

The Battle over Kentland Ambulance 339: I did not join the VFD to ride an ambulance! *September 12 update*

Michael J. Ward, MGA, MIFireE
Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine
The George Washington University

Thanks to all that have contributed to make this case study accurate

EMS Week 2007 in Washington DC included a public battle between the Prince George's County, Maryland, Fire/EMS Department (PGFD) and the Kentland Volunteer Fire Department over the placing of an ambulance at Fire Station 33.

PGFD purchased 70 medium-duty ambulances to update their fleet of county-owned transport units. As part of this update, Fire Chief Lawrence Sedgwick Jr. started assigning county BLS ambulances to the five fire stations that did not have a transport unit. Seventy percent of the 130,000 calls a year for fire department assistance are EMS.

Fire/EMS service is provided through the efforts of 38 volunteer organizations and a county fire department that was established in 1971 as component of a charter county government. Just east of Washington DC, Prince George's County is a diverse urban community of 830,000 residents with pockets of wealth, expanding upper-middle class communities and acres of urban blight. PGFD provides service to 27 municipalities within the 485 square miles of the county and handles the most fire incidents within the Washington DC metropolitan area.



Tim Wolfe photo

Fire station staffing

Forty of the 44 fire stations need volunteer staff on evenings and weekends to meet the minimum staffing for first line fire companies and ambulances. A PGFD officer and three career firefighters staff 40 fire stations from 0700 to 1500 from Monday through Friday. A four or five person crew works every hour of every day at Tuxedo-Cheverly 22, Landover Hills 30, Chillum 44 and Bunker Hill 55.

In 22 stations career coverage includes a two-firefighter team that works every hour of every day. Three fire stations: Bladensburg 9, Kentland 33 and Ritchie 37 have no career staff.

The county provides dedicated staffing for 12 medic units (two firefighter/paramedics) and two paramedic ambulances (one firefighter/paramedic + one firefighter/EMT) around the clock. BLS ambulances are staffed by county employees or volunteers that are in the station at the time of the dispatch.

Kentland 33 was given three months to prepare to house and staff Ambulance 339. Station 33's district is ranked #2 in ems activity, responsible for 4000 to 5100 incidents in 2006.

A busy, high profile and internationally recognized volunteer fire department, the membership of Kentland voted to refuse to accept the county ambulance. Kentland Chief Mike Mattison was suspended by Fire Chief Sedgwick on May 14, 2007. Chief Sedgwick threatened to suspend every successive Kentland chief until Ambulance 339 was staffed and housed in the fire station.

Selected history of PGFD ambulance service

PGFD grew from community groups organizing volunteer fire departments from the late 1880's to the 1960's. The first rescue squad was organized by Mr. H. L. Leonard, manager of the Washington Suburban Gas Company, in 1927. Originally designed to provide ambulance service to members of the volunteer fire companies and their families, the concept quickly changed to responding to calls for assistance from the public. The 1927 Buick ambulance eventually ended up at the Bladensburg 9 fire station.



In 1939 Bladensburg bought two new Buick ambulances, increasing Rescue Squad 1's fleet to three. A notation from Bosanko's history book states "With only nine units in the county, it was not uncommon for all of them to be on calls at the same time." The six other ambulances were operated by Glenn Dale Rescue Squad (Rescue Squad 2), Hyattsville 1, Brentwood 4 and Bowie 19.

Bladensburg VFD owned ambulances still carry the "Rescue Squad No. 1" identifier.

The Kentland VFD was organized in 1951 and joined the county volunteer fireman's association as Company 33 in 1953. Kent District Rescue Squad #2 was organized in 1961, placing a Buick ambulance at Kentland 33. The rescue squad subsequently moved to its own quarters in the Palmer Park Shopping Center. In 1972 the Internal Revenue Service seized Kent District's assets, including a heavy rescue truck and two Cadillac ambulances.



Retired 9-1-1 dispatcher and Bladensburg volunteer Tom Carter picks up the story as relayed by WUSA9 reporter Dave Statter in his STATter911 blog:

The (Kent District Rescue) loss then put a load on adjacent fire departments like Landover Hills, West Lanham Hills, Chapel Oaks, Tuxedo-Cheverly, Capitol Heights and Bladensburg. Within a couple of years Landover Hills, West Lanham and Capitol Heights put their ambulances out of service. This made Bladensburg and Chapel Oaks the busiest ambulances in the county. The county chief sat down and talked with all of the volunteer chiefs involved and came to an agreement. Landover Hills, Capitol Heights and West Lanham put their ambulances in service. Kentland refused to put an ambulance in their station. So, it was worked out that a piece of equipment ran from their station to the medic calls and would provide immediate first aid until an ambulance got there.

