

# **After Action Report “Paving the Way to the Future” Emergency Services Symposium**

May 20, 2006

## **Executive Summary**

The emergency services symposium was offered as an educational and informational tool towards improving our fire and emergency medical service system. The audience mix of police, fire, ems, cities, towns, and villages brought together the authorities having jurisdiction and the key response members.

The symposium was based on the Changing Times Report published in December 2005 and other related professional and non-professional resources that addressed the same type of concerns throughout the U.S.

As with many endeavors, the process of reaching the goal of improved, cost effective, timely emergency service is of more value than reaching the goal itself.

With such a multifaceted and multi-jurisdictional system we must continue to focus on the process as we move forward, it's the process that will improve our system.

We must never lose site of our primary goal: to provide the most efficient, timely, and cost effective emergency services to our community. This goal will always be judged against the level of risk our community is willing to bear, which is directly related to what our emergency service providers will allow and our citizens will support.

## **Overview**

### History

The Symposium was presented as the next step towards providing a forum for improved fire and emergency medical services within Dutchess County.

The genesis of the symposium was driven by past County initiatives that looked at what the problems are in our emergency response system. The symposium moved beyond the problem identification stage and provided a standard approach, breaking down our system into its components, and providing system options to move forward with additional discussion at the governmental agency levels, city, town, village, fire district, emergency medical service agency, commercial service agency levels.

Using the results of the “Changing Times Committee Report” as a starting point and platform, a strategic planning committee was formed by invitation to research, outline, and present realistic options toward improved service.

Each committee member was chosen based on their knowledge, service specialties, time in-service, and proven pro-active approach to the improvement of the fire and pre-hospital emergency services. All of the committee members started as volunteers and currently remain active in the system in various capacities.

The Committee agreed there was an urgent need to move forward with providing the groundwork for pro-active positive change using a county view perspective, although from the onset there were concerns that the effort and time given to this process not be left in committee and presented to the stakeholders at the county, city, town, village, agency, and provider levels. For failure to bring this information to light would then be an act in futility for the committee.

It was agreed that the time has come, and probably past, to take the next step in a process to improve fire and ems services within Dutchess County.

### Goal

To provide the best possible emergency services to our customer in a timely and cost effective manner taking into account service standards, available resources, funding, geography, and a level of risk that the customer and service is willing to bare.

### Purpose

The purpose of the symposium was to take the information gathered from the Changing Times Report and information relevant from other sources and form a county level strategic plan focusing on the improvement of fire and emergency medical services.

### Objectives

The following objectives were presented at the symposium:

- A snapshot of our current fire and ems system
- Pros and cons of our current system
- A standard approach toward improvement
- Options for positive change
- Public education and feedback
- Public Expectations, Our Duty, Standards

### Participant Comment

Post symposium questionnaire responses resulted in the following comment:

1. The symposium was rated above average by the majority of the participants with the pro-active view of new concepts and ideas.
2. The participation by public officials was poor.
3. The participation by emergency services providers in certain geographic areas of the county was also poor.

4. Customer – taxpayer education, our most important stakeholder, is an important and needed next step toward improving service.
5. The County should continue to foster, coordinate, and facilitate these discussions with those agencies having the authority, keeping the forward momentum.
6. Future meetings should present more detail of the problem so work on possible solutions can be less ambiguous and more specific, matter of fact.

Upon closing, the symposium presentation team recommended the following next steps:

1. Each agency, emergency service and public office, should review the material presented and start collaborative dialog with other neighboring municipalities toward a regional emergency systems response. The goal is to provide for the best use of valuable resources while removing duplication and over abundance of apparatus and lack of manpower in many areas of the county.
2. As a team the County is willing to coordinate, facilitate, and assist in community meetings in an educational, informational, and fact sharing environment with the authorities have jurisdiction and the stakeholders.
3. A resource list of the strategic planning committee and the participants was provided at the symposium for each agency to continue this process of team building, collaboration, and strategic planning.

Being fully aware that we live in a home rule state and the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) has the authority, if we are to move forward as a united emergency services that provides the best possible service factoring in geography, population, tax base, current assets, call volume, and each community's willingness to except a degree of risk, it is critical that a strategic focus at the county level be conducted and presented to all stakeholders, including the public.

This process needs to start from the top down so when the educational piece of this process is presented to the public, those agencies and members directly involved in providing the service, are aware of their position, their options available, and are not blind sided.

## Conclusion

The symposium was a success in the following light; we brought together seventy-two people from different agencies, different perspectives, and different positions of authority, for a four-hour period, to honestly discuss our fire and emergency medical service system.

The symposium will have wasted the time of the strategic planning committee and the participants if the content and momentum from the symposium, as with the Changing Times Committee Report, and many other past initiatives are not acted on in a proactive, collaborative, and coordinated manner.

We must continually ask ourselves;

“What does the public expect from emergency service providers?”

“Improved emergency service through teamwork and collaboration.”

Special thanks to the following Strategic Planning Committee members that gave their time, knowledge, and expertise toward improving our emergency service system:

Howard Adams  
Henry Campbell  
Andy Mihans  
Jeff Pells  
Mark Butler

Dana Smith  
Chuck Tuttle  
Dave Walsh  
Mike Macak

This symposium would not have been possible if not for the continued proactive and supportive approach of the County Executive and the Department of Emergency Response.

Respectfully submitted,

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