



To: City Council Members
From External Affairs, Gundersen Lutheran

Re: Tri-State Ambulance Quality and Availability

10/20/08

The City has announced plans to form a fact-finding commission to assess the emergency medical transport system in La Crosse. We welcome the opportunity to have an independent review of the situation by someone knowledgeable in the complex world of Emergency Medical Services. We are proud of Tri-State's performance and will share our results with anyone, anytime.

We still feel the best, long-term solution to this issue is development of a county-wide EMS Commission, charged with ensuring people throughout La Crosse County have access to high quality, affordable pre-hospital care. This ordinance is scheduled to go before the County Board in November and we encourage the La Crosse City Council to pass the same proposal.

A position paper has been recently published on the Fire Department's website, which misrepresents Tri-State's response time and the concept that increasing the number of paramedics in a system results in decreased skill levels.

The document says Tri-State's response time was over the target of 7 minutes, 54 seconds 90 percent of the time, when in fact the opposite is true. Tri-State responded to 90 percent of calls in the City within or under the 7 minute, 54 second target. In fact, Tri-State arrives simultaneously with or before the La Crosse Fire Department nearly 47% of the time. Of the 7,500 calls Tri-State responded to in the City, during the time period cited in the report, 17 have been questioned by the Fire Chief regarding response times. That's .022%, an excellent record by anyone's standards. And many of those 17 were non-emergency transports as defined through Emergency Medical Dispatch, which means Tri-State responds without lights and sirens—details of the circumstances are available if anyone is interested.

The conclusion of the Milwaukee study, which was not referenced in the position paper, was that technical skills decreased as the number of paramedics in a system went up. That's further validation that quality of care could be diminished by adding Fire Department paramedics in La Crosse.

We take great pride in the fact that Tri-State paramedics have achieved triple the national average for cardiac arrest survival, we feature dual paramedics on ambulances, and our average urban response time is 5 minutes, 20 seconds, all with no taxpayer support.

We recognize that as a City Council member you have important work to do solving difficult problems...creating jobs, lowering taxes, improving education, meeting needs for basic services, making La Crosse a healthier place to live and a destination site for businesses and individuals. Pre-hospital emergency medical needs are met today by a high-quality service with no taxpayer subsidies. We know you need to use your time on these important issues, and want to make sure you have the information that you need to be assured that Tri-State is meeting the needs of La Crosse and the surrounding communities without using additional public resources or tax dollars. Please do not hesitate to call us if you have a questions or concern.

For more information contact Joan Curran or Emily Hiatt at Gundersen Lutheran External Affairs, (608) 775-3133.