Kentland purchased its first mini-pumper in 1975. It was a two-firefighter unit that handled the ems first responder calls in 33's district. At that time, Engine 33 was the second busiest engine company in the county, with 1618 responses for the year. Two of the ambulances covering 33's district were the #2 ranked Chapel Oaks (2846) and #3 ranked Bladensburg (2692).



The first three PGFD Mobile Intensive Care Units, staffed by firefighter/cardiac rescue technicians, went into service in late 1977. Creating additional career positions was difficult after the county voters passed a TRIM amendment at the November 1978 elections. TRIM froze county government expenditures and significantly restricted any future increases in local tax rates.

Inconsistent BLS ambulance staffing

BLS ambulance staffing is a challenge. Outside of paramedic transport units, PGFD employees staff apparatus on a first-come basis. Let's consider the situation in fictional Fire Station 16. It is staffed from 7 am to 3 pm with a fire officer, an apparatus driver and two firefighter/emts. If all four of the day crew members are in quarters, and there are no volunteers, Truck Company 16 would respond to a structure fire with a crew of four.

Two of the four day-work firefighter/EMTs will staff Ambulance 169. If the ambulance is on an incident, the officer and apparatus operator are left to staff a fire unit (engine, aerial or rescue company). Evening and weekend ambulance coverage is more variable.

In the 1980's an ambulance would "scratch," not respond to a dispatched emergency call, in some fire stations even when there were enough volunteers at the station. For example, Ambulance 169 is dispatched for a sickness at 2133 hours. At 2137 hours Communications determines that Ambulance 169 has scratched and the next nearest ambulance is dispatched.

At 2140 hours box 16-01 is transmitted for smoke in an apartment building. Engine 161 (with a crew of four), Truck 16 (with a crew of four), Chief 16A and Ambulance 169 (driver only) responds on the fire call. Minimum staffing for a PGFD engine is three, so Station 16 probably had enough volunteers to run the sickness call and cover the apartment fire response.

Scratched BLS ambulances resulted in PGFD establishing two round-the-clock BLS ambulances that were staffed with ems-only employees and seasonal labor, known as "700 hour EMTs." Rescue 1 was assigned to Chapel Oaks 38 in 1983.

Rescue 2 was originally placed in Station 33's district, using a county fire apparatus maintenance facility on West Street near the United Parcel Service distribution center. The facility was described as a "dirty, dingy warehouse where the county built a small bunkroom." The crew of Rescue 2 was not permitted to park, eat or rest at Station 33. They had to use the bathroom at the McDonalds across the street. The rescue ambulances averaged 3500 responses a year.

To meet the increased need for paramedics, the county hired non-firefighter Paramedic I's in 1984. By 1990 the county was staffing ten medic units and three

BLS ambulances every hour of every day, using a mix of firefighters and non-firefighters. Between 0700 and 1500 hours on weekdays, county firefighters were also staffing ambulances from 35 fire stations.

There was a continuing decline in volunteer fire department support of ambulances. West Lanham Hills 28 stopped running an ambulance in 1991 as result of a dispute over sending an ambulance into Station 33's area. Ambulance 289, a county-owned unit, was parked in a gasoline station across the street from the fire station. For a short period of time, it operated as PGFD Rescue 5.

A 1992 snapshot of ems transport coverage in the Kentland area shows the following resources:

Kentland: no ambulance
Lanover Hills: Medic 6 and Ambulance 309
West Lanham Hills: no ambulance
Chapel Oaks: Rescue 1
Seat Pleasant: no ambulance
Bladensburg: Ambulance 99
Tuxedo-Cheverly: Rescue 2
Ritchie: no ambulance
Capital Heights: Ambulance 59
Hillside: Ambulance 69
Kentland #2: Medic 7 and Ambulance 469



A few details about the 1992 snapshot:

Tuxedo-Cheverly was first fire station that the county took over from the volunteers. Originally assigned in 33's district, Rescue 2 was moved to Tuxedo-Cheverly so the county could better staff the engine, aerial and heavy rescue units assigned to 22. A single crew of an officer and three firefighters are used to cover the staffing of all three fire companies.

