

Ambulance service to reduce number of 'lights and siren' responses

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ABSTRACT

According to a BCAS memo, the updated RAP is expected to contribute to a 22 per cent reduction in calls requiring an advanced life support ambulance, a 29 per cent reduction in "lights and siren" responses and a 35 per cent reduction in first responder call-outs.

FULL TEXT

The B.C. Ambulance Service is changing the way it responds to emergency calls with a plan to reduce "lights and siren" responses by about 30 per cent.

That means if you suffer a suspected aortic aneurysm or second trimester miscarriage, don't expect an ambulance to come screaming to your doorstep.

For about 70 patient conditions, a "routine response" has replaced the Code 3 "lights and siren" callout.

The BCAS's updated Resources Allocation Plan, part of which came into effect Oct. 29, was drafted after a review of about 600,000 patient records, which found that paramedics were "over-responding" to certain calls, said BCAS chief operating officer Les Fisher.

The RAP outlines how many and what type of ambulances should respond to a call, whether they respond with or without lights and siren, and whether first responders should be notified.

According to a BCAS memo, the updated RAP is expected to contribute to a 22 per cent reduction in calls requiring an advanced life support ambulance, a 29 per cent reduction in "lights and siren" responses and a 35 per cent reduction in first responder call-outs.

That last number came as a surprise to first responders themselves.

"We found out [a few days ago] by email," said Vancouver fire Chief John McKearney. "We're just now beginning to understand the impacts."

The BCAS intends to consult with fire departments before changing the notification protocols. The BCAS dispatch centre automatically notifies first responders of certain calls, as established by the RAP. It is up to individual fire departments to decide which ones they will attend.

But before the notification system is changed to reduce first responder notifications, the fire departments need to "understand the rationale," said McKearney. "For the time being, we are still going to go, and we want to make sure citizens know that we are."

The BCAS's changes to the Code 3 "lights and siren" response, which have already taken effect, also impact first responders, who face longer wait times for paramedics to arrive.

"Why is fire going Code 3 and we're going routine? It doesn't make sense," said Bronwyn Barter, president of the Ambulance Paramedics of B.C. union. Nonetheless, Barter said she believes the science behind the changes is sound and the updated RAP will actually improve public safety.

The changes will improve BCAS resource allocation," said Fisher.

An ambulance will still respond to every call.

Credit: The Province

Illustration

Adrian Lam, Times Colonist / The B.C. Ambulance Service is looking to improve resource allocation, but paramedics will still respond to every call for assistance.; Caption:

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