

BENTON COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT #1

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fire chief says that ambulance response times need to improve

[KENNEWICK, WASH.] Benton County Fire District 1 has spent a significant amount of time crunching data on ambulance response times over the past few months. The results are discouraging, and Fire Chief Lonnie Click says the agency needs to improve service for the communities it serves.

The fire district serves 17,800 people over 320 square miles, including the communities of South Kennewick, Finley, Rancho Reata, and Badger Canyon. Emergency services are funded with a fire levy of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed value. However, the agency is unable to purchase ambulances out of existing revenue and relies on neighboring agencies to transport patients to area hospitals. This is considered “mutual aid” and takes longer to reach people in an emergency. It also reduces the resources that mutual aid partners have to serve their communities.

“Improving response times for medical emergencies means patients will be treated sooner and arrive faster to the hospital for follow-up care,” said Chief Lonnie Click. “In some areas of the fire district, it takes too long for an ambulance to arrive. We can and must do better.”

Chief Click is quick to defend neighboring agencies. He says that Benton 1 is extremely grateful for the mutual aid provided, but it’s time for the fire district to be a good neighbor, as well.

“Our fire district has grown to the point where we need to improve our EMS program,” he said. “We serve too many people to have to rely on neighboring agencies for ambulance transports all the time.”

Benton 1 has seen a steady increase in call volumes – about two percent per year over the last 10 years. In that time, a need has emerged for the fire district to consider expanding its Emergency Medical Service program to improve service to the community. Currently, 90 percent of all EMS calls received by Benton 1 require patient transportation to area hospitals.

The fire district will consider asking voters to approve an EMS levy sometime in 2018 to improve its EMS program. Funding would be used to purchase and equip ambulances, stationing them throughout the fire district to respond to calls. Doing so would substantially reduce ambulance response times for a majority of district residents.

Here’s a chart of current and projected ambulance response times in minutes and seconds as a result of an EMS Levy:

Community	Ambulance Response Time (Current Average)	Ambulance Response Time (Projected)
West Badger/Dallas	9:12	1:30-4:00
Summitview/Rancho Reata	8:58	2:00-8:00
East Badger/Cottonwood	8:57	3:30-6:00
Clodfelter/Triple Vista	11:53	10:00-12:00
East Kennewick	7:29	5:00-7:30
Central Finley	10:45	1:30-5:00
South Finley	16:11	2:30-7:00

Source: “Current average” from actual response times for 2016. “Projected” represents actual drive time from station to identified locations within the referenced areas.

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Benton County Fire District 1 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. Emergency personnel also are active and involved in the community and local schools teaching fire and injury prevention. Benton 1 operates under a balanced budget, and has passed all financial and accountability audits with the state.