

## **TEMS Bails out the WTFD**

**WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP (Mercer County) - June 19, 2007 - The Washington Township Fire Department (WTFD)'s aging fleet of ambulances finally caught up with them last week.**

**The WTFD operates three ambulances. Two ambulances are owned by the Township of Washington and one is owned by the Borough of Hightstown (WTFD is contracted to provide EMS to Hightstown Borough under a "Shared Services" agreement signed in March, 2007). The ambulances owned by the Township of Washington are 11 and 6 years old respectively and both have over 90,000 miles. As they have aged, these two ambulances have developed into maintenance nightmares. Over the past few months they have become regular visitors at the Township's garage for various repairs.**

**Two weeks ago, the Hightstown Borough ambulance (1994 Ford/PL Custom) broke down and was placed out of service with a laundry list of problems. This ambulance is suffering from many years of use by the Hightstown Volunteers as well as the previous contracted ambulance service (MONOC). The WTFD sent its backup (1996 Ford/PL Custom) ambulance up to Hightstown to fill in for their broken down rig.**

**Last week, the WTFD's primary ambulance (2001 Ford/PL Custom) broke down. Since the Washington Township reserve ambulance was assigned to Hightstown, the residents of Washington Township were left without an ambulance until a replacement could be found. Fortunately, Trenton Emergency Medical Service (TEMS) was able to temporarily loan a spare rig to Washington Township and within a few hours the WTFD EMS was back in service. The Deputy Director of TEMS is a former firefighter from WTFD.**

**In 2005, the (now defunct) fire district prepared a 10 year strategic plan for the fire department (<http://wtfd.org/masterplan/2005stratplan2015.pdf>). Under Section Two "Improving the Emergency Medical Service Program" the fire district listed the #1 priority as, "Replace the department's primary ambulance...no later than the first quarter of 2007."**

**A committee was formed and specifications were drawn up for a new ambulance that would meet the needs of the Dual Role Fire and EMS service provided by the WTFD. The former fire district placed a referendum on the general election ballot and the taxpayers of Washington Township overwhelmingly voted to purchase a new ambulance. Unfortunately, once rumors began circulating in 2006 that the mayor wanted to dissolve the fire district; several commissioners stonewalled the purchase of this lifesaving apparatus in order to politically maneuver themselves into the good graces of the mayor.**

**There is no steadfast rule by which to judge when it is most appropriate to replace an emergency vehicle, such as an ambulance or a fire truck. Several factors such as call volume, total mileage, annual mileage, annual unit activity (emergency responses), total engine hours, annual engine hours, annual maintenance costs, annual maintenance costs per mile, and downtime for maintenance and repairs must be taken into account. A sharp and prolonged rise in maintenance costs as well as time**

**spent “out of service” is an indicator that an ambulance is nearing the end of its serviceable life span. The NJ Department of Health (NJDOH) requires that all licensed ambulance services maintain an “out-of-service” log book. This log can be closely scrutinized in the event that the NJDOH receives a complaint or performs an unannounced inspection of the records of a licensed ambulance provider (such as the WTFD).**

**Ideally, you would anticipate this and plan for it so that vehicle breakdowns don't cause a disruption in service. Fortunately, a vehicle replacement plan was implemented by the fire district in 2005. Unfortunately, the municipal takeover of the fire district placed the ambulance replacement schedule on the back burner and now vehicle breakdowns have caused a critical interruption in service to our residents as we are forced to utilize a borrowed ambulance that does not meet the needs of a dual role fire and EMS agency.**

**Now, it is June of 2007. The first quarter of 2007 has long since passed and the WTFD is no closer to getting a new ambulance than it was two years ago. The specifications drawn up by the WTFD have been in the hands of the Township administration for several months with no progress. We will continue to update our residents as necessary on this critical situation. The TEMS ambulance will remain as the primary WTFD EMS unit for an as yet to be determined time frame.**