



March 19, 2015
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SFMD Awarded Certificate of Necessity to Allow Emergency Patient Transport

In 2014, after continued instability in the local emergency transport landscape, the Superstition Fire & Medical District (SFMD) Board of Directors unanimously approved the district's application for a Certificate of Necessity (CON) through the Arizona Department of Health Services (AzDHS). An application was filed in December of 2014 after considerable and careful preparation. SFMD was notified on Tuesday, March 17, 2015 by the AzDHS that it had been granted a CoN allowing our organization to begin transporting critical patients.

SFMD like most valley fire jurisdictions became very concerned when the Rural-Metro Corporation, a private for-profit company that provides emergency transportation services through its subsidiary South-West Ambulance within the SFMD as well as most other valley communities, filed for bankruptcy in 2012. There were real fears and concerns that the patients our paramedics and EMT's treat wouldn't have reliable emergency transport to health care facilities. This was troubling, and caused every fire chief in the valley to begin working with their elected officials to solve this dilemma.

Southwest Ambulance has provided all ambulance service for the SFMD for the past two decades. But as Fire Chief Paul Bourgeois explains, the environment has changed and it's opened the door for a new partnership and new service delivery model for the SFMD. "There is a basic expectation everyone in our community should have – to be transported to an appropriate medical destination in a timely manner when you call 9-1-1," said Chief Bourgeois. "Rural-Metro has struggled to meet contractual response time requirements more frequently over the past few years" he continued. "By obtaining our own CoN, our ability to ensure quick and efficient transport is a very positive step in the right direction for this community" Bourgeois added.

The fire chief also noted that the fire district has successfully met with Rural-Metro Corporation and developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to capture the spirit and intent of this arrangement. "The MOU helps to stabilize and strengthen our relationship with Rural-Metro" said Bourgeois.

SFMD will work in partnership with Rural-Metro, with critical emergency transportation services being provided by the SFMD, and less critical low-acuity medical transports being provided by Southwest Ambulance. The new hybrid service allows Rural-Metro to lower some of its overhead costs by staffing basic life support ambulances with EMT's instead of Paramedics, while SFMD Paramedics and ambulances tend to the most serious medical patients in the district. "This is a big upgrade to our service" explained Emergency Services Assistant Chief, Jerome Schirmer. "In this new system, we will retain care of our most critical sick and injured patients all the way to the hospital, providing a more efficient and effective service to our community" explained Schirmer.

The process of applying for, and being granted a CoN generally takes between 12 – 18 months, depending on whether objections are raised by other ambulance providers. With the MOU in place between SFMD and Rural Metro Corp., the fire district had hoped for, and got a quicker resolution. "AzDHS told us the quickest application they had ever approved took more than 8 months" said SFMD Spokesman Asst. Chief Dave Montgomery. "Ours was approved in 4 months, with much less of a financial impact than we had expected" continued Montgomery.



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Chief Schirmer suggested that the quality of the SFMD application gave them an advantage in the application process. “Our finance division worked very hard to show the Department of Health Services that this will be a benefit to our community”, Schirmer continued. SFMD was able to petition the state to waive a required hearing in order to expedite the process. SFMD staff was able to present a cost model showing conservatively that the new ambulance service will be fully self-sustaining in 3 years, with total investment recovery and positive revenue within 4 to 5 years

“We are excited to be taking this step towards providing the very best pre-hospital service anywhere” said Chief Bourgeois. He also described this effort as a “natural progression” for his department and a “big win-win” for the communities served by his district. “We believe this is the next wave of change adding to the Community Para-medicine phenomenon that is changing the way Fire based EMS will look.”

The last 2-3 years have seen a significant increase in fire jurisdictions and municipalities preparing for and filing CoN applications with AzDHS, Current applications with AzDHS include Glendale, Gilbert, Sun City, Mesa, Tempe, Maricopa, Surprise, Queen Creek, Buckeye, and Northwest Fire District. Historically the process has been difficult and cumbersome at best, while costing at least one fire district several hundred thousand dollars only to have their application denied.

There are many more fire jurisdictions that will be watching how this MOU works and also to see what impact AMR Ambulance has in Maricopa County. AMR is another major private provider, and recently was granted a CoN for operation in Maricopa County, mostly involving inter-facility transports.

All inquiries should be directed to SFMD PIO – Assistant Chief Dave Montgomery at (480) 215-9224 or dave.montgomery@sfmd.az.gov

If you would like to know more about the SFMD, please visit our web site at www.sfmd.az.gov, or call our offices at 480-982-4440.

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