Ambulance service was restored to Capital Heights in 1988 when the county supplied round-the-clock career firefighters. This was one of five stations in 1992 that had a PGFD officer and three firefighters working every hour of every day. Ambulance 59 and Ambulance 69 were staffed by PGFD employees around the clock.

Ritche Ambulance 379 became a pawn in the staffing of rescue ambulances. When the "700 hour EMT" program ended, rescue ambulance staffing was handled by the detailing of firefighters to the rescue unit. The career sergeant at Ritchie placed Ambulance 379 out of service when the daytime staffing dropped from four to three when they detailed a firefighter to Rescue 1.

The sergeant argued that it was unsafe to leave a lone driver to respond in Engine 371 if the rest of the day crew was staffing both Ambulance 379 and Rescue 1. Ritchie Volunteer Chief Joseph Ball informed the county that, since it allowed the career crew to place Ambulance 379 out of service, the unit would remain out of service for the rest of the day "... to support the rescue unit pilot program."

The rescue ambulance program and use of ems-only employees ended with a hiring freeze during Wayne Curry's first term as county executive in the mid 1990s.

Career staff removed from Station 33

The county fire chief negotiates career staffing with each of the volunteer corporations. Because the TRIM amendment continues to restrict expansion of the county budget, the fire/ems department remains significantly understaffed. According to a 2004 Tri-Data study, PGFD has a budget that, as described in cost-per-capita, is 20% lower than the rest of the Washington metropolitan area.

On May 26, 1995, the fire chief unilaterally removed career crews from Brentwood 4, Seat Pleasant 8 and Kentland 33. Some involved with this issue stated that the return of daytime county crews would require the assignment of a BLS ambulance to the fire station. The BLS ambulance would be staffed by volunteers on evenings and weekends. Brentwood 4 housed PGFD Medic 1 since 1977 and refused to accept an ambulance. It remained an all-volunteer fire company until it was part of the 2005 county consolidation of fire companies 2, 3 and 4 into Bunker Hill 55.

Volunteer support of ambulance service continued to erode. Riverdale Heights 13 refused to send an ambulance into West Lanham Hills 28 in early 1997 because of comments made by a Company 28 crewmember on an earlier ems call.

County changes response to declining ambulance coverage

While not directly affecting ambulance service in Kentland, the following incident marks a turning point in how the county would respond new reductions of ambulance service. Riverdale 7 was involved in a two-front battle with the county fire department and the Town of Riverdale Park when the volunteers decided to stop providing ambulance service.

On November 26, 1999, Riverdale Chief Charles A. Ryan III sent the following letter to the county fire chief: "As a result of a reduction in membership, we feel that we can no longer provide the quality of a consistent and reliable response with the ambulance."

The county chief asked Riverdale to continue to provide ambulance service, but the volunteers refused to respond to ambulance calls. They hid the ambulance.



The relationships are complex. The town owns the building, Company 7 owns the ambulance, and the county fire chief approves volunteer command officer appointments. After the ambulance went missing, PGFD Fire Chief Ron Siarnicki demoted Ryan and Assistant Chief Robert Cease to captains and assigned a reserve county ambulance to Station 7 with a paid crew. After a seven-day impasse, the town evicted the volunteer fire department from the building and obtained a restraining order that prohibited the volunteers from entering the station or interfering with career firefighters who took over operations. The volunteer corporation was ordered by the court to produce the missing ambulance.

100% Volunteer for more than 12 years

Kentland 33 has always been a busy fire company, with 4194 engine company responses in 1987. In 1988 Kentland added Tower 33, a rehabbed 75' Aerialscope. Station responses jumped to 5201 in 1989. A second special service was added in 2004, with the upgrade of Engine 333 to Rescue Engine 33, a pumper with enough extrication equipment to be allowed to respond as a heavy rescue squad company.



An unintended consequence of providing volunteer staffing every hour of every day was a significant increase in the number of structural fires handled by Kentland volunteers. PGFD requires a minimum staff of three on an engine and four on a "special service" – their definition of a truck company or heavy rescue squad.

