



MEDIA RELEASE

OFFICE OF COUNTY MAYOR TIM BURCHETT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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County taking proactive steps to protect the public's health and safety

Knoxville, Tenn. — Last week, Knox County Purchasing officials sent a letter to Rural Metro asking for an explanation of potential indicators of service-related issues. Knox County contracts with Rural Metro to provide ambulance services to citizens in emergency situations.

In the letter, Knox County Purchasing Director Hugh Holt asks for a “written explanation and an action plan to remedy these performance related issues.”

Contrary to what has been reported, the letter Holt sent to Rural Metro's Erin Downey is not the first step toward termination of Rural Metro's contract with Knox County. Instead, the letter is a proactive effort to identify potential issues that could develop into problems that impact public safety.

The concerns brought forth by Knox County include Rural Metro staffing levels, its seemingly frequent use of mutual aid and an early assessment of June 2015 performance numbers that indicate Rural Metro's response times may not meet contractual obligations. The County's contract with Rural Metro allows for the use of mutual aid agreements in responding to calls when necessary, and also requires that, at least 90 percent of the time, a first responder arrive on-scene within 10 minutes of a call for emergency medical service. The early assessment of June's response data may indicate a 10-minute-or-less response time of just under 90 percent, which could trigger fines for Rural Metro and prompted the proactive response from Knox County in requesting an explanation of the ambulance service provider's frequent use of mutual aid and what appear to be below-benchmark response times.

In Holt's letter, he lists Rural Metro's “use of Mutual Aid approximately 78% of the time from January-March 2015.” To be clear, this bullet point refers to the number of days during which Rural Metro notified partner agencies of the potential need for mutual aid, and is not intended to mean that 78 percent of all individual emergency medical calls received a mutual aid response. These notifications rarely result in a partner agency responding to an emergency.

“When someone calls 911 for a medical emergency, they deserve to know they'll receive an appropriate response, which is why Knox County is doing its due diligence. It's our duty to ensure public safety,” said Knox County Mayor Tim Burchett. “A primary reason we have a contract for this sort of service is to ensure performance and maintain accountability.”

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