

## Ambulance Provider Affected by Higher Fuel Costs

It seems like everyone is getting hurt hard by raising gas prices... and that includes ambulance provider Tri-State.

They have seen their fuel expense increase by sixty-five percent over the last year.

But, as News 19's Sarah Alain explains... the ambulance company is finding ways to cope... without passing the cost on to patients.

Rich says, "Hello this is Tri-State"

Tri-State ambulance provides service to patients in a twenty two hundred square mile radius.

Tri-State Director Matt Zavadsky says, "Running around the community, everything from Richland County all the way through here."

The miles rack up fast... and lately, so do fuel prices.

Rich says, "Typically we fill up ambulance once a day."

Sarah Alain says "Paramedic say they don't like to let their gas gage get below half full... so they fill up, and when they do it can cost anywhere from 90 to one hundred dollars."

It didn't use to cost as much.

Last year... fuel cost Tri-State about 26 cents a mile.

Now... it's costing them about 43 cents.

They're paying 65 percent more in fuel prices.

But, despite the cost, it's business as usual.

Zavadsky says, "Our service hasn't changed. We have to have the ambulance on the street and they have to respond to calls, so it's not like we can change our operation, so we have to find savings in operating to offset the rise in fuel."

Offsetting the cost includes, stretching every dollar and working with the system.

Since Tri-State is a non-profit organization... they've been able to great a break on gas taxes...

And many companies that used to charge Tri-state surcharges for gas... have dropped them...

Zavadsky says, "We'll actually have gone to our vendors and said very we can't pass that on to our patients so can you help us."

Paramedics are also trying to conserve on gasoline.

Rich says, "We eliminated all unessential trips."

These steps have helped, but Tri-State employees are still feeling the pinch.

Zavadsky says, "We're also quite frankly not giving our employees the rise they would like to give them."

Thankfully employees like Rich and his partner Nick... care more about saving lives.

Rich says, "We'll make it work."

In La Crosse, Sarah Alain... News 19.

Tri-State has 60 full time employees and 14 vehicles.

Last month, they paid more than 13 thousand dollars in fuel expenses.

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