When individual units mark-up responding to an incident, they are required to provide Communications with their staffing. During the day, our fictional Company 16 may have Ambulance 169 already on an EMS call. When the truck company is dispatched to a structure fire the remaining career crew starts for the fire and reports to Communications "Truck 16 with two". Communications advises the responding battalion chief and asks if an additional company should be dispatched to make up the staffing.

Short staffing has lasted so long it is institutionalized within the dispatch protocols. Communications has an algorithm that assumes each fire station is capable of sending only one engine or special service unit to a structure fire. It is Engine-Truck-Engine-Truck-Engine-Engine-Truck/Squad. To encourage volunteer participation, the nearest three fire stations are allowed to respond additional appropriately staffed engines and special services to a structure fire.

The volunteers at Station 16 can make up the minimum staffing of Truck 16 with two volunteers. In addition, a crew of three volunteers could also respond to the incident with Engine 161. If that happens, Communications will return an engine responding from a further location.

Kentland volunteers were staffing a two-person mini-pumper, a three person engine company and a four person aerial during the weekday when they were surrounded by short-staffed day crews. On many occasions, Kentland would be able staff a second engine company.

In addition to handling their regular emergency workload in the 1st Battalion, Kentland 33 was responding to more distant fires to cover short-staffed companies or responding in place of units that had no staffing. Volunteer staffing at other fire stations on evenings, weekends and holidays is irregular. Occasionally, Kentland 33 units would be working at two or three simultaneous structure fires. The first full year as a 100% volunteer fire station showed 5439 responses from Kentland 33 in 1996, climbing to 7551 station responses in 2006.

“Home of the second busiest engine in the country”

Firehouse Magazine does an annual run report, publishing self-reported response activities of fire companies, stations, etc. The 2003 run survey showed the following top four engine companies:

- 1) Washington DC, Engine 10: 6709 runs
- 2) PG County, Engine 33: 6325 runs
- 3) Los Angeles County, Engine 33: 5885 runs
- 4) Los Angeles City, Engine 57: 5760 runs

Trinidad Engine 10 has been the busiest engine in Washington DC Fire and EMS Service (DCFEMS) for over a decade. Medical locals, the DC term for ems first responder events, account for 76% of Engine 10's runs.

Kentland runs four units under the engine company designation: **Engine 331, Engine 332, Mini-pumper 33** and **Rescue Engine 33**. With no ambulance or medic unit, the engine company runs every serious EMS call in 33's district. MiniPumper 33 is the primary ems 1st responder. Each MP33 run counts as an engine response.

Controversy came with the attention as the “second busiest engine company in the nation.” Apparently, the engine company statistics provided to the magazine included all units responding from Station 33. The 2005 Firehouse Annual Survey showed Kentland Engine Company 33 ranked #16, with 4376 engine company responses. Trinidad Engine 10 was ranked #2 in 2005 with 7366 responses. By the way, DCFEMS 10 Engine and Kentland 33 are 7.5 miles from each other.

An ambulance in every fire station

PGFD struggles to match resources to the workload. In a March 2005 response to a Maryland EMS Workforce survey question “If provided with an unlimited supply of quality providers at the following levels, how many would you hire today?” PGFD would hire 80 EMT-Basics and 12 Paramedics. This was an interesting contrast to the response from neighboring Montgomery County, who would hire 80 paramedics. The rest of the urban counties and cities were only looking for additional paramedics.

PGFD eliminated a decades old practice of providing a single career “shift man” to provide a fire apparatus driver for the volunteers on evenings and weekends. Minimum 24 hour career shift staffing is now two firefighters. While they are expected to staff whichever fire/ems unit is dispatched, they spend a lot of their time staffing the ambulance.

In reviewing the incomplete 2006 staffing records that are required to be submitted by every corporation, the stations with career shift staffing show that county employees are responsible for 95% of the ambulance staffing. There are enough county firefighters on duty to staff BLS ambulances from 26 fire stations on evenings, weekends and holidays.

The Chillum 44 fire station is the second facility the county has taken over from the volunteers. On September 2, 2007, shift staffing at Chillum 44 increased

from four to five in order to provide the minimum staffing of three for Engine 441 and two for Paramedic Ambulance 44. Chillum became one of the first paramedic-staffed engine companies, designed to provide increased ALS coverage in an area identified by Tri-Data as underserved. In addition, Capital Heights Ambulance 59 became Paramedic Ambulance 5 to cover another identified ALS coverage deficiency.

