

Berks County Fire Services Working Group

March 28, 2024

Officers: Chair Colin Hackman, Vice Chair Chris Schaeffer, Secretary *Vacant*

Meeting was called to order at 1800 hours. There were no additions or corrections to the previous months minutes, they stand approved as read.

Attendance:

Zone 1: Matt Brett

Zone 2: Blair Miller, Dean Dalious

Zone 3: Bob Martin

Zone 4: Colin Hackman, Lance Parmer

Zone 5&6: Chris Schaeffer, Brian Sierocinski

Zone 7: Tom Kemery, Andrew Getka

BCFA: Roger Weidenheimer

BCFT: No one in attendance

BCFPA: Andy Culp

Forestry: No one in attendance

DES: Brian Gottschall, Mike Smith, Matt Stairiker, Philip Salamone

Additional Attendance: Scot Landis

Communications: None

Zone 1: Matt Brett reported the Department's he made contact within Zone 1, are against Fire Department handling lift assists only. Matt brought up DES dispatching QRS, even if not QRS certified by DOH. Director Gottschall reported no laws or regulations pertain to this as long as one licensed entity (EMS) is dispatched / responding. Director Gottschall stated they understand the potential confusion and DES dispatches all fire responses on the initial medical dispatch as QRS, whereas fire dispatched after the initial dispatch is a medical assist and no changes to procedures will be made. Matt asked if DES had a list of certified QRS agencies in the County? Director Gottschall reported DES does not get involved with that and local

government is responsible for knowing who is/isn't QRS certified. Matt asked if there was any update to the tree down calls? Director Gottschall reported he would address that under DES.

Zone 2: Dean Dalious reported a large group of Zone 2 Departments would like Crew Force revisited by the County. Dean asked about additional call types, specifically for Structure Fire dispatches which are a brush fire within ten foot of the building and no Brush Apparatus or DCNR is dispatched / notified. Chair Hackman stated that should be up to the first officer or apparatus provided the additional information to make those requests. Director Gottschall agreed and stated DES provides explicit additional information upon response, and with that information responses can be modified as first officer or apparatus sees fit. Blair Miller reported the lift assist inquiry still needs to be answered by Zone 2.

Zone 3: Bob Martin reported a 50/50 mix for lift assists handled solely by Fire.

Zone 4: Chair Hackman reported that Zone 4 was not in favor of Fire handling lift assist only.

Zone 5 & 6: Vice Chair Schaeffer reported that Zone 5/6 was not in favor of Fire handling lift assists only. Vice Chair Schaeffer reported a lack of attendance / interest at their Zone meetings.

Zone 7: Andrew Getka reported he is working on run card review with DES. Andrew asked about changing / adding call types, specifically Pedestrian Struck, No Voice Contact Elevator Alarms and Crash Notification Alarms. Director Gottschall reported any call type can be created, however once it is created, it must be resourced with an apparatus and every agency would need to update and resource their run cards. Director Gottschall also stated the call type needs to be reasonably discernable when a call is handled by DES to quickly call type it and send for dispatch and not delaying the process to get the appropriate information. Director Gottschall stated if the fire service wants/needs a new call type, they need to develop it and propose it through the FSWG. But DES cannot change call type SOP's on a monthly bases but maybe yearly. Chair Hackman recommended the FSWG will entertain call type change proposals at the May meeting annually.

Tom Kemery reported that last year's recruit class is working the street. New recruit class just started last week. Chief Banks (Car 3) has retired. The current First Deputy's moved up and Chief Thorpe will be (Car 5) First Deputy and the City will be promoting for a Second Deputy Chief (Car 9).

BCFA: Roger Weidenheimer reports he received a request from Muhlenberg Fire to move from Zone 1, to Zone 4. Director Gottschall asked if that was the case, if the BCFA could propose dissolution of Zone 1, and move those companies into other Zones to encourage attendance and move Zone 7 Reading to Zone 1, so there would be a Zone 1 through 6. Matt Brett said there maybe interest from some Zone 1 Departments to move. Roger will work on this.

BCFT: No Attendance / Report

BCFPA: Andy Culp reported Fire Police Association memberships are coming in and he thanks the Department's for being members. Andy reports they have training classes coming up and people should sign up if interested. Andy reports the Fire Police Association has the same issues as the Training Committee with filling classes. Andy agreed with the general lack of responses from the companies to the Zone Representatives, and feels the Zone Representatives should make decisions if there is no response or limited response.

