be transferable by the Washington Parish Council.

### **Section 4.07 - Suspension For Violators**

A violation of any of the above sections would be cause for a suspension of said permit for a period of thirty (30) days.

A second or subsequent violation within a three (3) year period would be cause for said permit to be suspended for a period of ninety (90) days.

A recommendation for suspension can be made to the Washington Parish Council by the Washington Parish Medical Society, the Washington Parish Communications District, or the Washington Parish Ambulance Board for non-compliance to criteria.

The Washington Parish Council shall have the power of permit suspension.

### **Section 4.08 - Volunteer Fire Departments Exempt**

Washington Parish Volunteer Fire Departments are exempt from all portions of this ordinance.

### **Section 4.09 - Exemption Current Ambulance Permit - Mutual Aide Services**

Mutual Aide Services who are requested by the Parish or by a provider with a current ambulance permit, to enter the Parish to provide care service on a mutual aide basis, shall not be required to obtain said permits. In the event a currently permitted provider requests assistance, the ambulance permit will be extended to provide coverage for the mutual aide service.

## **Section 5.00 - Establishment of Washington Parish Ambulance Board**

The Washington Parish Ambulance Board is herein established to develop, monitor, and certify compliance to response time and quality assurance related criteria.

This board shall consist of seven members, appointed by the Parish President and confirmed by the Washington Parish Council.

The board shall include the Washington Parish Communications District's Physician Medical Director and one EMT-Paramedic not employed by any ambulance service holding a permit to operate in Washington Parish.

The above and foregoing having been submitted to a vote, the vote thereupon resulted as follows:

**YEAS :**

**NAYS :**

**ABSENT :**

The ordinance was declared adopted on the xx<sup>th</sup> day of xx, 2007.

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Darwin Sharp, Chairman  
Washington Parish Council

Delivered to the Parish President on  
\_\_\_\_\_, 2007 at \_\_\_\_\_

Returned to the Clerk of the Council on  
\_\_\_\_\_, 2007 at \_\_\_\_\_

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M.E."Toye" Taylor, Parish President  
Washington Parish Government