Kentland is not the only VFD required by PGFD to add ambulance service. The City of Laurel sits on the northernmost section of the county. The volunteer fire department was established in 1902. In 1949, the city police association started the Laurel Volunteer Rescue Squad. Both organizations are part of the county fire/ems department, operating out of separate buildings that are miles apart. In early 2007 Laurel VFD accepted Ambulance 109 as an addition to their suppression responsibilities. The volunteers are providing evening and weekend staffing.



Kentland is not the only VFD required by PGFD to staff an ambulance every hour of every day with volunteers. Bladensburg 9 staffs an engine company, a truck company and ambulance with no career personnel at the fire station since November 1, 2004. "Rescue Squad No. 1" has been a part of the Bladensburg VFD since 1927.

Unlike the county tradition of a sudden unilateral removal of career personnel, Bladensburg negotiated the transfer to an all volunteer service. According to the Bladensburg web site "It has proven to be even more of a help than anticipated, with members staffing 2 and sometimes 3 crews, with an ambulance in service, therefore out doing our original expectations." In 2006, Bladensburg 9 ran over 6000 responses, 1500 less than Kentland 33.

I did not volunteer to ride the ambulance

There are two primary objections to Chief Sedgwick's efforts to add ambulance service to Kentland. The county chief lacks the legal authority and the volunteers do not want it.

The creation of the Prince George's County Fire Department in 1971 ended a 48 year reign of the Volunteer Fireman's Association as the director of fire services in the county. The charter government created a unique career-volunteer fire department system that has been the subject of lawsuits clarifying the authority of the county fire chief and the individual volunteer corporation. The Maryland Court of Appeals heard the "Combined Fire Cases" in April 1974. The court affirmed that the county fire chief has complete operational authority over the fire scene and apparatus traveling to and from the incident. If a volunteer corporation accepted county funds, the county could impose conditions on the disbursements and audit the expenditures.

In an earlier case, brought by the Chillum-Adelphi VFD, the appeals court ruled in 1972 that the county fire chief could not dictate what type of vehicles the volunteer corporation would purchase to provide services. Kentland did not need the county fire chief's permission to purchase a used FDNY Aerialscope to establish Tower 33 or replace Engine 333 with a rescue engine. Some speculate that the opposite is true, the corporation is not obligated to accept additional services



imposed by the county fire chief. Once Ambulance 339 is in the Kentland fire station, the county fire chief has operational control over the unit.

Prior to Kentland filing a lawsuit in early June, negotiations were detailed in the volunteer fire department website. Kentland notes that over the years PGFD has unstaffed eleven basic ambulances, three of them covered 33's district. Ambulance 228 (overtime unit), Ambulance 226, and Rescue 2. In addition, Ambulance 308 was replaced by Medic 6 and the Hillside VFD was closed due to bankruptcy, eliminating Ambulance 69. Most recently, Ambulance 59 became Paramedic Ambulance 5.

Kentland points out that during a May 23 public community meeting, Chief Sedgwick stated "I have eight people ready to go for this ambulance right now." Kentland offered to provide a parcel of VFD owned land and to construct a separate "Greater Landover EMS Station" that would have separate crew and garage facility for any county-staffed EMS unit provided by PGFD.

The history of ambulance service in Prince George's County shows that many volunteers have little enthusiasm for ambulance duty. Despite that, the Prince George's County Fire Commission issued a letter in February 2007 supporting the county fire chief's goal of an ambulance in every fire station.

Many of the 50 volunteers at Kentland 33 are off-duty career firefighters who work in other jurisdictions. Some of these two-hatters are second, third or fourth generation PG volunteer firefighters with family in the Landover, Kettering, Glenarden or Largo communities. Donating their services in Kentland provides an opportunity to perfect their craft of structural firefighting in a community of like-minded individuals. Many ride the ambulance when working as a career firefighter. They do not want to ride the ambulance where they are donating their services.

Showdown Summer

On July 25 Acting Kentland Fire Chief Kelleher announced a nationwide search to find individuals interested in establishing an EMS-only division of Kentland 33. It appears that the KVFD EMS crews would be operating from the Greater Landover EMS Station that will be a separate facility adjacent to Fire Station 33. According to a follow-up report from Kelleher, there were a "handful" of qualified applicants.

