

# ALS provides more options in saving lives

EMS services expanded in Riverside put more paramedics in fire stations

By Greg Adams, fire captain / paramedic, Riverside Unit

Most fire departments throughout California provide some form of pre-hospital Emergency Medical Service (EMS). The form of EMS service depends on community desires, available funding and



Photo by Wes Schultz.

pre-hospital EMS needs. Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) and First Responder EMS provide Basic Life Support (BLS), which is the foundation of any EMS system and is based on ensuring victim airway support, breathing and heart/blood circulation.

Advanced Life Support (ALS) or paramedic service is a significant step up from BLS. Paramedics are authorized to perform invasive techniques on patients including drug therapy, airway

management (intubations) and electro cardio therapy. The CAL FIRE / Riverside County Fire Department provides a two-tiered EMS system. The core or fundamental level is BLS with the enhanced level being ALS.

EMS within the Riverside County Fire Department started in the 1960's with volunteer firefighters using volunteer-owned rescue squads. They provided oxygen and operated at a simple Red Cross Basic First Aid training level. A major change occurred during the early 1970's when the TV show, "Emergency" debuted and depicted pre-hospital care with paramedics. With that debut, every home in America soon learned about ALS and its values. Many communities began to implement ALS. Beginning in 1980 at Indian Wells, CAL FIRE / Riverside County Fire Department initiated paramedic service. Soon, paramedic ambulances were also operational in the cities of Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage. When Indio joined the CAL FIRE/ Riverside County Fire Department in 1996, ALS was a part of that change. The City of Temecula added medic squads during 1999. Little change occurred until 2002, when three paramedic engines began responding in the remote communities of Desert Center, El Cariso and Lake Riverside. Elected officials saw the value and the little additional cost of increasing EMS.

Today, 56 of the existing 95

fire stations in Riverside County provide ALS. Currently, ALS is delivered in four modes of service. They are (1) seven medic ambulances that are staffed with two paramedics which transport patients, (2) two medic squads that are staffed with one paramedics and do not transport, (3) medic fire engines that are staffed with two medics and do not transport and (4) 54 medic assessment fire engines that are staffed with one medic and do not transport.

During mid-2004, a committee was formed to review the entire fire department pre-hospital medical program. The committee was tasked with developing a fire department EMS strategic plan and developing EMS operational policies and procedures. Throughout the months following, the committee determined several items which needed to be addressed to meet the rapid



Photo by Wes Schultz.

growth of the program. Some of the major items included:

- Add additional staffing to the EMS Bureau to include a battalion chief and supporting staff.
- Add fire captain/paramedics who will work as EMS area captains.
- Add one EMS specialist.
- Fund county employees who will work on automation projects (data collection, reports, automated class registration, etc).
- Establish the data collection system, including software and field mobile hardware.
- Establish promotional system for paramedic classes (FAE/medic and FC/medic).
- Establish new unit implementation criteria for catch up conversion priorities.
- Establish standards (procedural, staffing and equipment) for all unit types.
- Establish medical operating guidelines.

Through the support of fire department management and the Board of Supervisors, the once struggling EMS section, previously a branch of Health and Safety headed up by one fire captain overseeing all aspects of EMS for more than 1200 employees has grown into its own bureau and will continue to grow to meet the needs of future expansion.

Most issues identified in the strategic plan have either been completed or are in progress and nearing completion. Additional engine companies were upgraded in July 2006 along with the addition of three EMS

area captains, one training specialist, one management analyst and one clerical staff member.

All new stations will include paramedics as the standard staffing with additions to the EMS Bureau staff as outlined in the counties EMS strategic plan. At the end of this expansion in 07/08 every Schedule "A" County engine in CAL FIRE/Riverside County Fire Department will provide ALS service to the public we serve. The EMS expansion program in Riverside is just another example of CAL FIRE providing the highest service available to the citizens of California.



## Welcome to CAL FIRE!



*Above and right, firefighters from CAL FIRE's newest contract districts receive their new badges as CAL FIRE employees.*

In 2006 CAL FIRE welcomed two new departments: Placer Consolidated Fire Protection District in Auburn and San Diego Rural Fire Protection District in Jamul.



*Above, Director Ruben Grijalva discusses the great benefits of cooperating contracts between local and state agencies.*