

	STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE	SECTION: EMS DISPATCH
		SUBJECT: BLS AND QRS NO RESPONSE (PAGE 1 OF 7)

I. Purpose

This policy outlines a new Emergency Medical Services (EMS) dispatch procedure which, once implemented on January 1, 2018, will place Basic Life Support (BLS) Transport and Quick Response Service (QRS) Agencies temporarily out of service if they do not acknowledge (within 10 minutes of a dispatch) that they will be responding to a call for service.

II. Background

On April 10, 2014, provisions of Pennsylvania's EMS System Act (Act 37) took effect. Provisions of this Act require all PA EMS Agencies to maintain 24 hours a day, 7 days a week staffing so as to be able to respond to a request for EMS assistance when dispatched.

Further analysis conducted of Tioga County EMS Response Rates between 2015 and 2017 have concluded that some agencies have not been able to respond to as much as 50% to 75% of their calls for service. This is a critical issue because agencies unable to respond when dispatched are in violation of Act 37 Requirements and subject to penalty.

Act 37 does however permit EMS Agencies to operate their services less than 24 hours a day, 7 days a week if in accordance with a County-level or broader EMS Response Plan, approved by the Department of Health (DOH). This policy will contribute to that plan.

Due to the desire to avoid delays in response, provide the expected service, and comply with Act 37 Requirements, the Tioga County Department of Emergency Services (TCDES) consulted with the Tioga County EMS Council and Chiefs from all EMS agencies in Tioga County from October 2016 through July 2017.

Following almost a year of planning meetings, TCDES drafted this policy so that EMS calls will be dispatched based on the closest known available PA-DOH certified BLS Transport or QRS unit, regardless of which physical EMS Station is closest. This will allow agencies to more collectively support one another and thus reduce the burden of individual agencies not being able to respond to 100% of their calls for service all of the time.

As clients of the EMS agencies that service them, local elected officials and the public are key stakeholders in the process to decide the level of EMS coverage they expect to receive. It is for that reason that this policy was released for public comment between October 1st and November 30th, 2017.

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III. Scope

This policy includes all BLS Transport and QRS Agencies servicing any of the municipalities dispatched by the Tioga County PSAP which is physically located in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania. This includes the majority of Potter and Tioga Counties as well as parts of Lycoming and McKean Counties.

IV. Situation and Assumptions

A. Situation

Volunteerism is the backbone of the EMS system in Pennsylvania, however all volunteer EMS agencies are currently experiencing 1) an overall reduction in volunteers available to respond to EMS calls, 2) an increase in the average age of responders, and 3) an increase in the amount of cost and minimum training hours required by the PA-DOH for an entry-level responder to function as a primary EMS provider. These three challenges (among others) result in a serious reduction of volunteers available to respond to emergency calls.

B. Assumptions

1. *Patient Care* – Providing the best quality of care for patients needing pre-hospital EMS is the most important concern.
2. *Standardization* – Because of the vast geographic area covered by the Tioga County PSAP, it is not practical for some EMS agencies to be dispatched with one set of protocols and other agencies with different protocols. Although a “one size fits all” approach may have challenges, it reduces the opportunity for human error. This plan is intended provide a structure for standardized EMS dispatches throughout the PSAP’s entire coverage area.
3. *Limited Coverage Areas* – Available EMS agencies are expected to respond to any calls for service that they are dispatched to, regardless of whether or not a call is in “another department’s area.” Emergencies are not limited to specific geographic areas, therefore available emergency responders must be willing to respond to any calls for service within a reasonable distance.

V. Goal

Within 10 minutes of every BLS dispatch, the closest known available PA-DOH certified BLS Transport Unit has acknowledged that they will be responding to the call for service.

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VI. Concept of Operations

A. Recruitment and Sustainment of Volunteers

TCDES, under leadership of the Tioga County Commissioners, will continue to seek additional financial and programmatic support for pathways to develop new EMS volunteers in the area, as well as opportunities for maintaining them, such as Continuing Education (“Con-Ed”).

This includes scholarship programs for EMS classes, advertising for volunteer recruitment, and new potential “feeder programs” such as offering Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) and possibly Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) courses in the public schools during regular school hours.

B. Staffing

1. Definition of “Attended”/minimum staffing required to be considered “Attended”:

- i. A BLS Transport Agency may consider themselves attended if, for two hours or more, they have *at least* the minimum number of licensed EMS providers required by the Department of Health (DOH):
 - a. Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) (also with Emergency Medical Services Vehicle Operator (EMSVO) certification)

AND

- b. Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)

Reminder – Staffing of two EMTs (one with EMSVO) is more than the minimum DOH requirements and, therefore, is adequate to be Attended.

- ii. A QRS Agency may consider themselves attended if, for two or more hours, they have *at least* one EMS provider licensed by the Department of Health (DOH) who is also an EMSVO.

Reminder – Staffing of one EMT (with EMSVO) is more than the minimum DOH requirements and, therefore, is adequate to be Attended.

2. Staffing Plan

- i. It is recommended that each station develop their own internal Station Staffing plan to identify when they do/do not have sufficient coverage to be listed as Attended.
 - a. Staffing plans do NOT need to be submitted to other agencies or the Tioga County PSAP.

