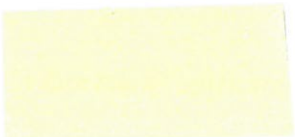


Delivering emergency fire and medical services in rural communities is becoming quite the challenge due to a couple of issues. One issue involves cost and training. The other issue involves new state regulations which add a burden to small rural townships and villages. In order to continue providing the needed emergency services new ways to fund these services need to be created.

Currently, townships assess taxes to the residents and these taxes are used to support the local fire department/emergency services. According to Jim Klang, Township of Henrietta supervisor, Henrietta Township along with 4 surrounding townships use tax money to help the Village of Cazenovia purchase equipment. It is the Village of Cazenovia's responsibility to house this equipment. If the volunteer fire department is dispatched, the landowner where the fire is raging is assessed a fee of several hundreds of dollars for the fire call. These are the main ways that emergency medical costs are currently dealt with. Unfortunately the cost of this equipment and training of personnel is quite high. These types of circumstances are probably pretty similar to most towns/villages and townships.

Ambulance services are becoming problematic as well. According to the article, "State Law Makes Emergency Medical Services Problems Worse in Rural Wisconsin" Wisconsin requires that an ambulance that is transporting a patient to have two EMTs that are certified. Certified EMTs are expensive and requiring two can be a time burden if the ambulance is ready to go but has to wait for a second EMT. This can take valuable minutes away from the patient who is waiting for help to come. Mike Koles, executive director of the *Wisconsin Towns Association* stated, "I've heard from many of our members how this delays response time" (Brennan). I would imagine that a patient would be relieved that at least one EMT is in the ambulance to assist them as long as there is a first responder and driver along with the only EMT. Time is of the essence not the number of trained EMTs. A second issue that provides problems with providing ambulance services is the amount of training that is necessary. According to Jesse Kremer, Representative from the 59th Assembly District, "the ability to recruit and retain trained personnel has been on the decline. It is difficult to convince a volunteer to dedicate several months to classroom training, only to be followed by the need to remain in the community when covering ambulance duty" (Emergency Medical Services in Rural Wisconsin). The volunteers who make up our rural emergency services cannot afford to pay for



all this training and miss work at their main job. Just what can be done to help alleviate the costs of increasing town/village fire and emergency medical service costs?

One suggestion to help pay for the increased costs of increasing town/village fire and emergency medical costs is to increase Wisconsin's sales tax by a half of a percent. The money generated from this sales tax increase can be applied to all emergency medical services- rural or otherwise. All Wisconsin residents along with out of state visitors would help pay for these services; after all, a person never knows where he/she might be when emergency services are needed.

A second suggestion is for the state to offer some reimbursement for the training volunteer EMTs, firemen, and first responders are required to master. This training could also be offered at various times say in the evenings or on weekends so that volunteers do not have to miss their working hours. Perhaps our assembly men and women could pass a law that businesses can't penalize volunteers when they miss work for this training.

A third suggestion is for our elected officials to take a look at the existing law of requiring at least two trained EMTs going on a service call. Small townships and villages do not have as many people who are willing to be trained and there are not as many trained EMTs available to send two out every time. One should be sufficient.

Slightly more than 30% of the state's population live in small towns- over 1, 709,481 citizens (About Towns: Wisconsin Towns Association). These people deserve quality emergency services just as those in big cities do and currently volunteer fire departments and emergency services are trying to fulfill these services and doing a fairly good job. Unfortunately, the costs, trainings, and regulations are bogging these volunteer emergency services down. Something must be done to ensure that all people receive quick services from well-trained emergency EMTs/first responders/firemen whether they are volunteers or paid professionals, and I believe that the fairest method of funding these services is the increased sales tax coupled with breaks given to those who are willing to volunteer their time to help others.



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