

Delays have left Halton with no available ambulances Region seeks Provincial help

MELANIE HENNESSEY
Special to The IFP

The Region is turning to the Province for help with hospital offloading delays, which take up much of Halton paramedics' time and sometimes leave no ambulances available for local residents.

At its meeting Wednesday, regional council passed a motion that directs Regional Chair Gary Carr to write to the minister of health and long-term care regarding the urgent need for a province-wide approach to the issues contributing to offloading delays.

The resolution also asks that the Province work with hospital emergency departments to resolve the delays in an expedient manner.

High call volumes and hospital offloading delays continue to tie up Halton paramedics, resulting in several occasions last year when no ambulances were available to respond to local calls.

"We're saying in a community this size we need to ensure the safety of our citizens, and also that our ambulances are needed on an emergency basis," said Carr.

Offloading delays occur when a hospital's at capacity and can't provide a bed for a patient brought in by ambulance. Paramedics must therefore continue providing care to the patient at the hospital, usually in the emergency department hallway, preventing the ambulance from leaving and being used for another emergency.

Late last year, the Region started tracking the frequency of periods when a limited number of ambulances are available to service the region.

Staff found there were 19 occasions and a total of more than 11 hours when four or fewer ambulances were available for all of Halton in November, with one occasion when no ambulances were available for about five minutes.

Then in December there were 36 occasions when four or less ambulances were available that totaled 14.5 hours. There were also three occasions that month totaling one hour when no ambulances were available.

Halton Director of Land Ambulance Services Jim King explained when the local EMS is down to four or less ambulances, supervisory staff is sent out in first response vehicles.

"All of our supervisory staff are advanced care paramedics," he said. "We send them to areas

where we're experiencing higher call volumes."

He said dispatch also notifies Peel Region and the City of Hamilton to try to get some of their ambulances on stand-by on the Halton border.

"It's still a concerning situation to us because we like to have our ambulances available," King said.

The amount of time lost to offloading delays each day is equivalent to two ambulances being out of service of an entire 12-hour shift, stated a report from Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal.

For 2007, this added up to 8,851 hours of vehicle staffing lost at an estimated cost of more than \$1.2 million.

Emergency call demand for Halton EMS also increased by 150 per cent between 1996 and 2007— something that's stretching local resources.

Nosal's report said that the periods of limited resources significantly impact the workload of frontline paramedics.

"On a regular basis, meal breaks are delayed or missed entirely due to call volume and paramedics are currently spending the majority of their working hours on task, with a limited amount of time actually spent in the station," the report explained.

"Limited resources also impact supervisory staff that are frequently required to service emergency calls and provide emergency coverage for prolonged periods of time, which in turn impacts on the supervisors' abilities to complete administrative supervisory functions."

King said the recent addition of two peak-demand ambulances seems to have helped the situation a bit.

He also noted that the offloading delays boil down to a "systemic problem" in the healthcare system.

"There are a lot of patients in the hospital that could go to long-term care homes if there were beds available for them," he said.

Despite the delays at the hospital, Halton's EMS response time has been below the mandated standard since 2001.

The Region is continuing to work with local hospitals, the Halton-Peel Emergency Services Network and the Local Health Integration Networks to develop strategies to manage offload delays.

Tim Hortons
Help us send local kids to Camp!
Georgetown South Tim Hortons
(Argyle and Mountainview)
2nd Annual Camp Day Fundraiser!
10 am to 8 pm
Please join us for this family fun filled event this Wednesday, June 4th, 2008. All coffee proceeds for the 24 hour period to be donated to the **Tim Horton's Children Foundation!**
Featuring activities for the whole family: Prize Wheel, Face Painting, Children's Games, Special Guests, Pop-a-Balloon.
Great prizes to be won!

ENTER FOR YOUR CHANCE TO Win!
ONE OF 10 PRIZES!
1 of 5 \$500 GIFT CERTIFICATES
from **ColorYourWorld**

1 of 5 \$500 GIFT CARDS
from **SEARS**
presented by *There's No Place Like Home*
SPECIAL METROLAND SUPPLEMENT
CHECK OUT THE ONLINE EDITION OF THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!
VISIT www.flyerland.ca

FILL OUT THIS BALLOT FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN!
or you can enter online at contests.metroland.com
MAIL ENTRIES TO: **THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME**
Metroland Corporate Sales, 10 Tempo Ave., Willowdale, Ontario M2H 2N8

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____
POSTAL CODE: _____ TELEPHONE: _____
EMAIL: _____
 Yes, I wish to receive information from Color Your World and Sears on upcoming specials, contests, promotions & events.

Contest Rules: Contest opening date: Friday, May 9, 2008 12pm. Deadline for entries: Thursday, July 31, 2008 12pm. Residents of Ontario may enter, except employees and immediate family members (and/or persons domiciled with) Metroland Media Group Ltd., the prize sponsors and/or any employees of their affiliated companies. Entrants under 18 must have parent/guardian consent. Chances of winning the random draw depend on the total number of entries received. Prizes must be accepted as presented with no cash substitution. Winner consents to having their names and/or photos appear in Metroland Community Newspapers. The decision of the contest judges is final. No purchase necessary. A limit of one qualifier per person, per household, one entry per e-mail address. Color Your World prizes - 5 prizes each valued at \$500. Sears prizes - 5 prizes each valued at \$500. In order to be eligible to win, the selected contestant must correctly answer a skill-testing question which will be administered upon notifying the winning entrant. Full contest rules visit: contests.metroland.com

Drinking and Driving Can Distort Life.

Drink and drive, and your life may never be the same again. You not only risk your life when you drink and drive, you also risk losing your license, incurring expensive fines, doing time in jail or even causing injury or death to an innocent bystander. With all these consequences facing you, driving under the influence is the worst decision you can make. Don't take chances with drinking and driving; there's always a better alternative.

The BRICK.com
Red Tag Sale
Red Tag Savings throughout the store!
Plus Do Not Pay For 15 Months!
Just in time for FATHERS DAY!
L A Z Y
Rocker Recliner - Save \$100 - Red Tag Price 349.95
Microsuede Pillowtop Rocker Recliner - Red Tag Price 399.95
Chaise Rocker Recliner - Save \$150 - Red Tag Price 449.95
Solid Pine Inlay Cocktail Table - Save \$100 - Red Tag Price 299.95
Red Tag Door Crasher!
Scored 50% off! Decorative Pillows - 9.99 Each

Look for our Red Tag Sale flyer in today's paper!
(Only in selected areas.) See in store for complete details.