



JEFFERSON COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCY

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“Handling and Transportation of the Deceased by Jefferson County EMS Providers”

Ranson, WV. (July 21, 2014) - For many years now, the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Responders of Jefferson County's volunteer fire departments and Jefferson County Emergency Services Agency (JCESA) have been providing to the community the service of transportation of deceased individuals within the county after we are called to these type incidents. With the written opinion of the Jefferson County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and the formal action of the Jefferson County Emergency Services Agency Board, the practice of the transportation of and the custody of the deceased by EMS crews will cease on August 16, 2014.

For consecutive years, the demand on our county's EMS system has increased. This increase in calls for service has been accompanied by lower volunteer turn-out across the county's six (6) volunteer EMS companies, and county budget cuts to the JCESA career system which supplements the volunteers with paid staffing - the Jefferson County Emergency Services Agency.

“ We are not insensitive to the needs of the grieving family. Our providers are caring people, who chose this profession because they enjoy helping people and they will continue to handle these situations with compassion, respect and dignity. But, with 4,360 hours of career coverage eliminated this year, as a result of the 20% budget reduction, we must better utilize our resources to fulfill our mission of saving lives,” says JCESA Deputy Director Ed Hannon.

The new operational guideline that EMS providers in Jefferson County will follow states that if the circumstance meets the criteria for the State of WV Medical Examiner to investigate, as determined by the County Medical Examiner on call, EMS staff will return to service upon arrival of law enforcement and/or the medical examiner. EMS volunteer providers may, at their discretion, remain on scene pending the arrival of the medical examiner. The medical examiner will assume custody of the body, transportation and control of the scene.

“We understand that this is a trying time for the family of the deceased, and we assure you that our crews will maintain the utmost respect for the situation at all times, however, the time it takes to take control of the deceased, and transport to a facility potentially leaves the community without a staffed ambulance in that area that is designed and dedicated to emergency lifesaving response,” stated the EMS Chief of the Shepherdstown Fire Department, Chief DeMeritt continued to state that, *“with limited resources throughout the county, we must be cognizant of the need for resources, while still maintaining the level of passion that the community residents are accustomed to”*

In a recent letter to those organizations immediately affected by this change, Director Pittinger states, *“The mission of EMS in Jefferson County is to provide life-saving emergency care to those in need of emergency medical services. This cannot be done by dedicating limited personnel for extended periods to handle and transport deceased individuals while other resources are available for this purpose. The transportation of the deceased who require a medical examiner investigation will be transported through arrangements with the Chief Medical Examiner’s office. Those who have enrolled in Hospice and those who have made prior arrangements with funeral homes will not be affected. In the event that none of the above applies to the deceased, the EMS crews on scene will provide to the family the contact information of appropriate local funeral homes who can then arrange transportation”*.

“Another major issue is the matter of where to transport and/or hold the deceased. Until four years ago, the Jefferson Memorial Hospital (now Jefferson Medical Center) morgue was available to EMS to hold the deceased until decisions could be made by the immediate family members. When that facility became unavailable, JCESA purchased a portable morgue which was graciously housed by a local funeral home. That arrangement likewise will cease operations as of August 16, 2014 for numerous reasons” Director Pittinger states.

All parties involved with this change in operations of Jefferson County EMS were notified via written correspondence on July 16, 2014 by Jefferson County Emergency Services Agency by Director Pittinger