

Story originally printed in the La Crosse Tribune or online at <http://www.lacrossetribune.com>

Onalaska fire chief backs EMD

By DAN SPRINGER | La Crosse Tribune

ONALASKA, Wis. — The concept of forming an Emergency Medical Dispatch operation in La Crosse County got a thumbs up Wednesday night from Onalaska Fire Chief Don Dominick.

But Dominick said he is not ready to support having Tri-State Ambulance and Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center run the operation.

As a member of the county's Public Safety Communications Governing Board, Dominick had spoken out strongly against the proposal April 30 to have medical emergency calls forwarded to a Gundersen Lutheran dispatcher who would provide medical advice once emergency crews were sent.

Dominick told the commission Wednesday he opposed the proposal because the private agencies wanted to begin the service first and then form a local task force on how it should operate.

"It seemed backwards," Dominick said when asked why he was against the idea. "If you have policies and procedures, we would know about the implementation as we move forward."

Last month, the county's governing board was prepared to vote on refusing the proposal. But that motion was pulled to make way for a second motion to table Tri-State's proposal to look into whether the county could operate the EMD.

At the earlier meeting, Dominick's most vocal opposition was to a part of the plan that would allow dispatchers to recommend whether crews should respond with full lights and sirens. He argued that would place emergency personnel at legal liability if they have an accident while running lights and sirens when they were advised otherwise.

Wednesday, he also questioned how the private agencies would fund the program.

Tri-State and Gundersen Lutheran told the county board last month they would operate the EMD at no cost to taxpayers and would pass the cost on to

those who used the ambulance service.

Dominick said he is not prepared to approve a program when he doesn't know how much it will cost the users.

Onalaska Police Chief Randy Williams, who chairs the governing board, said the board will further consider the proposal May 30 when the head of the county's dispatch center will give a presentation on whether the county could operate the EMD.

The commission did not take a stance on the issue because it was not listed on the agenda, commission President Mary Anderson said.

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