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- ii. If possible, it is recommended that BLS Transport or QRS Agencies consider implementing station staffing software which is visible throughout the department to ensure that there is effective communication regarding who is/is not available to attend the station.
 - a. Example – “*I Am Responding*”
- iii. Each station is tasked with developing a policy for who is/is not authorized to notify the PSAP of a change in Attended status on behalf of their station.
 - a. **The Tioga County PSAP will not make a determination as to whether or not a caller is authorized to change an attended status.** However, all calls are recorded. If a station questions the authority of a specific caller to change attended statuses, they must follow existing protocols for requesting the review of a phone recording.
- iv. **IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH STATION TO NOTIFY THE TIOGA COUNTY PSAP OF ATTENDED OR UNATTENDED STATUS.**

C. PSAP Dispatch Model

1. “Attended” Status

- i. A BLS Transport or QRS Agency may only consider themselves “Attended” if they have the minimum DOH Staffing requirements AND are available for **at least** a two hour time period.
- ii. **ALL STATIONS ARE CONSIDERED TO BE ATTENDED UNLESS THEY OFFICIALLY NOTIFY THE PSAP OTHERWISE** (i.e., available for dispatch 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year) or unless they fail to respond to calls (See the next section, Chapter V, Section D, 2).

2. “Unattended” Status

- i. If a BLS Transport or QRS Agency is no longer able to respond to calls (i.e., lack of sufficient staffing), they must notify the Tioga County PSAP via phone (570-724-4666) or by radio immediately that they are “no longer attended.” This must be done *PRIOR to being dispatched to a call*.
 - a. Phone Example – “Station 21 is no longer attended.”
 - b. Radio Example – “Chief 2160 to Tioga County, Station 21 no longer attended”
- ii. The PSAP will then broadcast that message over the radio.
- iii. ****If an “Attended” BLS Transport or QRS Agency is dispatched to any call for service, regardless of location, and does not acknowledge to the**

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PSAP *within 10 minutes* that they will handle the call, the following will occur:**

- a. Step 1 – BLS Transport or QRS Agency will be marked as a “No Response” (i.e., a “Scratch”) in the CAD system.
- b. Step 2 – BLS Transport or QRS Agency **will be marked as Unattended** in the CAD system (i.e., temporarily out of service).
- c. Step 3 – BLS Transport or QRS Agency **WILL NOT BE DISPATCHED FROM THAT POINT ON.**
 1. Any station who is marked “Unattended” due to a No Response from a dispatch will be in that status until someone from the station officially notifies the PSAP that they are attended again,

OR

until they are marked “Attended” again by the PSAP at 0600hrs the next morning.

2. Reminder – The closest BLS Transport or QRS Agency will still have their department tones activated, regardless of whether or not their status is “Attended,” however the PSAP will only voice the dispatch of the closest known *ATTENDED* BLS Transport or QRS Vehicle.
3. ****Exceptions****
 - i. BLS Transport or QRS Agencies will *not* receive a “No Response” designation under the following circumstances:
 1. The Agency is recalled within 10 minutes of dispatch or a BLS Transport Agency, who is geographically closer, acknowledges that they will be responding to that call prior to the end of that 10 minute period.
 2. The Agency is already committed to another call for service during time of dispatch and did not previously indicate that additional units were Attended (i.e., 2nd calls & interfacility transfers).
 - a. Ex. If Department 21 has two ambulances and one is committed to an interfacility transfer at the same time a 2nd call for service originates from their area, Department 21

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will only be dispatched for that 2nd call if they've previously informed the PSAP that they have adequate staffing to attend their second ambulance. Otherwise, the PSAP will consider their agency committed to a call for service and unattended for additional calls. Instead, Department 21 will receive a courtesy notification (i.e., pager activation) at the same time the next closest BLS Transport Agency is dispatched. Department 21 will *NOT* receive a "No Response" designation for that 2nd call.

4. Tioga County PSAP tracking of Attended vs. Unattended Stations
 - i. The Tioga County PSAP will record any "attended" and "unattended" statuses of BLS Transport or QRS Agencies by entering them into the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. This CAD system will then recommend only the closest known available PA-DOH certified agency with the appropriate level of care for each call.
 - ii. Each day at 0600hrs, the Tioga County PSAP will reset the CAD system so that ALL agencies will be marked as Attended.
 - a. Reminder – Any BLS Transport or QRS Agency that knows they do not have sufficient staffing to respond to 100% of their calls should immediately notify the Tioga County PSAP that they are "Unattended."
5. Surplus of EMS Calls for Service
 - i. In the rare event that all EMS units in the PSAP's coverage area become "Unattended" or all attended units are dedicated to existing calls for service, the PSAP will dispatch the next closest agency (geographically) to the incident who is licensed in the appropriate level of care, regardless of whether or not they are attended.
 - ii. In other words, if all Attended units in the PSAP's coverage area become Unattended, then the PSAP reverts back to the previous dispatching process where the Primary BLS Coverage Agency is dispatched first, followed by the next two closest BLS Transport Agencies 10 minutes later, etc. until an agency is able to respond.
6. *Responders' Discretion* – When an unattended Primary EMS Agency calls "responding" after an Attended EMS Agency has already responded to a call for service, the PSAP dispatcher will then ask each unit for their geographic location. The unit closest in distance/time to the incident scene will take the call.
 - i. Reminder – Safety and patient care are top priorities.

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VII. Remediation

- A. *Annual Progress Report* – At the end of each calendar year, this policy will be reviewed. If issues with EMS Dispatches or Responses are identified at any point throughout the year or in the Annual Progress Report, the Tioga County PSAP may initiate discussions to include specific BLS Transport or QRS Agencies and/or the elected officials of their municipality in order to identify potential opportunities for improvement or remediation.

VIII. Associated Plans, Regulation, and Legislation

- A. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
- i. Title 28 Health and Safety, EMS Systems Regulations, Chapter 1027 EMS Agencies, 1027.1(3).
 - ii. Title 35 of the PA Consolidated Statutes, Chapter 73, Subchapter C. Intrastate Mutual Aid.
 1. *Also known as* Act 93 of 2008 – Pennsylvania Intrastate Mutual Aid System (PIMAS)
 - iii. Title 35 of the PA Consolidated Statutes, Chapter 81, Subchapter 8140. Conditional Licenses.