Kentland VFD issued an extensive statement on August 10, stating that the county fire department is attempting to crush the volunteers. They report that the county-provided station management funding has been taken away, \$30,000 that covers day-to-day operating expenses. They say that the county is moving to take away Kentland 33's share of state 508 funding, representing \$45,000. Despite an earlier statement at a public community meeting, Kentland stated that Chief Sedgwick expects Kentland VFD to provide volunteer staffing for Ambulance 339 every hour of every day.

Suspending volunteer command officers and restricting the VFD response area are legal activities that county fire chiefs have used in the past. Freezing the

station management and 508 funding is a new tactic used by the Sedgwick administration.

Second VFD chief suspended and 33 under "house arrest"

PGFD set a deadline of August 20 at 7 am to have Ambulance 339 staffed and in service. A press release was issued around six pm: ***Fire Chief Compelled To Address Non-Compliant Volunteer Fire Department***. The county offered to provide eight career Firefighter/Paramedics that would staff the county-owned ambulance 24 hours a day – seven days a week. Service would start August 21. Unlike earlier negotiations, a hard deadline date for volunteer takeover of ambulance staffing was relaxed.

Acting Kentland VFD Chief Kelleher said that he did not have the authority to give them an immediate answer. As a result:

- 1) Tony Kelleher joins Michael Mattison as Kentland command officers to whom the county has removed all command operational authority.
- 2) The same requirement of housing a county-staffed Ambulance 339 will be presented to the next acting Kentland fire chief. "The volunteer leadership at Kentland Station 33 will be granted a limited amount of time to comply with orders to place the ambulance into service or face additional sanctions."
- 3) A modified version of the "only respond to incidents in your district" restriction went into effect at 7 pm. Here is the PGFD description:

The Fire/EMS Department will reduce the amount of mutual aid responses of the Kentland Fire Department to ensure personnel are available to respond to the more than 5100 Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance calls within their first due response area. The Fire/EMS Department will evaluate Kentland's ability to maintain adequate response to all calls in their first due prior to any adjustments. Continuity of service to the citizens shall not be reduced as the same amount of Fire/EMS units will be dispatched in accordance with standard procedures.

WUSA9 reporter Dave Statter obtained a clarification from PGFD PIO Mark Brady. Kentland can dump the house on any fire event in their first due, but Engine 33 will only be sent to incidents out of their first due if they are the nearest fire station to the emergency. The example used was if a neighboring fire station was already on a call.

Kelleher also explained his side of the meeting. He was given five minutes to accept a new proposal from PGFD, stated that they would provide 24/7 staffing of Ambulance 339 "... as long as it was financially affordable." The county refused to provide a memorandum of understanding about Ambulance 339 staffing. Kelleher asked for 24 hours to consult with the volunteer leadership, the county demanded an immediate decision.

It is interesting that during this conflict the reported ambulance workload in 33's district has climbed from 4000 to 4400 and now it is at 5100 incidents a year.

On August 21, the county used overtime to increase career staffing in the stations around Kentland. PGFD Battalion Chief 1 received an acting promotion to

Bureau Chief 12, in order to be above the company volunteer chief in the chain-of-command.

There is also an aggressive transferring of units into fire stations adjacent to 33 in order to reduce the chance that Kentland will need to respond out of its first due area because an adjacent fire station has no crew.

For example, as soon as HazMat 30 starts on an incident, using the three person crew that staffs Engine 301, the county is transferring a fire company into the Landover Heights fire station. The county is incurring thousands of dollars in overtime, but has not placed Ambulance 339 or any other additional transport unit in the 1st Battalion.

On August 23 at 11:27 hours Communications dispatched an accident with injury on east bound Route 50 between Airport Road and Route 197. Report of one ejected. Glenn Dale VFA Chief 18, Tony McGillin, is the first command officer on scene. He reports two pinned under van.

Normally, Rescue Engine 33 would be sent to this incident. Rescue Engine 18, coming from a sixth due fire station, was on the initial dispatch. Chief McGillin stated that they were presented with more of a technical rescue situation. The plan was to lift the entire van to remove both patients at the same time. Chief McGillin wanted to assure enough lifting capabilities at the scene. Approximately 8 minutes after arrival of RE18, Chief 18 requested a second rescue squad.



When he heard that the second unit would be Squad 8, coming from a ninth due fire station, Chief 18 told PGFD Bureau Chief 12 that he intended to request the closer Rescue Engine 33. Chief 18 says that you will need to read the Operations Report to get BC 12's response. According to the computer aided dispatch information obtained by WUSA9 reporter Dave Statter, Squad 8 took 12 minutes to travel to the scene.

Early in the on-scene operations, one of the two occupants under the van was declared dead. It took 30 minutes to extricate the viable patient. In the discussion of this incident, some point out that two of the three BLS ambulances that are not staffed would also have been on this incident: Ambulance 289 on the initial dispatch and Ambulance 339 on the special call.

It may NOT be about the ambulance

In a department where daytime fire station staffing is four, with many fire companies responding with two on a rig, this policy is creating large gaps in other parts of the county. This iron wall of isolation has only been penetrated once, when West Lanham Chief 28B requested Tower 33 respond on a structure fire on Sunday, September 2nd. Dave Statter provides the details from his blog: <http://wusa9.com/news/columnist/blogs/2007/09/kentland-dispatched-on-call-out-of-area.html>

The PGFD response that: "There is an open and ongoing review of the situation regarding bidding on calls that may result in disciplinary action" reinforces

the impression that this is part of a multi-front effort to beat Kentland into submission. As employees of large fire departments know, when the formal organization decides to discipline someone or some unit, there is a piling on of charges and issues to paint the picture of a completely unsuitable person or unit.

That PGFD is refusing to put anything in writing creates a red flag in terms of bureaucratic behavior. If the Kentland volunteers could be members of IAFF Local 1619, they appear to have cause to file an unfair labor practice complaint.

PGFD is spending thousands of dollars in career overtime, creating gaps in community emergency coverage to maintain an iron wall around the Kentland fire station and not adding additional transport units to the 1st Battalion. This executive summary from the 2004 TriData report may provide a clue:

Government Oversight

The government oversight process of [PGFD] has had negative affects on the department's ability to function effectively. Past county administrations have often dealt with the fire department politically, not wanting to alienate either volunteers or career groups. In doing so, county administrations have often taken the path of least resistance, reluctant to make some of the tough decisions regarding the structure, changing the model of delivery, or adding additional career staff in fear of alienating either volunteer or career personnel.

A particularly troubling issue is not empowering the county fire chief to exercise the duties of this office. Overall, the coordination aspects of the structure between the volunteers and the chief are not well defined, often handcuffing the chief. Past chiefs we spoke with confirmed a "fundamental lack of control" over the organization as the number one problem they faced. Under the current charter, and backed by several court decisions, the fire chief is the recognized senior official of the department. In practice, he is not.

Suspending two volunteer chiefs, restricting the VFD to its first due, freezing the flow of station management and 508 funding would indicate that the department wants to knock down the loudest of its well-staffed volunteer organizations.

It appears that the county executive has empowered Chief Sedgewick to continue the path started by Chief Blackwell in making the county fire chief as the actual senior fire official.

It does not help that Kentland's initial response to the A339 issue looked more like Opie and Anthony's response to a memo from XM radio management. Kentland's current charm offensive is stark contrast to years of arrogant and selfish behavior, such as racking a 600' attack line so they can run past the first arriving engine to get first water on the fire.

Status of adding five BLS ambulances to the department

Two fire stations, Morningside 27 and Laurel 10, accepted PGFD ambulances. West Lanham Hills 28 and Ritchie 37 are awaiting the result of the Kentland action. West Lanham Hills, who got out of the ambulance business in 1991 because Ambulance 289 was running so many calls into Kentland, said it would accept a PGFD ambulance as soon as Ambulance 339 goes in service.

Bladensburg Volunteers. <http://www.bv9fd.com/>

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Go here to link to references: <http://home.gwu.edu/~mikeward/FireBasedEMS.html>

Assistant Professor Michael J. Ward runs the EMS Management program at The George Washington University. Ward has three decades in fire/rescue, including a year as a Sackroom (live-in) member at the College Park Volunteer Fire Department in Prince George's County. Ward spent 25 years as a firefighter/paramedic with Fairfax County (VA) Fire and Rescue, retiring as the acting EMS Division administrator. Primary author of NFPA's *Fire Officer: Principles and Practice* and former fire science program head, Ward can be contacted through his faculty web page: <http://home.gwu.edu/~mikeward/>