
West Hill Fire Service

Case Examination

West Hill Fire Service

Introduction

The West Hill Fire Service provides fire, rescue and emergency medical services in the City of West Hill, as well as ambulance transport. Eighteen months ago, the West Hill Fire Service expanded its services by providing first responder emergency medical care on all incidents.

Background of the West Hill Fire Service

West Hill Fire Service operates four fire stations, each with one crew of five firefighters.

Emergency Medical Response

The West Hill Fire Service joined with the Ambulance Service to coordinate and jointly respond to medical emergencies when it was determined that the Fire Service would likely provide a faster response. The Ambulance Service had been finding it difficult to meet its attendance targets. The ambulance crew arrives later, if necessary.

This strategic partnership was applauded by the community as the speedier the response, the more likely persons, such as heart attack victims, would survive. Firefighters carry defibrillators and are trained emergency medical technicians.

West Hill Fire Service's addition of an Emergency Medical Response was well planned, with all firefighters being trained over a period of twelve months prior to the introduction of emergency medical services.

Shift System

Firefighters work on the 2,2,4 shift system, with 2 day shifts, 2 night shifts and then 4 days off. The day shift is from 09:00 to 18:00 hours and the evening shift is from 18:00 to 09:00 hours.

Prior to the addition of emergency medical services, firefighters often were able to sleep during a portion of each night shift. Based on an analysis of incidents, it was shown that firefighters typically had a productive 14 hours out of each 48 hour (4 day) watch before the introduction of EMS.

Dispatch

Dispatch for the West Hill Fire Service is handled by the East Glen Fire Service which operates in the community next to West Hill. The phone exchange for both communities is the same. East Glen has handled all the dispatch for fire and rescue operations for the past ten years and this system has worked well. When East Glen assumed responsibility for coordinated dispatch ten years ago the total number of calls annually was approximately 2,000 for both cities.

When East Glen agreed to assume responsibility for Dispatch, West Hill agreed to pay the equivalent of two firefighters salaries (with benefits) to East Glen annually. The remaining savings from eliminating the West Hill Dispatch operation were used to increase West Hill's firefighting crews from 4 to 5 firefighters.

Current Dispatch Operations

The current Dispatch Centre has a firefighter and a civilian dispatcher working together to respond to calls. East Glen firefighters are rotated into the Dispatch Centre for a month at a time, or occasionally are assigned to the Dispatch Centre when they cannot perform their routine firefighting duties for medical reasons. Informally, the firefighters act as supervisors to the civilian dispatchers when the supervisor is not there. The duties are divided between the two people on each shift, one performs call taking and providing emergency medical instruction and the other handles dispatch.

The civilian dispatchers were hired a year ago, after a 60% increase in dispatch calls for the West Hill area was experienced due to the expansion of its services. The Dispatch Centre received 3,720 in the past twelve months and the number of calls is expected to increase.

The Dispatch Centre works on the same shift schedule as the firefighters.

Supervision

The Dispatch Centre is supervised by an East Glen Sergeant who is also a trained and experienced paramedic, which has been very helpful. The Sergeant's practical knowledge assisted enormously in successfully getting the Emergency Medical Dispatch launched.

The Sergeant works 9 am to 5pm Monday to Friday. He is available on call if needed after hours.

Emergency Medical Dispatch

When the additional civilian dispatchers were added to East Glen's Dispatch Operation, they began providing pre-arrival lifesaving instructions over the phone to callers with medical emergencies. East Glen also upgraded its equipment and software in its Dispatch Centre a year ago.

East Glen Enhances Services

A year ago, East Glen Fire Service made the decision to also partner with the Ambulance Service to provide first responder emergency medical services to the East Glen Community. Since then, East Glen has trained 70% of its firefighters as EMTs.

The number of calls has increased by 48% for East Glen since introducing its first response emergency medical service 6 months ago.

Recruitment

Recruitment of civilians had been a major concern to East Glen Fire Service. However, it found that the applicants for the dispatcher positions were largely very good and with training all but one of the dispatchers worked out very well. The one dispatcher who has since been terminated, tended to show up late for work and frequently fell asleep during the slow night time shifts.

East Glen Fire Service**Background of the East Glen Fire Service**

East Glen Fire Service is very similar to West Hill in terms of size of community and number of incidents. East Glen Fire Service's firefighters operate on the same shift schedule. Owing to the Hill dividing the two communities, the two Fire Services restrict attendance to their respective cities.

East Glen Fire Service operates out of three stations. The central station has two crews and the other two stations have one crew each. Each crew has five firefighters.

The Two Municipalities

The Municipalities of West Hill and East Glen have a long standing positive relationship and have jointly conducted many projects and provided some services to the mutual benefit of the two communities.

The East Glen and West Hill Fire Chiefs' share similar views and are committed to providing efficient and effective services to their respective communities. The two Chiefs are also under financial constraints to minimize expenditure and any increase for additional funding would be scrutinized closely.

Incidents

A decade ago, the two Chiefs foresaw the decrease in home and building fires as better building materials and alarm systems became standard. Combining dispatch operations made a lot of sense under these conditions. See Annex A.

Based on communities with similar demographic profiles, both Fire Services expect that the number of emergency medical service calls will level off in the next year to two years. West Hill estimates that the total number of calls in its area to increase by an additional 40% before leveling off. East Glen estimates an additional 85% increase in total calls before the number begins steady. An increasing proportion of calls will be for EMS.

Ambulance Services

The Ambulance Service provides emergency medical services and transportation to the five hospitals in West Hill and East Glen.

