

Subject: Fire Emergency Response Times

**FY 2023 Proposed Budget
Budget Work Session Follow-up**

3/18/2022

The following information is provided in response to a request made by Mr. Dorsey at the work session on 03/01/2022, regarding the following question:

The proposed budget (page 358) shows an increase in response times but no real change in outcome measures like fire deaths (page 360) or the value of non-vehicle fire loss (page 361). What is the relationship between response time and outcomes? Does response time matter?

EMS Response Times

Response times matter in terms of confirming the nature of the emergency and providing life-saving care and conservation of property.

Dr. Smith, Arlington County Fire Department’s Medical Director, reaffirms that quick response times remain a high priority. While there are high acuity medical conditions that clearly benefit from rapid evaluation and transport, including cardiac arrest, major trauma, and respiratory distress, the current trend showing increased response time did not compromise our ability to provide emergency services because the Fire Department changed the placement of advanced life support (ALS) providers onto suppression units to allow for ALS first response. Thus, an ALS provider is at the patient’s side from the closest available fire department unit. This represents an improvement from the historic model where ALS providers were only on a limited number of transport units, and thus could be dispatched to the call from farther away.

Additionally, the Department is placing an emphasis on developing the skills and training for our basic life support (BLS) providers to improve their role in assisting in the management of these critical patients. This emphasis on BLS providers is an evidenced-based best practice that has shown improved survival in many critical medical conditions.

As a further compliment to the Department’s emergency care initiatives, the Virginia Hospital Center (VHC) was recently elevated to a level two trauma center designation. This new designation will create a locally available trauma center to accept critically injured patients. As a result, the Department anticipates faster transportation times for care of critically injured patients who in the past had to be transported to appropriate hospitals in either neighboring Fairfax County or the District of Columbia.

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The Department is committed to continued evaluation of existing practices to find ways to improve response times and overall quality of emergency care. For example, we are working on technology to connect patient record systems from the County's emergency medical services and area hospitals. These connections might allow us to track a patient from 9-1-1 call through discharge from a hospital. This visibility could allow the department to better manage patient care through changes in medical assessments and treatments, rather than solely relying on the fastest possible response with unneeded personnel and vehicles. Matching a patient's need to arrive at the best medical outcome is the emergency medical service philosophy.

Fire Response Times

A counter-intuitive finding that is shown in the proposed budget document is a slight increase in annual response times with a corresponding reduction in estimated fire losses. Although there does not appear to be any verifiable correlation between the two performance measures, as with EMS responses, staff believes that fire response times are vitally important and will continue to monitor them and develop methods to reduce them wherever possible.