Forestry: No Attendance / Report

DES: Director Gottschall reported he was involved in a session involving Junior Firefighters and reports Labor and Industry (L&I) is actively pursuing Fire Departments who are not complying with Junior Firefighter requirements. L&I has levied fines up to \$5,000.00 for failure to comply with the rules. This is stemming from Junior Firefighters injured which caught the eye of legislators. There are ramifications and L&I is actively following up with companies for poor documentation and not following the rules. Highly suggest engaging with L&I. Compliance manual hasn't been updated and there is a current effort underway to update it. Current out of date manual is accessible online from the State Fire Commissioner and L&I.

Lithium-Ion Sub Committee: Director Gottschall reports they currently have a solid SOP for smaller than vehicle batteries (cell phones, ipads, laptops, scooters, e-bikes, etc.) DES is working with the County Solid Waste Authority who currently already accepts batteries but does not accept damaged batteries, to work something out to potentially accommodate this. Until plans are in place, Fire Departments should do what they think is a reasonable effort until the SOP/plans are established.

Tree Down Calls: Director Gottschall reported a tree down across the roadway is an emergency and must be dispatched. Concept of contacting Municipalities only, will not be completed by DES. Greater concern is over 1/3 of the County is covered by PSP, with potential for delayed response. However, PSP is potentially ok with the view that PD goes first to determine if Fire Department is needed. Vision for Fire/EMS run cards could result in a fire unit called LE Only, but could result in Fire Department dispatched as local government sees fit. Side agreement would need to be signed between PD and Fire for LE Only, just as Fire and EMS have to sign when submitting run cards.

Radio Fleet Replacement: Director Gottschall reported many agencies elected to not extend warranty out to 10 years. Those that chose not to are facing decommissioning of radios due to them not being serviced any more. DES is pursuing the possibility with the County Commissioners for a fleet refresh. No commitment to do this, cant guarantee if/when this will happen. Potential bulk radio purchase at the end of 2026 beginning 2027. Just want companies aware of this potential, no further details at this time.

Radio Decommissioning: Director Gottschall stated Radios Out of Service, that are unable to be repaired or re-programmed to remove Berks System Data must come back to the County to be properly disposed. The County has absolute authority of disposal/trading/sale of all existing radios to insure the County System is removed. Example – A radio still programmed to Berks, someone buys it and is able to fix it – is not in the best interest of emergency services for someone to have this radio and access to the Berks System. DES has done as much as they can to get radio programming off of radios in the past, if

unable to get it off it is a security risk and needs to be kept by DES. Tom Kemery reported there is a third party vendor that can make repairs to radios but RMI cannot, but the radio comes back without being intrinsically safe.

Communications: It is believed that Departments are not listening to their Zone Representatives, but are coming back to DES saying they know nothing about what is going on. These Departments that say they don't know anything are saying the FSWG is not working. A decision needs to be made by FSWG if Representatives should continue doing what they are doing (with addition of keeping track of communications) or if DES needs to make direct communications with all entities.

No update on radio updates for fixes. Motorola is still running into issue with firmware. DES is having weekly discussions with the Motorola project manager.

Old Business:

Tax Credit Sub-Committee: Chris Jordan has completed a proposal for a County Tax Credit for the County Commissioners. 54 out of the 69 agencies have provided Chris with information requested. There are currently a few other County's that have implemented a program (York, Montgomery, Franklin). Based off the information received, the rebate for County property taxes would be about \$500,000.00 and the Commissioners will need to decide about an impact like this. This money would need to be collected in other ways (taxes) for Volunteer Firefighters to receive this rebate. This is a large financial responsibility that the County Commissioners will be taking on. A lengthy discussion ensued, and it was determined additional information should be collected to identify any Municipalities that currently have a tax rebate program in place for Volunteer Firefighters / EMS personnel. Chris was notified of the additional information requested and the consensus from all Zones was to continue to move forward with the proposal.

Chair Hackman advised we still have a vacancy for Secretary. Anyone interested in filling this position should contact Chair Hackman

New Business:

Call Type Change Proposals: Chair Hackman advised that every May at the FSWG meeting, we will entertain proposals for changes. The proposals need to identify the reason for the proposed change and provide reasonably discernable ques for the telecommunicator to type the call without delaying dispatch.

The next FSWG meeting will be Thursday May 23, 2024 at 1800 hours via TEAMS

There being no further business to come forth, Chair Hackman adjourned the meeting at 1950 hours.
Minutes completed by Blair Miller and Colin Hackman

Respectfully Submitted,

Colin D. Hackman