The Ambulance Service is operated as a non-profit organization, wholly owned by the Cities of West Hill and East Glen. The Ambulance Service operates on a break even basis. The Ambulance Service's Board is comprised of members appointed by the two cities. Emergency medical dispatch was not provided before East Glen Fire Service expanded its Dispatch Centre.

The Ambulance Service does not contribute financially to the cost of Dispatch.

Unionization

Both the West Hill and East Glen firefighters are represented by the same union: the Hill and Glen Firefighters Union. Firefighters in both services receive similar remuneration, benefits and conditions of work.

The civilian dispatchers are not unionized. East Glen pays the dispatchers a rate which is competitive with similar positions in the vicinity and offers better benefits than most similar jobs.

The current dispatchers rejected an attempt by the Hill and Glen Firefighters Union to represent them. The civil service union in the area may approach the dispatchers sometime in the future.

Some firefighters didn't like the idea of providing emergency medical services initially. The union requested an increase in wages to correspond to the increase in responsibilities. The matter eventually went to arbitration where it was settled. The appointed arbitrator found that the EMS responsibilities while making firefighters busier on duty, did not involve additional health and safety risks. As well, other communities whose ambulance services were provided by private agencies paid paramedics approximately 75% as much as firefighters earned with fewer benefits. The arbitrated settlement included a cost of living wage adjustment, but no additional remuneration for emergency medical services.

Financial Information**Firefighters**

Firefighters are paid an average of \$45,000 per annum including benefits. Firefighters spend a total of 3 weeks a year in training that requires them to be taken off of the regular shift. No specific training is provided for emergency medical dispatch.

Dispatchers

Civilian Dispatchers are paid \$30,000 per annum including benefits. New dispatchers require 3 weeks of classroom training and 3 weeks closely supervised on-the-job training before they can function as dispatchers. An additional week of refresher training is provided each year.

Supervisors

Sergeants are paid an average of \$55,000 per annum including benefits. Based on salary scales in the West Hill/East Glen area, a civilian dispatch supervisor would earn approximately \$37,500 per annum.

Factor for Vacations, Sick Leave, Training Etc.

In order to cover the cost of employees' vacations, sick leave, training, etc. a factor of 1.4 must be added for civilian staff. I.e., if 4 dispatchers are required to provide shift coverage 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, $4 \times 1.4 = 5.6$ persons are needed.

A factor of 1.5 is required for firefighting personnel.

Dispatchers work 42 hours net out of every 48 hour shift, which allows them time for lunch/super breaks.

The Future Direction

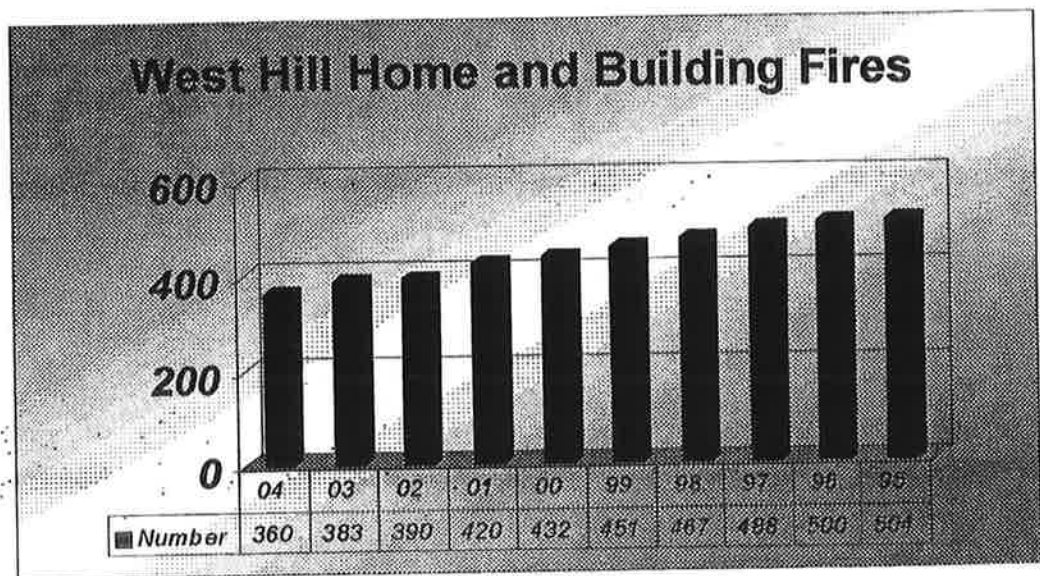
East Glen recently informed West Hill that it can no longer continue to provide dispatch services under the current arrangements. It wants to review how Dispatch operations can be shared and made more effective.

At a recent meeting of the West Hill and East Glen Fire Services, the Chiefs agreed to assign a staff lieutenant (you) to review all the available information, undertake any additional research necessary and provide recommendations on how the Dispatch Centre should be operated in the future. The recommendations must include the financial implications, the benefits to both East Glen and West Hill Fire Services and their respective communities. You will also provide a detailed implementation plan of how the changes, will be accomplished.

The type of incidents West Hill Fire Service responded to in the past 12 months is shown below.

Type of Incident	%
Home and Building Fires	18%
False Alarms	17%
Other non-medical emergencies	19%
Road Traffic and Medical Emergencies	46%
Total	100%

The number of home and building fires over the past ten years is shown below:



The type of incidents East Glen Fire Service responded to in the past 12 months is shown below.

Type of Incident	%
Home and Building Fires	20%
False Alarms	17%
Other non-medical emergencies	18%
Road Traffic and Medical Emergencies	45%
Total	100%

The number of home and building fires over the past ten years is shown below:

