

# Paramedics delayed at hospitals due to lack of emergency beds

By **CHRISTINA COMMISSO**  
Metroland Media Group

Almost \$1.5 million in Emergency Medical Services staffing hours was lost last year due to hold ups in emergency departments.

While Halton's EMS continues to hit its response time targets, a lack of beds in emergency rooms is keeping paramedics and their vehicles tied up at hospitals.

During his presentation to the Region's Health and Social Services committee recently, EMS director Greg Sage said close to 9,000 hours were lost in 2010 due to hospital offload delays.

"If there are 12 ambulances on duty and four are tied up at hospitals in offload delays, we're left with eight vehicles. The longer they stay in hospital, the further our resources are depleted."

The Ontario Ministry of Health has set a 20-minute target for paramedics to arrive to emergency departments until they're able to respond to another call. However, when inpatient beds in hospitals are full, patients end up occupying emergency beds and paramedics are unable to move individuals from the EMS stretcher to hospital beds.

Regional Chair Gary Carr said the offload delays could be traced back to the Province, which is supposed to cover 50 per cent of EMS costs, with the Region covering the other half. This year's budget reports show the Province will fund 46 per cent of EMS costs in 2011, leaving

a shortfall of close to \$1 million.

"It's not a reflection on the staff at the hospital. Everyone knows they're over-worked," said Carr of the delays. "Consequently, because of the inaction of the provincial government, it's essentially the downloading of services."



**GARY CARR**

The EMS update shows five instances in 2010 where not a single ambulance was available to respond to emergencies and 226 occurrences of four or fewer ambulances being available. The numbers are slightly higher than 2009, when there were four instances of zero available ambulance, and 167 times when four or less were available.

The Health Ministry provided funding to staff Joseph Brant and Oakville hospitals with a dedicated offload nurse (DON) to receive ambulance patients in emergency departments. One-time funding for 2010-11 of \$261,756 allowed for almost 3,500 hours of DON staffing, which saw 1,346 patients. However, despite the funding, offload delays have remained consistent since 2007.

The ministry hasn't confirmed DON funding for 2011-12.

EMS forecasts call for two additional 12-hour ambulances in 2012.

Two new stations, one in Georgetown and one in southeast Oakville, opened last year. Regional staff are currently scouting locations for a northwest Oakville station for 2012 and work is underway with the Town of Milton to construct a fire/EMS station in 2016.

## Developments in Georgetown South get go-ahead

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The development has received 383 SDEs of water allocation covering the first phase of 144 units, with a portion of the second—the remainder will have to wait until more water becomes available. The Town will receive \$1,000 per SDE from the developer for the water.

The Remington Group is also adhering to the Town's Green Checklist for new housing and will be building homes with enhanced green features.

Planning director John Linhardt anticipates that building permits for these developments will happen in late 2011 for construction in 2012.

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