



**SAWYER COUNTY AMBULANCE
STATE OF THE STATE REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
December 15, 2016**

Initial Findings

In an effort to determine the needs for Sawyer County Ambulance, it seemed appropriate to review all aspects of the Department. The category sections in the full report will be used for that review, which is based on the National standards that have been identified by the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS)

The review and subsequent full report will provide recommendations and options for the County to use now and in the future when assessing department needs. This review is designed to gain insight on current service administration, operations, rules, regulations, personnel procedures, operating procedures and provide recommendations on future departmental needs, both short- and long-term. Further, an evaluation of the overall organization and staffing levels will be reviewed with a recommended timeline for implementation. As part of the review, an analysis of equipment and vehicles will be assessed. Equipment needs will be based on the services currently offered and recommendations will be made based on the scope of services offered both now and in the future. Further, this report will make recommendations on the need for full-time staffing and will determine the best locations for ambulance stations. This will be based on careful evaluation of total call volume, location and frequency of calls in various sections of the County and the associated response times.

This executive summary is not intended to address all of the areas of the Service that are being reviewed. A more detailed report will be forthcoming that will drill down into many areas that will need more work from the Department and support from the County. The executive summary is intended to provide initial recommendations on the most pressing issues, therefore providing County Administration guidance in moving forward.

The pressing issues that I have been confronted with from the start of this service evaluation, as well as an area that I have received the most comment about, has centered around three major areas. **First, does the service need full-time personnel? Second, where should personnel be stationed? Third, current status of the Ambulance Fleet.** Because this evaluation was commissioned very late in the County budget process



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it has been difficult to delve deeply into the many other areas that a review of this nature would encompass. As a result, and at the request of the County Administrator and the Chair of Public Safety Committee, this executive summary will focus on those three issues.

The Sawyer County Ambulance service currently provides service to the entire County. The County is one of three counties in the State of Wisconsin that provides this service for the entire County. There are other counties in the State that have partial county provided services, but just three are full county services. Sawyer County is the only one of the three that does not have full-time staffing of response personnel. Currently, the only full-time employee is the Service Director.

Maintaining this model is important for several reasons. The cost to the citizens is more evenly dispersed over a larger population base, which reduces duplication of equipment, personnel, etc. Further, countywide services are the only EMS services in the State of Wisconsin that are allowed to exceed the tax levy limit. The importance of this option is that it allows the County to provide the level of services that the community expects.

The issues that are present in Sawyer County are also present in many other communities in the State. Therefore, to begin to address some of the issues, the State of Wisconsin's Legislature has commissioned a Legislative Council Study Committee. This committee is made up of Legislators, industry experts and interested citizens. The Study Committee is charged with examining issues related to the shortage of volunteer firefighters and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) in the state, particularly in rural areas. Also, the charge is to recommend ways to retain volunteers and propose measures to address the shortage. Specifically, the Study Committee shall study all of the following:

- the magnitude of volunteer shortages, the areas of the state most affected, and the potential impact of shortages on public health and safety and economic development;
- whether current training and continuing education requirements contribute to the shortage;



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- relationships between full-time and volunteer emergency response departments and the impact that the shortage of volunteers has on non-volunteer departments in neighboring communities; and
- whether the creation of organizations, particularly in rural areas, may help address the shortage. The committee shall develop legislative options to meet the needs of full-time and volunteer fire departments, including proposals designed to increase the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters throughout the state.

The link below will provide more specific information regarding the study. At the writing of this report, the committee has not as yet made any recommendations for the issues and concerns that were brought forward during hearings.

<http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lc/study/2016/1498>

The purpose for mentioning this study in the report is to call out the significant issues in the State as well as nationally with regard to EMS workforce shortages. Sawyer County has been fortunate in that its EMS workforce had been relatively stable. However, Sawyer County, like the rest of the state, has begun to experience difficulty replacing employees and will continue to experience this growing trend going forward.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Findings

At the present time, the department has 1 Full-time Director, 16 Basic EMT's, 20 EMT-Advanced, and 8 Paramedics. The department responds to approximately 2,500 calls for service per year. The department should be commended for the operational plan that provides the coverage for this number of calls, with essentially all part-time paid on call staff.



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There are approximately 575 interfacility transfers each year. An interfacility transfer is best described as a call from a medical facility (hospital) to transfer a critically injured or ill patient to another facility (hospital) that can better treat the patient's condition. Many times, these are patients that the ambulance picks up from the scene then takes to the local hospital. Once evaluated, the local hospital determines that the patient's condition warrants the need to be transferred to a facility that can better manage the patient's needs and then requests a transfer.

It should be understood that the provision of ambulance service is NOT a positive revenue stream. The cost of services (known as the cost of readiness) far outreaches the revenue generated from providing the service. However, providing interfacility transfers provides more revenue than a typical local emergency call. Therefore, on the surface, transfers can bolster the overall revenue picture. Other factors must be considered to determine if increased revenues offset the additional cost of providing the transfer (additional labor costs, depreciation on equipment, wear and tear on the ambulances causing an increased replacement schedule, etc...). This will be analyzed further in the detailed report.

