



For Immediate Release

May 16, 2017

Foothills Regional 911 Commission Statement: Monitoring is Not Enough

Background

On May 8, 2017, the Foothills Regional 911 Commission distributed a news release to Southern Alberta media urgently requesting Health Minister Sarah Hoffman to return ambulance dispatch back to the Commission. Since October 2009, there have been, and continue to be, **many problems in emergency response to residents living in rural Southern Alberta.**

On February 21, 2017 Alberta Health Services (AHS) began dispatching EMS calls to Southern Alberta Municipalities with no planning, cooperation or explanation of emergency protocols to Foothills Regional 911 Commission, its municipalities and fire departments. The transition has been fraught with many problems, errors and delays in emergency response for ambulance and fire medical responses. **The Minister refuses to correct problems and suggests monitoring as her only current action.**

The Issue

For rural Albertans, there is not a single, coordinated fire/ambulance response when you dial 911. Poor communication and the separation of fire and ambulance dispatch is the core issue. Our concern is not about a change in process, as the Minister and AHS have suggested. We have been dealing with this change in emergency dispatch since 2009. **Our position has been consistent, that separate dispatch for these services, and the inherent delays are risking the lives of people living in rural Southern Alberta.**

Our dispatch calls logs provide the evidence that Medical Fire Response times are evaluated against the standards set by [National Fire Protection Association](#) and current response times fall well below these standards. Only 4% of emergency calls requiring MFR (Medical Fire Responses) are being sent to Foothills 911 within the industry standard time frames.

What does Monitoring Mean?

The Minister has stated that she will “monitor the situation.” We are unclear about what this means and have not been contacted by the Minister or AHS about any concrete solutions or commitments that will lead to solutions on these critical dispatch issues.



Serious delays will continue to occur, when you separate fire and ambulance Dispatch. When a 911 call is received at the Foothills Regional 911 dispatch centre in Black Diamond, it is transferred to AHS in Calgary for ambulance dispatch. AHS must then transfer the call back to FRESC for Fire Medical responses (when an ambulance can't be there quickly) and there are problems with delays and coordinating the calls. Local area knowledge is missing. First Responders can't communicate. AHS continues to focus on ambulance response times, not the broken dispatch system.

The Commission is not in any way criticizing the EMS responders who are on the front lines of emergency situations in 26 Southern Alberta communities. Many of these people are our neighbours and friends, and they do an incredible job in very stressful situations.

The Solution

We believe the only Solution to eliminate the delays and errors, is to have the 911 call managed by one center, with fire and ambulance resources being sent immediately and simultaneously for a coordinated emergency response.

We want equitable emergency response service for all Albertans. Other municipalities, including the City of Calgary, fought very hard to keep their fire and ambulance dispatch together. They understand that if Fire and EMS dispatch is separated into two different dispatch centers, the delays and lack of coordination will create a risk to people's lives.

We believe our solution fits well into the AHS EMS Dispatch System, which AHS promotes as a collaborative model benefiting all Albertans.

The Foothills Regional 911 Commission welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively with Minister Sarah Hoffman, her office and Alberta Health Services on behalf of all rural residents of Southern Alberta.

For further background information on this issue, please visit: www.fixrural911dispatch.com