

## — PART 2 of 2 —



Firefighter/paramedics take care of an injured passenger of an automobile after it overturned on the freeway.

## There When You Need Them: A Detailed History of the City's Emergency Medical Services

### ■ LAFD provides an overview of its Emergency Medical Services.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following history was written by LAFD Captain II/Paramedic Bill Wells and distributed through the LAFD's Yahoo listserve. Alive! thanks the LAFD and Capt. Wells for this excellent communication service.*

Capt. Wells has more than 30 years' experience as an Ambulance Driver, Paramedic, EMS Supervisor and Paramedic Captain with the Los Angeles Fire Department. He also served as past president of United Paramedics of Los Angeles. For the past six years Captain Wells has worked at Fire Department Headquarters in the Planning Section overseeing the creation and implementation of the EMS Plan you will read about below.

### An EMS Crisis

In September 2000, local newspaper headlines were declaring a paramedic staffing crisis in the City of Los Angeles. The LAFD had over 100 paramedic vacancies for its 447 paramedic positions on fire engines and ambulances. Firefighter-Paramedics were working excessive and forced overtime to maintain the constant staffing of the resources. Paramedic response times in over a dozen neighborhoods averaged nearly ten minutes. The workload of over one-third of the rescue ambulances, including 22 paramedic ambulances, exceeded the Department's recommended workload guidelines of 350 responses per month.

Firefighter-Paramedics were decertifying and requesting to get off the busy paramedic ambulances and back onto fire companies. The Board of Fire Commissioners conducted four public meetings to study the paramedic staffing problems. City officials, Fire Department management, union leaders, firefighter-paramedics, and members of the medical community participated at the meetings and offered solutions.

Within four months, the Fire Department had a plan.

### The LAFD EMS Resource Deployment Plan

In January 2001, faced with mounting EMS problems, Fire Chief William R. Bamattre introduced a five-year Emergency Medical Services Resource Deployment Plan (EMS Plan). The EMS Plan addressed the Fire Chief's goals of increasing paramedic coverage, improving overall EMS service delivery, and providing a better

working environment through reducing workload.

### What Would It Do?

The EMS Plan would manage the significant number of new paramedics, deployment of additional EMS resources, and expansion of EMS field supervision. The five-year Plan would increase the number of paramedics and resources to meet the following objectives:

- Paramedic resource at every fire station
- Ambulance at every fire station
- EMS Captains in every Battalion
- Additional paramedic ambulances to provide workload relief for busy units
- Additional paramedic assessment engines for paramedic personnel rotation

The EMS Plan was endorsed and approved by the Mayor in January 2001. The EMS Plan included hiring and training 500 new paramedics over the next five years and increased EMS field supervision, resource deployment plans and workload relief plans.

During the first year of the EMS Plan (2001/02):

- Hired 145 new paramedics
- Hired four nurse educators to instruct paramedic continuing education
- Revised EMS dispatch protocols
- Trained LAFD uniformed dispatchers to the National Academy EMD standards

By the end of the first year, the total number of ambulances increased from 83 to 98, the number of paramedic ambulances increased from 56 to 67, the total number of paramedic units increased from 84 to 98, and the number of EMS Captains on-duty increased from 6 to 12.

### Call Volume Up, Yet Response Time Down

Paramedic response times decreased from an average of 7.2 minutes to 6.9 minutes Citywide. The number of paramedic ambulances exceeding the workload limit was dramatically reduced from 22 to just 3. The number of fire stations where the firefighter-paramedics could rotate between the paramedic ambulance and the fire company

was increased from 4 to 8. The total number of EMS incidents for the year increased 5 percent from 261,619 in 2000-01 to 274,341 in 2001-02.

### The Tide Has Turned

By the end of the second year, the total number of ambulances increased from 98 to 115, the number of paramedic ambulances increased from 67 to 72, the total number of paramedic units increased from 98 to 114, and the number of EMS Captains on-duty increased from 12 to 16.

Paramedic response times decreased from an average of 6.9 minutes to 6.8 minutes Citywide.

### More Options, More Calls, More Success

The number of fire stations where the firefighter-paramedics could rotate between the paramedic ambulance and the fire company was increased from 8 to 15. The total number of EMS incidents increased by 2 percent from 274,341 to 280,395.

In April 2003, the Department successfully achieved one of the EMS Plan's objectives by deploying at least one paramedic resource in every fire station district in the City.

In June 2003, the Department achieved another objective by deploying EMS captains in every one of the 16 geographic Battalions, thereby improving EMS supervision, training and management of field personnel. The EMS captains were assigned

to the platoon-duty Battalion Commanders in their respective Battalions.

### Where We Are Today

As of May 2, 2004, the total number of ambulances remains at 115, the number of paramedic ambulances has increased from 72 to 75, the total number of paramedic units has increased from 114 to 120, and the number of EMS Captains on-duty remains at 16.

Paramedic response times are projected to decrease from an average of 6.8 minutes to 6.7 minutes Citywide this year. The number of fire stations where the firefighter-paramedics could rotate between the paramedic ambulance and the fire company has increased from 15 to 26.

Budgetary approval from the City Council



The EMS works hard for the safety of Los Angeles.

and the Mayor was required for each year of the five-year EMS Plan.

### Communication and Teamwork

Fire Chief William R. Bamattre initiated a labor-management executive committee to prioritize, market, and ultimately gain approval of each year's budget request. The labor-management executive committee consisted of members of the Fire Commission, Fire Department management, the firefighters' union (United Firefighters of Los Angeles City Local 112), and the fire chief officers' association (Los Angeles City Chief Officers Association).

### EMS Plan Success

Chief Bamattre, and the men and women of the LAFD are pleased with the results of the EMS Plan. Paramedic personnel shortages are a thing of the past, paramedic attrition has been reduced from 15 percent to 8 percent annually, paramedic response times have been reduced in nearly every neighborhood of the City, the number of citizen complaints has been reduced, the number of patient lawsuits has virtually been eliminated, the revenue from ambulance transports has increased to more than \$44 million annually, and the number of firefighters volunteering to attend paramedic school continues to grow.

### The Bottom Line

The people who live, work and play in the City of Los Angeles are benefiting from the successful implementation of the LAFD five-year EMS Plan.

Currently, the Department has 115 rescue ambulances (75 paramedic and 40 BLS), 3 Paramedic Engines, 35 Paramedic Assessment Engines, 6 Paramedic Assessment Light Forces, 1 Paramedic Air Ambulance, 61 BLS Engines, 43 BLS Light Forces, 5 BLS Fireboats, and 16 EMS Battalion Captains on duty 24 hours a day. Each and every one of these resources are but a 9-1-1 phone call away!



The City is in good hands with the EMS.