



For Immediate Release

May 8, 2017

Southern Alberta Lives Put at Risk Daily with New AHS Dispatch System
Foothills Regional 911 Commission Calls for NDP Government to
Restore Local Emergency Medical Dispatch Services

Black Diamond, AB – The Foothills Regional 911 Commission is urging the NDP government and Health Minister Sarah Hoffman to return ambulance dispatch back to the Commission after weeks of delayed response times, first responders arriving at incorrect addresses and multiple problems.

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.

“Separating fire and ambulance emergency response dispatch is plagued with problems. Transferring these rural calls to an AHS Dispatch Center and then waiting for that call to be transferred back for fire-first response makes no sense,” says Suzanne Oel, Foothills Regional 911 Commission chairperson. “Albertans living in the southern, rural communities of our province are paying the price for a model that has fragmented the emergency response system.”

Oel adds that, “This is a very serious situation where lives are put at risk due to errors and issues that are a direct result of the Calgary AHS Dispatch Centre. There have been delays of over one hour to notify our Centre to send a fire department medical response, when an ambulance was not available. Imagine how long that time feels to the patient or the family experiencing an emergency.”

Coordination and simultaneous dispatch of ambulance and fire in rural and suburban communities is critical to saving lives. Often there is no ambulance to respond, so sending a local fire department immediately is critical to filling in the gaps and ensuring that citizens in the 26 municipalities served by the Foothills Regional 911 Commission receive emergency care quickly.

Foothills Regional 911 Commission and its partner municipalities have lobbied AHS and the provincial government for seven years, asking for a collaborative approach for its rural municipalities and to ensure all Albertans receive experienced, competent and coordinate service in an emergency. Despite recent meetings with government officials and Minister Sarah Hoffman, where the Commission highlighted multiple examples of AHS errors and problems, there has been little response from the NDP government.

“Lives are being placed in jeopardy,” says Mayor Kelly Tuck of Turner Valley. “On a daily basis, there are time delays, poor communication, lack of understanding of our communities and incompetence in AHS dispatch. Every second counts in an emergency. No one is accountable and this is unacceptable.”



AHS has three dispatch centers located in Edmonton, Calgary and Peace River. Four municipalities (Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Lethbridge and Calgary) successfully negotiated to maintain a coordinated EMS dispatch with emergency response agencies and have been allowed to keep their ambulance and fire dispatch together.

“Poor coordination is costing lives, risking peoples well-being and costing tax payers. While the Ministers Office has suggested these incidents are not acceptable. They have not taken action to improve this situation in any way! We need to get this fixed and we have the solution,” says Jamie Tiessen, Foothills Regional 911 Commission Vice-Chair.

One of the key municipalities of particular concern is Banff where local ambulance service has no reliable radio communication. Additionally, AHS will not permit municipal fire departments to communicate directly with dispatch on the AHS radio system channel which means there is no direct radio communication between ambulance and fire in emergency situations.

“Banff experiences a high volume of emergency calls with the high-risk activities – like skiing and hiking – that take place in the area, as well as the number of tourists and visitors coming to the Park. As we celebrate Canada’s 150th birthday in the Park, we are expecting hundreds of thousands of people visiting Banff this summer and their safety should be paramount,” says Silvio Adamo, Director of Protective Services and Fire Chief, Town of Banff. “We are very concerned about how effective emergency response will be, given the fragmented dispatch system and the lack of coordinated radio communication.”

The Commission is asking the NDP government to reconsider its decision to centralize emergency medical dispatch for 26 southern Alberta municipalities and 33 fire departments and stations. **They are urgently requesting that Minister Sarah Hoffman return emergency medical dispatch to the Commission and the 130,000 Albertans it serves immediately.**

Albertans are invited to visit FixRural911Dispatch.com for information and a sample letter to send to the Minister’s office and local MLA’s.

About Foothills Regional 911 Commission

The Foothills Regional 911 Commission is responsible for 911 services and emergency response dispatch for 26 municipalities and 33 fire departments/stations in southern Alberta. It serves a population of 130,000 people, covering a geographic area that extends from Banff to the Crowsnest Pass. Foothills Regional 911 Commission, member communities include: Arrowwood, Banff, Black Diamond, Canmore, Claresholm, Crowsnest Pass, Eden Valley (served by Longview), Fort Macleod, Granum, Lake Louise, M.D. of Willow Creek, M.D. of Ranchland (served by Longview and Nanton), Stavely, Tsuu Tina, Black Diamond, Carmangay, Champion, Vulcan County, High River, Longview, Okotoks, Turner Valley, M.D. of Foothills (Priddis, Spruce Meadows, Heritage Point, Blackie and Cayley Fire Departments), Lomond, Milo, Nanton and Vulcan.