Recommendations

- **Develop a deployment plan for the addition of full-time personnel.**
- **Option 1: Hire 9 full-time Paramedics and 6 full-time EMT's. This will provide 2 full-time staffed ambulances 24 x 7 x 365. This will also provide 1 full-time Paramedic for the fly car.**
- **Option 2: Hire 12 full-time Paramedics and 6 full-time EMT's. This will provide 2 full-time staffed ambulances 24 x 7 x 365. This will also provide 2 full-time Paramedics for the fly car 24 x 7 x 365.**
- **Maintain an on call pay program for the staffing of satellite stations.**



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STATION LOCATIONS

Findings

Station locations has been an area that I have been focusing on from the first day of this evaluation. Many factors go into the proper location for an EMS station. In Sawyer County, this becomes more difficult due to the challenges of the extensive amounts of water that dominate the middle of the County. This fact has a significant impact on response times, where presumed normal routes of travel would be in a relatively straight line. In Sawyer County, ambulances routinely are required to travel out of the way to get to a specific location because of the route of travel that is necessary.

Other factors include, but are not limited to:

- Number of calls to specific areas of the County.
- Staff resources, available personnel and their proximity to the call locations.
- Available ambulances.
- On-site personnel that get out the door within a minute of receiving the page.

Current issues that affect response time, and in turn affect acceptable station locations, has been some stations have a more difficult time filling the on-call schedule than others. This can, in part, be attributed to the current discrepancy in the amount of on-call pay depending on which station schedule is being filled. A more detailed accounting of the disparity will be addressed in the full report. Many of these concerns are reduced, or go away completely, if the recommendations for staffing are put in place.

The current station locations have worked for many years and for the most part should remain the same. However, in the southern part of the County the challenges are greater. It is an area with the fewest number of calls but the largest geographic response area. There are EMS personnel that live in the area, but there have not been significant or equitable resources to interest them to assure consistent coverage.



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After considering all of the above factors, running computer models and actually driving the area, I have concluded that the best location for a southern station would be Ojibwa. However, there are obstacles that would need to be overcome. First of which is that there currently is not a physical structure in Ojibwa to house a full-time crew with ambulances. There were funds allocated in the 2017 Budget to erect a suitable structure on County land in Ojibwa if that location would be approved.

One of the factors listed above was the value of having on-site personnel. Because personnel are already on-site when a call is received, it shortens the overall response time to the patients by 6 – 8 minutes based on current response guidelines. Therefore, specific locations are able to cover larger geographical areas. Actual locations can be determined more on routes of travel rather than fixating on a specific location as the only option. That is the rationale that was used for selecting the Ojibwa location. It is equidistant between two current station locations. Even though Ojibwa is 5.6 miles to Radisson and 5.4 miles to Winter, response times to each would be approximately 6 minutes, which is 2 minutes faster than the requirement for on-call personnel to arrive at the Winter or Radisson station. Both communities gain in coverage and response time and the resources are more equally distributed throughout the entire southern part of the county.

A specific determination regarding station locations will ultimately be made by the County Board. I was retained to provide a recommendation as to where the stations would best be located to serve the entire County.

The addition of full-time personnel would require some modifications to all of the locations determined to house full-time personnel such as providing adequate sleeping quarters, kitchen facilities, shower facilities, rest area, etc.



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Recommendations

- **Maintain the current location of the Hayward Station.**
- **Maintain the current location of the Stone Lake Station.**
- **Maintain the current location of the Round Lake Station.**
- **Establish a new station location in Ojibwa.**

Other options to consider:

- **Maintain the “garage” space, if possible in Radisson for placing a back-up ambulance to be manned in times of excess calls.**
- **Maintain the “garage” space, if possible in Winter for the placement of a back-up ambulance to be manned in times of excess calls.**

The last two bullets can be accomplished with equitable compensation for on-call staff. In an effort to be fiscally responsible, on-call pay would become effective any time the Ojibwa station staff were otherwise assigned. Because of the short distance from either town to Ojibwa, the on-call crew could pick up the closest ambulance and report to Ojibwa for future call assignments. Again, due to fiscal constraints, a rotating schedule could be established as to which location, either Radisson or Winter would be the back-up. There are many deployment plans that can and should be considered by department administration. The above represents some possible plans.



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AMBULANCES

Findings

The current fleet of emergency vehicles is in dire need of updating. There are significant mileage totals on most of the ambulances in the fleet. Vehicle repairs are much higher than normal due to the aged fleet. Several of the vehicles have exceeded the normal life expectancy for operating in a 9-1-1 response system. Significant outlays will be needed for the purchase of several new units. The County has established a Capital Improvement Plan for future purchases but funding for new ambulances needs to be increased to provide adequate vehicles and reduce repair costs.

Recommendations

- **Establish an expedited vehicle replacement plan.**
- **Once a replacement plan has been established, develop an ambulance bid package to meet the needs of the service in the form of an RFP.**
- **Determine a qualified fleet vendor for the purpose of long range planning, which should result in preferred pricing and continuity of fleet vehicles for staff safety and future ease of remounting.**