

A Proposal: A Community First Responder (CFR) Specialization for Rural Firefighters

**Prepared by the Partnership to Support Community First Response
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The following document represents agreements reached during a facilitated action planning process attended by Fire Chiefs, Rural municipal leaders, Dispatch services and First Responders representing many regions of Rural Alberta. The detailed comments and recommendations arising from the day are included in a separate document that is available from a working committee. The working committee and attendees opted to call themselves a 'Partnership to support community first response'.

The following proposal represents the specific focus of a rural/ community first response and outlines the need, definitions, issues related to rural first response, a scope of practice, a development plan to take this idea forward. We conclude with the need for a follow up conference/founding meeting of the partnership in April 2011.

Background: Rural Albertan communities have created a variety of strong, coordinated responses to medical emergencies. First responders, based mostly within volunteer fire departments sought training to extend their ability to respond to the accidents and sudden medical emergencies within their communities. As firefighters, they were automatically coordinated with ambulance and police services through local 911 dispatch centres.

The current AHS plan to consolidate ambulance dispatch has fragmented this coordinated response to medical emergencies, and has sidelined the role of first response. This report lays out a long range goal but it was clear from the group that the following issues require urgent attention and must be addressed immediately

- Dispatch of CFR must be recognized and negotiated in all EMS Protocols.
- Common communication must be implemented if there is to be a coordinated rural response to medical or emergency events.

1. Community First Responder Definition

Community First Responders in Rural Alberta are firefighters, both volunteer and/or paid on call (along with some other organized community first responder organizations), who are trained to provide:

- Pre arrival medical care (first on scene assistance) and medical assist/support
- Security of the scene and making the environment safe for emergency team members
- Supportive medical care, landing STARS, communication, and extrication.

2. The need for a specific Rural First Response Protocol

- Vast distances in rural and remote areas mean that Ambulance ETA of more than 10 minutes is common.
- The introduction of STARS for province wide critical evacuation highlights the need for a local first response to coordinate onsite landing, stabilize the situation and the patient and prepare patients for evacuation.
- Local emergencies are best handled by local personnel who can best assist the patient, family and bystanders during the emergency and in follow up.
- Coordinated EMS response is the accepted standard of care internationally and coordinated services include CFR.
- Local/volunteer response the cornerstone to building Community Health Capacity and sustaining perceptions of health security.
- ALL people involved in an event must be able to communicate. E.g. dispatch system that is compatible, programmable radio frequencies so that everyone is in the loop, direct link between EMS and all services involved.
- It is not possible to take one service (ambulance) out of an integrated system without serious risks to the other services.
- Municipalities are implementing risk management protocols to deal with the serious liability issues that are part of the transition without revenue.

2. Scope of Practice of a Community First Responder

The following scope of practice was the result of an analysis of case records of first response situations and modified and ratified by the planning group. Emergency medical situations attended by Community First Responders include:

- Vehicle Accidents: motor vehicle, farm equipment, planes, water, military vehicles etc.
- Fires and explosions
- Search and rescue
- Natural disasters
- Hunting accidents and gun related accidents
- Industry accidents (oil, gas)
- Medical emergencies: sudden death (heart and stroke), diabetic reactions etc.

Scope of practice tasks include

1. Secure scene of accident
 - a. Traffic control
 - b. Securing damaged vehicles or equipment
 - c. Securing perimeter of the scene
2. Extricate victims from vehicles and equipment using Jaws of life etc.
3. Provide comfort and care to victims and bystanders
4. Stabilize and provide first aid and emergency care (up to EMTA):
 - a. assessment of vitals and injuries
 - b. fracture stabilization,

- c. breathing apparatus,
 - d. CPR and Automated External Defibrillators (AED's)
5. Communication with dispatch to coordinate ambulance, hospital base, police, military, gas company services, fire, community resources.
 6. Emergency route assistance and coordination of onsite resources.
 7. Secure and land STARS, transport ambulance personnel from nearest road access.
 8. Onsite coordination of medical resources and personnel and assist where necessary
 9. Assist with preparing victims for transport (ground and air)
 10. Assist community in coping with aftermath and cleanup.

3. Training and Certification

Currently CFR require appropriate medical training as determined by each local municipality. There is a growing concern around standardized training. If a First Responder Specialist designation is adopted by Fire Chiefs it would open the door to

- Investigation of first responder training programs used in other jurisdictions that utilize volunteer or paid on call responders
- Investigation of a Fire specialization online/intensive training system, coordinated by Fire Departments
- Designation /Registration/Certification of those completing the program
- Methods of acknowledging and supporting other community organizations who provide community first responder support
- Annual conference/training/research event

5. First Steps to develop a community first responder (CFR) specialization with Rural Fire Departments.

A working committee has been established to move this initiative forward.

- Establish an online communication network for the Partnership
- Distribute this document to get feedback and support
- Set up working committees to move the approval of the document forward
- Host a conference in April in Wainwright to
 - Adopt the work completed by the working committee and subcommittees related to a CFR specialist designation within Alberta Fire Departments
 - Research papers related to CFR models, dispatch in remote areas, coordination of communication
 - Group discussion and planning sessions for next steps.

We invite your input and participation in creating a Community First Response.

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