

BENTON COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT #1

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fire Commissioners to consider EMS levy for Benton County Fire District #1

KENNEWICK, WASH.— Waiting a long time for an ambulance in Benton County Fire District #1 could be over. The Board of Fire Commissioners for Benton County Fire District #1 is considering asking voters to approve a levy for emergency medical service (EMS). Funding would be used to purchase, outfit and staff two ambulances to respond to emergency medical service calls.

Fire Commissioners will deliberate on a resolution asking voters to approve such a ballot measure at three upcoming meetings:

- Tuesday, March 20 at 6:30 p.m. – Rancho Reata, Station 140, 7704 South Bermuda Road, Kennewick (99338)
- Tuesday, April 3 at 6:30 p.m. – Finley, Station 120, 30004 S. Finley Road, Kennewick (99337)
- Tuesday, April 17 at 9:00 a.m. – Fire District Headquarters, 7511 West Arrowhead Avenue, Kennewick (99336)

The Board will vote whether to place an EMS levy on the August Primary Election ballot at the April 17 meeting.

Fire district officials are concerned that ambulance response times are too long because it relies on mutual aid from neighboring agencies. A local EMS program would reduce ambulance response times and improve patient care.

Citizens have come forward to express support for the fire district to purchase and staff its own ambulances. Dawn Senger and her husband who live in Finley waited 20 minutes for an ambulance after he slipped and fell on ice this winter cracking two ribs.

“We hope the Board will allow people to vote on this issue,” said Dawn Senger. “We shouldn’t have to wait for the care we need.”

“We want to provide better service to our people,” said Fire Chief Lonnie Click. “The population in our fire district has grown to the point where we need to provide this level of care.”

Chief Click also says that relying on mutual aid impacts the resources neighboring agencies have to serve their communities.

“We want to be a good partner in the region,” Chief Click said.

In 2017, Benton #1 responded to 1,516 emergency calls – 55 percent of which were EMS-related. Currently, 90 percent of all EMS calls require transporting a patient to the hospital.

The EMS program would be funded by a levy of 50 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, or \$100 per year (\$8.33 per month) for a \$200,000 home. If approved by voters, funding would be used to purchase, outfit and staff two ambulances to respond to medical calls. This would reduce response times by as much as seven minutes when a patient needs immediate care.

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Benton County Fire District #1 is a combination fire department with approximately 90 volunteer, part-time and full-time firefighters serving 17,800 people over 320 square miles. It responds to an average of 1,300 calls per year for structural and wildland fire suppression, emergency medical service, technical rescue, and hazardous materials response. The fire district operates under a balanced budget, and has passed all financial and accountability audits with the state.