

Dear Residents: This is a report about ongoing cooperative effort which is affecting you!

As a result of centralizing ambulance dispatch and challenges which have emerged in service to our residents, a number of people are putting in a lot of effort to work towards solutions, to manage costs, better support our 911 dispatch centres and effect better coordinated responses of ambulance and fire first response. On behalf of the MD of Foothills and our Foothills Regional Emergency Services Commission, I am working with many people who are interested in finding and advocating solutions to these complex matters. Our Foothills Regional Emergency Services Commission (FRESC), who owns and operates our Foothills 911 Call centre, is operating out of the Black Diamond Hospital. We serve 26 Municipalities and 32 Fire Departments in Southern Alberta, including the communities of Okotoks, High River, Turner Valley, Black Diamond, MD of Foothills, and 21 more... Your 911 Calls are answered at this Public Safety Answering Point and are further directed to Calgary PSC for AHS Ambulance – Emergency Medical Services (EMS), to the RCMP dispatch in Red Deer for police service, or if Fire Department response is required, dispatched directly from our location. We receive land line and cell phone calls within our area, and calls that are transferred to us from cell phone or VOIP calls received by other operators but require a response in our area. Although we have experienced some changes from the service we were used to before transition, we continue to work towards affecting the change we need to provide the best service possible to our residents. Here is what we are doing:

1. First, we wanted to let you know that we have been working with AHS, our MLAs, previous Minister of Health & Wellness (Gene Zwozdesky), current Minister of H&W (Fred Horne), the Minister of Municipal Affairs (Doug Griffiths) and their departments. As a result of our 2011 interactions, a partnership group was formed with the purpose to facilitate the continued team approach to resolve identified service delivery issues, monitor progress and provide a mechanism for feedback to and from citizens and other concerned parties. This oversight committee is comprised of representatives from FRESC (Dr. Ed Sands, Chair), Foothills 911 (Brenda Fenwick, ED), MD of Foothills (Johanna Kortenschyl-Allen), Alberta Health Services (AHS), Alberta Health & Wellness, and Calgary Public Safety Communication Service (PSC) EMS dispatch. We are meeting to present concerns and work with all these parties on strategies, training and getting the dispatch communications streamlined and effective. Additionally, Foothills 911 will stay on the line during a 911 call to assist Calgary PSC, if necessary, with locating addresses when dispatching ambulance.

2. While we are pleased with the steps forward here at the local level, we continue to advocate for other measures and have worked to address concerns and provincial policy. In 2012, we put forward a list of ongoing concerns from the perspective of the M.D. of Foothills and FRESC, such as the costs and fragmentation of emergency services. Since moving the ambulances to AHS in Apr. 2010 and the EMS dispatch to Calgary in Oct. 2009, we have experiencing long response times, dispatch issues, other technical issues, increased costs for municipalities, business case challenges for the commission and ambulances being tied up with inter-facility transfers, serving other communities or waiting in hospitals. Sometimes the area is left without an ambulance to respond in a timely manner, or without coverage at all. Since FRESC had formerly operated a model integrated system and our residents had benefited from the excellent service, we now compare it to the fractured system we are now working with. We believe the problems could be solved by a dispatch that understands the rural locations and addressing and knows our area. We have suggested revising the EMS Dispatch consolidation plan to include a Rural EMS dispatch centre, or to consider allowing our Regional 911 to complete the call taking process; that is, giving us back the EMS dispatch. Also, to help financially, we have asked to move forward legislation for cell phone revenues to go to local 911 dispatches.

Our concerns and suggested solutions were supported and put forward by our MLAs (at the time – 2011 & 2012): George Groeneveld, Evan Berger, Ted Morton, Dave Rodney, and others. In January, I presented letters to the Minister of Health & Wellness, other MLAs, CEO of AHS and the Premier. In February & March 2012, FRESC initiated a letter writing campaign where we asked our partnering and contract municipalities to draft letters supporting our efforts. On March 20, 2012, I presented the letters during a meeting with the Minister of Health & Wellness (Honourable Fred Horne) at the time of the Spring Convention of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts & Counties, and to the Premiers' Office. Since then, we have had more conversations.

3. We have been working provincially with other municipalities in bringing forward two important Resolutions to the urban and rural municipal associations in the Fall of 2011, on the topics of halting dispatch consolidation and considering the

effects of fragmentation of emergency response, and asking for 911 cell phone fee legislation to support our dispatch centres. Additionally, on behalf of the MD of Foothills at the AAMDC Fall convention, I presented our ideas to Municipal Affairs Minister Doug Griffiths, whose department under the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) along with Service Alberta, is responsible for the legislation of the 911 cell phone fees. We have heard this legislation process for the 911 cell phone fees is now going ahead.

4. Along with these, we have been working alongside of the Rural Community First Responders group (formed to deal with issues affecting Alberta rural communities), to move our concerns forward. Currently, we are in need of an overall 911 Policy and Rural Strategy for Alberta, which involves the provincial ministries of Municipal Affairs under AEMA (Fire), Solicitor General (Police) and Health (Ambulance). At a conference organized in August 2011, many first responder representatives from around Alberta met to discuss concerns and solutions. A document summarizing the perspective of the rural and suburban rural concerns and ideas for solutions, called the Rural EMS Direction or RED doc, was prepared by this group and presented to the Minister of Health & Wellness in February 2012. The document presents a Call to Action, along with recommendations and background research:

To communicate, research, learn about, work together, and become politically active to  
Recognize, protect and advance a Rural EMS Direction (RED) that includes 3 Key Principles:

- Ensure community capacity for First Response in medical emergencies
- Ensure a coordinated provincial 911 network that includes Rural Call and Dispatch centres
- Accountability of costs and quality outcomes

The authors have done the large task of summarizing the compounding issues & perspectives and are trying to bring a positive direction to this. We thank Dr. Nancy Marlett (U. of C. Faculty of Medicine), Heather MacLean (Policy Consultant) and Mayor Barbara Sjoquist (Edgerton). We are represented in our area by Mayor Sharlene Brown (Black Diamond), Brenda Fenwick (Foothills 911), and myself (MD Foothills & FRESC). We now plan on sharing the RED doc with municipalities to explain why we need a rural EMS Strategy for rural and urban rural communities. We hope to create awareness of the issues and invite further participation. Visit: <http://www.ruralcommunityfirstresponders.com/> for the RED doc

5. We are very pleased with the results of our meetings, letters, interactions, and the presentation of the RED doc to the Minister of Health. Minister Horne immediately asked for the Health Quality Council of Alberta to conduct an independent review by Ministerial Order, Dated: Feb. 28, 2012. We look forward to participation in this review and helping towards ideas and solutions. The Minister has asked for the results by October 2012, which will be presented directly to the Legislature. The review includes, but is not limited to:

- Transition issues related to the transfer of governance and funding of EMS from municipalities to the former regional health authorities and Alberta Health Services
- Dispatch consolidation
- Challenges specific to integrated fire/EMS service providers
- Challenges specific to rural and remote areas of the province
- Availability and adequacy of data on EMS

Visit: <http://www.suzanneoel.com/> for the Ministerial Order

We care about providing these essential services for you! Our thanks go out to all those who are coordinating or carrying out 24/7 Emergency First Response in our communities, the folks working on these issues, our municipalities over-seeing services, our FRESC Board for their support, and our Foothills 911 Call Centre.

With Best Regards,  
Suzanne Oel  
MD of Foothills Councillor  
Vice-Chair FRESC