

## Overview of Emergency Medical Service (EMS)

When a person calls 911 for an emergency, they are asked a series of questions by the 911 dispatcher. The answers to these questions are used to determine the severity of the situation and the response required. Each call is assigned a 'level' of severity using letters A through E. For example, the least severe situation is assigned a designation of A-Alpha, followed by B-Bravo, C-Charlie, D-Delta, and the most severe, E-Echo.

Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) function at different levels and are licensed based on the training they have completed. EMT-Basic is the lowest level, followed by EMT-Intermediate (and IV-Tech). The EMT-Paramedic is trained and licensed at the highest level. Emergency Medical Service providers deliver Basic Life Support (BLS – basic level EMTs) or Advanced Life Support (ALS – Paramedic level).

Ambulance districts are determined by municipality boundaries or other intergovernmental agreements. When a person calls 911 the dispatcher will determine the location of the emergency and send the ambulance that services the area (this may not be the closest ambulance to the location of the emergency). If the ambulance that serves the area is not available (on another call) another ambulance will be sent in its place. Basic level EMS providers may request ALS personnel be sent to the scene if it is determined the patient(s) require a higher level of care.

It should be noted; law enforcement will also respond to the emergency and may arrive before the ambulance. The fire department may respond as well.

In 2004 Dane county conducted a pilot program that automatically sent the closest ALS (Advanced Life Support/Paramedic) to the scene of higher level calls (i.e. D-Delta, E-Echo, and select C-Charlie). This eliminated the need for EMTs to perform an initial assessment to determine if ALS was needed, and request the unit.

Five ALS providers took part in the pilot program: Fitch-Rona EMS, Town of Madison Fire/EMS, City of Madison Fire/EMS, City of Middleton EMS and Sun Prairie EMS. Each ambulance received an electronic tracking device that allowed the 911 center to know their location at all times. The 911 center was able to determine if the ambulances were at the EMS/Fire station, at the hospital, or somewhere in-between. Thus, when a high level call was received that required an ALS response the 911 center was able to send the ambulance closest to the emergency.

This program resulted in the Medical Priority Dispatch System being adopted in Dane County. Priority Dispatch saves precious time during a medical emergency and provides advanced care to those patients who need it most. It is important to note: the ALS ambulance sent to the site of the emergency may not be from the closest EMS/Fire station; however it will be the closest ALS unit to the site of the emergency at that time.

The EMS service that provides coverage to the area will also be sent to the scene. If it is determined the ALS unit is not required, care of the patient will be transferred to the lower level provider. The ALS unit will then be back in service and available for another call.

For more information on EMS in Dane County, please see the following web site:

<http://www.countyofdane.com/emergency/ems/>