LAKEHEAD FIRE DEPARTMENTS
MUTUAL AID ASSOCIATION
www.north-link.net/lakehead

January 13, 2006

Mayo Medical Transport            EMSRB
200 First Street SW                2829 University Av. S. E. Suite 310
Rochester, MN 55905               Minneapolis, MN 55414-3250

Dear Gold Cross Ambulance Management and EMSRB,

The Lakehead Mutual Aid Association, which is made up of 30 fire departments in southern St. Louis County has previously brought two concerns regarding Gold Cross Ambulance to the attention of Mr. Matt Will of Gold Cross. These safety concerns have not been resolved. The first concern relates to Gold Cross Dispatch in Rochester initiating a scene launch with Luke’s One Helicopter Service without notifying either St. Louis County 9-1-1 staff or the responding Fire/EMS agencies. The second concern involves ambulances responding to incidents without monitoring the rural Fire/EMS channel while enroute and not communicating with incident command when making transport or other changes while on scene.

When Rochester initiates an auto launch in southern St. Louis County without making notification to the 9-1-1 communications center staff, it becomes a problematic situation for everyone involved. First there is no coordination or communication among the involved agencies to prepare for an air transport. This occurred on October 26th, 2005 when Lukes One was dispatched to an intercept with Meadowlands Ambulance at the Grand Lake Fire Hall per Gold Cross Ambulance’s request. The helicopter crew called Grand Lake Fire Department for landing zone information. Grand Lake FD was not aware of the response, considerable air communication traffic ensued between 3 other fire departments that were also on medical calls at the same time, everyone trying to find out who called for air medical. When air medical is dispatched by St. Louis County 9-1-1, all responding agencies are informed of such so they may plan accordingly. Secondly, the helicopter arrives to a scene without a secured landing zone location. When air medical is dispatched by 9-1-1 the jurisdictional fire department is dispatched at the same time to set up the landing zone. Setting up a landing zone requires both time and personnel, it is essential departments receive a timely notice.

An Air Medical response policy for southern St. Louis County was developed through Arrowhead EMS in cooperation with the affected user agencies, both air medical providers, and 9-1-1 communications staff. The policy was approved and adopted by our 9-1-1 User Board. It outlines a prescribed protocol for dispatching air medical to an incident. Specifically, it addresses the process for establishing a landing zone, as well as for identifying the designated radio tower for communication and coordination with Incident Command. In addition, it identifies an alternate day response opportunity for
both air services.

We request that Gold Cross Dispatch contact the St. Louis County 9-1-1 center to inform them of air medical scene launches in southern St. Louis County. The 9-1-1 staff will then page fire Departments and First Responders in accordance with the established policy, thereby making the process run more smoothly for everyone involved. Please find a copy of the policy attached.

The second concern the Association would like to have addressed is having the responding ambulance crew switching to or at least monitoring rural Fire/EMS radio frequency which all of our Departments except the city of Duluth Fire Department operate on. First responders are attempting to contact the responding crew on a daily basis to give a patient update or additional information and need to ask 911 dispatch to contact the crew on the Gold Cross channel and ask them to switch frequencies. This process takes time, ties up the 911 Dispatcher, and is unnecessary. The Association would like to request that you advise all your crews to at least monitor Fire/EMS. For the NIMS and ICS systems to work effectively, all agencies must communicate and follow established ICS protocols.

Some fire departments are asking that the Lakehead Mutual Aid Association be actively involved in future discussions on ambulance response regions. Many of the townships could be served by ALS ambulance services with a shorter response time than currently exists. We request the EMSRB and Gold Cross Ambulance look at ALS response regions in the southern ½ of St. Louis County and set a meeting date for joint discussions.

The Lakehead Mutual Aid Association works hard to maintain a good working environment between all agencies within southern St. Louis County and would like to continue working well with your service. Addressing these two issues and coming up with a working solution will help all of us with our ultimate goal, giving the highest level of patient care to our community. Please contact me with any questions or to discuss these issues further to come up with a solution.

Yours in public safety,

Kurt Rogers
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