



P.O. Box 788 • 110 N. Court St.
Heppner, OR 97836
(541) 676-2529

- PRESS RELEASE -

Statement Regarding Health District Ambulance and QRT Services

March 15, 2024

Morrow County acknowledges Morrow County Health District's new interest in providing emergency ambulance and medical services to the citizens of the County during this transition period. The County is also aware of the Health District's decision to provide ambulances and Quick Response Team ("QRT") medical responses on its own initiative. The County has always been willing to consider options to increase public services and welcomes the Health District's interest. First, however, we need to address some of the misinformation in the Health District's recent statements.

The Health District is no longer an authorized ambulance provider because it terminated its service effective March 12, and therefore under Oregon law cannot provide any ambulance services or transports at this time.

Responding to a scene in which an EMS provider is not properly dispatched, whether in a private auto, ambulance, or other vehicle, in violation of local protocols, procedures or ordinance, or interfering in the safe and effective operations of an EMS system, is "call jumping" under Oregon law, and is considered conduct or practice contrary to recognized stands of ethics of EMS providers.

Oregon made ambulance "call jumping" illegal for many reasons beyond financial feasibility. One reason "call jumping" is illegal is to ensure the safety of the public. The history of competing ambulance providers racing to incidents to get the revenue is one of extreme danger to the public. People have been killed by such competition, and multiple ambulance providers at a scene increases complexity of the call and treatment. There can be multiple standards of care, levels of training, sets of rules, different equipment, different protocols, problems with quality assurance, discipline, and integration. The Health District, in particular, will not work with others in a cooperative fashion which increases the risk to the public. With complexity comes added safety issues in the response itself, as well as in the medical services provided at the scene.

The Health District's press releases display a lack of understanding of the County emergency systems and the medical response laws of the State of Oregon. The Health District has been and continues to operate as a stand-alone entity separate from the governance of the County on emergency medical responses and integration into the emergency response system. Nevertheless, the County previously advised the Health District and all involved that it would continue the past practice of dispatching the Health District's Quick Response Teams (QRTs) in the same way they were dispatched prior to the transition of ambulance services to Boardman Fire. If Boardman Fire requests assistance, or if another fire district or fire department requests assistance, the QRTs will be dispatched. The legal authority to do so is unclear, and the County is working with the OHA to determine appropriate structure, but the County welcomes the Health District's decision to re-engage.

A possible structure that is under consideration is based on the Health District obtaining acceptable Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) from fire districts and fire departments that desire QRT backup services. If the Health District further agrees to provide QRTs in an appropriate agreement with the County, the QRTs may be dispatched through 9-1-1 when appropriate. Again, the County has already reached out to the Health District and hopes it will work with the County rather than refusing to become part of the emergency response system. It is noted that one benefit to working through the new ASA Plan is the ability to reconnect the Health District with the County's Emergency Operations Plan, the County's Mass Fatalities Plan, and in general with other participants.

To be clear, the County cannot tolerate the dangerous behavior of ambulance call jumping and will take action to protect the citizens of the County from this dangerous practice. That said, if the OHA agrees, and the Health District agrees to work within legal parameters, there may be a process and structure to augment the emergency medical services responses within the county. It is up to the Health District to decide if they will participate. In the interim, the County will continue to work with the OHA to determine an acceptable legal structure for dispatch of QRTs.

In closing, the County is very pleased with the transition to Boardman Fire Rescue District (BFRD) for the interim ambulance services. BFRD is doing an excellent job, and their response times are excellent. It has gone much smoother than anticipated and we appreciate the professionalism they have displayed. The County also hopes that the Health District will turn over the County's LUCAS equipment for the ambulances so that the County can continue that level of service.

Please direct inquiries to:

David Sykes
Chair, Board of Commissioners
(541) 256-0379

Matthew Jensen
County Administrator
(541) 676-2529