

# Emergency Medical Services

## Background and History of Emergency Medical Services: Paramedic programs at Placer Hills and Foresthill Fire Protection Districts

I would like to extend my appreciation to our Community – I am honored to serve as your Fire Chief. My business is serving all of the residents and visitors who live and work in the Placer County foothills. The Placer Hills and Foresthill Fire Districts business model places focus on the rapid delivery of Fire and EMS Emergency Services. These emergency services need to be reliable and most importantly efficient to achieve the desired results – Saving Lives and Property. It's against this backdrop that I would like to highlight our Paramedic program, provide an historical perspective on its evolution and why it's so important towards our primary mission of saving lives in our community.

The evolution of the present-day Emergency Medical Services (EMS) started in the early 1960's. Experiments in Belfast, Ireland and Toronto, Canada highlighted the benefits of providing advanced medical care to cardiac patients in the field environment. To accomplish this, ambulance personnel and medical interns were utilized, responding from local hospitals. The benefits of "medical care in the field" were further highlighted in a published 1966 report entitled "Accidental Death and Disability: The Neglected Disease of Modern Society" revealing that soldiers who were seriously wounded on the battlefields of Vietnam had a better survival rate than those individuals who were seriously injured in motor vehicle accidents on California Highways.

These studies revealed a number of important factors leading to enhanced survival rates: comprehensive trauma care, rapid transport to designated trauma centers, and a new type of trained technician – trained to perform advanced life support skills, e.g.: fluid replacement, advanced airway control, and other critical life-saving procedures in the field setting.

In the 1970's, California was ground zero in the development of the Emergency Medical Services System. Medical experts recognized and embraced the delivery of EMS as a component of Public Safety: the industry with the most experience in the delivery, planning, and managing public safety challenges was

the fire service. The fire service was selected by those medical experts in part because it was uniquely positioned to provide the delivery of EMS services having in place, personnel, facilities, and equipment required to deliver this service to the community. On July 14, 1970, California Governor Ronald Reagan signed into law the Wedsworth-Townsend Act, which created legislative authority to establish the Paramedic program in California, which led to similar programs across the United States.

Today, Fire based EMS is the primary provider of Advanced Life Support services throughout the nation, including California, and locally in both the Placer Hills and Foresthill Fire District response areas. In 1996 the Placer Hills Fire District established its Paramedic Program, providing front-line Paramedic response from Fire Station 84 and later from Fire Station 86. Foresthill Fire District began its Paramedic service and ALS Ambulance transport in 2006 after consolidating with the Foresthill Safety Club Ambulance, which provided Paramedic Ambulance services since the 1970's. Plans are underway to develop additional Paramedic Assessment Engines at Fire Station 41 in Newcastle and Station 38 in Penryn the near future.

An equally critical component of the pre-hospital Paramedic Program is ambulance transportation. The Ambulance industry has evolved from a small cottage industry to the present day integrated component of the EMS delivery system. American Medical Response (AMR) as we know it today has evolved from a collection of smaller ambulance companies (very similar in comparison to the current reorganization of Placer County Fire Districts). The Placer County foothill communities were originally served by Foothill and ETS Ambulance Service.

In our rural communities, when you call 9-1-1 for a Medical Emergency, Placer Hills and Foresthill Fire Department Paramedics are the first responders who arrive quickly from your neighborhood fire station to begin immediate lifesaving treatment. In Placer Hills, an AMR ambulance staffed with a Paramedic and equipment, contracted through Placer County to provide transportation, arrives on scene, assist the Fire Department Paramedics and transports the patient to the hospital. This system allows for "seamless" patient care as the fire paramedic and the ambulance paramedic care for the patient as a team, then the ambulance transports the patient to the appropriate hospital with paramedic level care and the fire engine with a paramedic immediately goes back into service ready for the next call in its area.

The evolution of emergency medical services by your Fire Department continues to evolve. All local Firefighters are trained at the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Basic level, with at least one EMT-Paramedic assigned daily to every Engine Company.

Today, your local Fire Departments serve a rapidly growing population of several thousand residents, encompassing hundreds of square miles from strategically located Placer County Independent Fire District Fire Stations.

Both Fire and EMS response are time critical. Rapid initial fire response affords firefighters the ability to keep the fire to the room of origin, put the fire out prior to a possible explosion (known as flashover) and results in significantly lower rates of deaths, injury and property loss (reducing insurance rates). Rapid response by Firefighters to EMS calls such as a Cardiac arrest is also critical. Cardiac arrest survival chances fall by seven to 10 percent for every minute between collapse and defibrillation. The ability to provide timely advanced life support is key to survival.

Utilizing dual-function, cross trained firefighter paramedics versus single function paramedics (as found on Ambulances) maximizes efficiencies and cost effectiveness while maintaining required fire protection service level standards, since many emergencies require both a fire/rescue EMS response.

The more rural foothill areas benefit from this combination of service providers, both public and private, between the Fire Departments and AMR. The true benefactor, our residents and visitors who live and work in our communities who rely on our 9-1-1 system that is efficient and reliable in their time of need.

Kirk Kushen  
Fire Chief  
Placer Hills, Foresthill, Newcastle Fire Protection Districts