



EMERGENCY SERVICES

Adopted April 13, 2000

Revised 2013, Annual Meeting Agenda June 8, 2013

The League of Women Voters of Saratoga County believes that the individuals who live in Saratoga County are entitled to a basic level of emergency response - emergency medical, fire, police - regardless of their place of residence or ability to pay.

We believe that combining emergency medical services (EMS) and fire responders in one organization would typically result in quicker response times and more efficient delivery of services. This would be especially true if these services were co-located in buildings housing the more numerous fire stations. Such efficiency would be gained through streamlining of administrations, more effective deployment of personnel, and cost saving in space sharing. Further, we believe that combining medical and fire emergency services should be a goal that all municipalities in this county work toward in situations where the staffs of both services are all paid employees.

We believe that paid employees can be required to have the level of cross training necessary to make the combined response work. We believe that having a combined service is not a goal the county should work toward in those municipalities where the staff of the services are all volunteer or some combination of volunteer and paid. There is some evidence that requiring cross training of volunteers, no matter how desirable, will not be effective and ultimately will result in a reduction of the total supply of volunteers.

The League believes that the current governance methods for supporting emergency medical services are acceptable, be they private non-profit corporations, town government or ambulance district. We also find governance by county government to be acceptable. We do not find it acceptable to have a for-profit ambulance service, unless contractually bound, because it might limit the service to those who can afford it. Additionally, we believe that county government is the preferable level for taxing, distribution of funds, and administering emergency medical services.

Methods of funding for EMS that are acceptable are local tax district, fee for service, and the county wide tax. Communities need a diversified funding mechanism to provide services in order to make them available to all regardless of income. We do not believe that private fund-raising should be relied on for basic services although it could be used for optional items like incentives for volunteers.

Methods of funding for fire departments that are acceptable: local tax districts and a county wide tax. Again, private fund raising should not be relied on for basic services, but could be used for optional items. Fee for service is not an acceptable method of funding fire response since public safety might be compromised.

So long as all EMS staff is required to have the same training, we find acceptable methods of staffing to be: all volunteer, combination of paid and volunteer, all paid. We are cognizant of the trend towards more and more paid staff which is usually supported in large part by fee for service payments.

For the quickest response by our emergency services it is important that all properties be clearly and prominently numbered. Relying on a GPS system to be accurate and available is not always an option.

Although police services are considered part of Emergency Services, at the time of the original 2000 study and at the current update, we found it impossible to gather enough information to determine the way that police services and funding are allocated from the State Police, the Saratoga County Sheriff's Department and the local police departments.